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AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN PRINCIPAL'S PERCEPTIONS OF CHALLENGES
FACED IN OBTAINING AND MAINTAINING PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP

by

Jennifer D. Jackson-Dunn

A dissertation

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Walter Jackson and Rosemary Jackson whose love, support, and encouragement continually motivated me to reach this milestone. They have been my strength throughout my entire life; my first educators and motivators. You taught me the value of education and the importance of setting goals and striving to reach them. You have always believed in me and my successes are a direct reflection of the things I learned from you.

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Abstract

In the 21st century, an urban teenager sent to see the principal might find an African American woman—the chances are small. If these students are lucky enough to find a black woman in the chair, she fought to get there and fights to stay. This study examined the perceptions of a few of these women vis-a-vis the obstacles they faced while pursuing or working as principals or assistant principals in middle- or high schools. The study illuminated the intersectionality of race and gender according to Crenshaw (1989) pointing out how African-American female principals identify, understand, conceptualize, interpret, and overcome those obstacles in leadership. The questions this research sought to answer were: What are the major challenges faced by female African American principals? How does identifying as a black woman influence the way one is treated as an African American principal? What are the strategies utilized to overcome obstacles in the pathway to leadership?

A phenomenological approach was selected to examine connections between leadership and barriers to career advancement. Eleven African American female principals and assistant principals in three urban school districts participated. All participants identified work-life balance and staff push-back as barriers. Interestingly, organic use of the Four Dimensions of Principal Leadership (Green, 2010) emerged among the strategies utilized to overcome these barriers. As theorized, study participants also identified racism and sexism to be obstacles in maintaining the leadership position of school principal/assistant principal; however, these were not identified as major barriers to obtaining leadership positions.

Key words: education, African American, Principals, barriers, racism, sexism, Four Dimensions of Principal Leadership, high school

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Chapter I

Background of the Study

Introduction

The performance level of public schools, especially those serving low-income students, continues to be low due to continued inequitable distributions (USDOE, 2011). Many cities/states have charter schools available to students attending low performing schools and leaders must put forth a greater effort to protect and prevent their low performing schools from being taken over by the state. In some instances, there is a change made in leadership at underfunded schools, according to state mandated testing performance (Price, 2010). If performance is continuously low for several years or adequate growth is not made according to state measures, the entire faculty/staff is at risk of losing their positions through school restructuring (Price, 2010). Educational leadership has been the focus of intense scrutiny in recent years, which binds incoming school leaders in reconstituted schools and/or school district (those taken over by the state) to remedy systemic issues that result in disparate academic outcomes.

According to Leithwood and Riehl (2003) school leaders are being held accountable for how well teachers teach and how well students learn. It is stated that a successful leader must possess adequate and sufficient leadership qualities and characteristics and demonstrate the ability to influence change within the entire learning environment, including achieving buy-in among pertinent stakeholders (CCSRI, 2005; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008; Wallace Foundation, 2013). Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins (2008) claim “all successful leaders draw the same repertoire of basic leadership practices” (p. 29), which include building a vision and setting direction, understanding and developing people, redesigning the organization through building collaboration, and

managing the teaching and learning program. (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). Continuous shifts in standards and accountability dictate that school leaders must become more effective in stimulating improvement in the performance levels of student and teachers and must bring about transformation of the underfunded schools (Wallace Foundation, 2013). As determined by Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2008) in their research, there was not a single documented case of a successful school turnaround of student achievement in the absence of talented leadership. “One explanation for this is leadership serves as a catalyst for unleashing the potential capacities that already exist in the organization” (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2008, p. 29).

Today in the United States, pupils from all racial backgrounds can access education in any public school, and the practice of prejudice based on race, gender, etc., is prohibited in private school admissions. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 were among the first laws seeking to prevent the practice of educational oppression. These laws form the basis of de jure prohibition against discrimination in education, however, de facto discrimination continues to be prevalent. For example, parents in white enclaves maintain school segregation by altering school assignment policies, direct private resources to the schools in their areas, and utilize voting power to influence decisions made by school boards (Frankenberg, Green & Nelson, 2013). Black students are suspended at triple the rate of their white peers according to the U.S. Department of Education (2012). At the same time, minority students have less access to experienced teachers leading to lower graduation rates and increased potential for dropping out (Resmovits, 2014).

Tillman (2005) stated *Brown vs. Board* had unintended consequences for Black principals. One of the main purposes of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education's* decision, wherein schools were mandated to desegregate the student body, was to eradicate racial inequality in education and eventually throughout other parts of society (Grant, 1995; Ogletree, 2004). The ruling heralded the legal struggle for racial equality in the education system of America. However, it failed to consider the impact beyond the students it sought to protect. While the decision highlighted the importance of having black leadership in schools due to their positive effect on the community (Milner and Howard, 2004), frequently lost in the debates was the fact that the law did not protect the jobs of black teachers and administrators (Karpinski, 2004). Prior to the Brown decision, Black principals and teachers functioned to impel movement towards racial equality through the presence of Black leadership in schools (Milner and Howard, 2004).

Critical Race Theorist Derrick Bell (2004), “saw the Supreme Court’s landmark 1954 school desegregation decision, *Brown v Board of Education*, as part of a Cold War effort to improve America’s standing among Third World countries.” According to Bell’s “interest convergence theory,” whites will support minority rights only when it’s in their interest as well (Bell, 2004). Critical Race Theory emerged from the early works of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman because of their discontent with the pace for racial reform in the United States. (Delgado, 1995. Ladson-Billings, 1998). The theory arose from a critical legal studies movement which failed to address race and racism in the U.S. jurisprudence (Ladson-Billings, 2004). According to Hiraldo (2010), Critical Race Theory analyzes the role of race and racism in perpetuating social disparities between dominant and marginalized racial groups. According to critical race theorists, racial

preferences (favoring blacks) in employment and education are not only permissible but necessary as a means of countering the permanent bigotry of white people who, as Bell puts it, seek to “achieve a measure of social stability through their unspoken pact to keep blacks at the bottom” (Bell, 1992, p. 152). *Brown v Board* was believed to be a case illustrating the effort to achieve this social stability and subordination. Bell (2004) argues that *Brown* offered little more than symbolic encouragement that discrimination could be overcome by litigation. According to Wassell (2017), Bell’s general argument of *Brown* was that it was an unfulfilled dream for racial reform.

The history of African-American leadership in schools began long before the *Brown* era (Brown, 2005). Often referred to as the pre-*Brown* era, it was characterized by Black principals who were committed to facilitate the education of black pupils. The principals of this era worked in close ties with other black leaders to establish schools for these children. (Zirkel & Canton, 2004). In the post-*Brown* era, African-American principals spearheaded the implementation of desegregation and education of Black children despite mounting resistance and opposition of white voters to integration fearing it would threaten the support to suburbs (Rothstein, 2013). Despite all of the hard work of African American leaders in the past, today’s aspiring African American principals find themselves facing almost insurmountable odds in trying to attain a principalship (Brown, 2005; Tillman 2003; Valverde, 2003). Even though educational administration continues to confront the issues of effectively engaging in efforts to racially and ethnically diversify K – 12 leadership, the field remains predominantly white (Tillman 2003). Today, most African-American principals are employed in large urban school districts and continue to

advocate for the social, emotional and academic achievement of students from the black community (Rothstein, 2013).

Obtaining a leadership position (Principal or Assistant Principal) has become more challenging as the role of the school leader has grown more complex and the need for strong, successful instructional leaders has increased (Anderson, 2016). Often, the need for leadership is greatest in those areas where students are not afforded the same opportunities as those at predominantly white schools due to the underfunding of the school (Brown, 2005). Since most African American Principals work in urban settings, there has been a development of training on how to best manage these types of schools (Brown, 2005). There are programs offered in some colleges and universities that are designed to assist in preparing future leaders to be successful in urban schools, such as the Center for Urban School Leadership (University of Memphis, Memphis, TN), Urban Education Leaders Program (Columbus University, Columbus, OH), National Institute for Urban School Leaders (Harvard, Cambridge MA), and others. Tillman (2003) has found that leadership preparation programs must take an active role in helping to place African American administrators in school districts to increase the numbers. According to Echols (2006), there is a scarcity of research available that considers how these African American administrators coped during the existence of Jim Crow laws. Research indicates that a disparity still exists at various levels of the academic ladder when African Americans school leaders are compared to their White counterparts. (2006). In Tillman's (2004) research it was found that the number of black women in pre-K-12 educational leadership positions, while increasing gradually, is still small relative to the numbers of White men and women and Black men.

For years, there have been more women employed as K – 12 teachers in schools than men. Even with those statistics, most school leadership positions have been and are filled by men (Thurman, 2004). Despite improved prospects for women and African Americans in other careers in the United States, women and African Americans still have somewhat limited access to leadership positions in schools such as the assistant principalship, the principalship, and the superintendency (Reis, Young, and Jury, 1999; Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). This phenomenon is the intersectionality theory of how different types of discrimination interact brought to light by law professor Kimberly Crenshaw in 1989 (Smith, 2013). In this study, the intersection of race and gender is examined with a focus on women in leadership. African American women are even more limited to accessing leadership positions although research shows women make great leaders due to their nurturing and natural “mothering” nature (Loder, 2005). According to Brown (2014), for African American women, it is the phenomenon of double jeopardy (race and gender) that affects recruitment and retention, primarily.

This phenomenological study is being conducted to bring to light the challenges faced by African American women in their path to Principal Leadership and, as they are in the Principal role, their perspective as African American women leaders. This will be an in-depth interview with nine African American women principals/past principals to obtain their individual and collective experiences/perceptions of obstacles they had to overcome to obtain the principalship, particularly in school districts noted for school reform activities. This study will explore the similarities and differences in their challenges. The research will also bring to bear strategies that these principals used to

overcome impediments to their rise and retention of leadership positions. Furthermore, this research will highlight similarities in the leadership styles and behaviors of the nine African American women principals.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

The focus of school success does revolve a great deal around school leadership (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Although the roles and expectations of school leaders are changing due to the amount of emphasis being placed on leaders, there are still thousands of schools that continue to be labeled as underperforming. Previous research has shown that one of the ways to transform a school and increase student achievement is through its leadership (Green, 2010). Leadership may no longer be proposed to have a direct influence on student learning outcomes, but it may indirectly influence school organization and the culture of the school (Wiezers, Bosker, Kruger, 2003). The processes, practices, and procedures of the school leader can have a great impact on teachers, students and the school. Many of the underfunded schools have a majority of minority (African American) students who need the leadership of a strong minority role model (Milner and Howard, 2004). Although the ratio of minority (African American) students to white students has increased at these low performing schools, the ratio of African American principals has not.

Most of the black school leaders in the post-*Brown* era were typically assigned to the worst schools in the worst neighborhoods with the lowest performing students (Tillman, 2004). This, inherently, places obstacles in the path of these principals to be successful. This is even more common for female African American principals. African

American women are faced with many barriers in obtaining principal positions.

According to Helterbran & Rieg (2004) they can include several of the following:

- lack of encouragement from others to become leaders
- belief they are to be nurturers not disciplinarians
- difficulties in balancing home and work life
- belief they must be better qualified
- lack of assurance they can handle discipline
- gender issues related to male resentment

The demand for school leaders in the United States has been growing due to retirement, turnover, and lack of interested and qualified applicants (Logan, 1998). Despite this fact, little consideration has been given to the underutilization of women (especially African American) in educational leadership to help solve the crisis. Although the number of female principals in the United States has been slowly growing, the existing barriers can prevent many from entering into the leadership field and becoming successful once they have become leaders. When given the opportunity, in most cases of leadership, African American women leaders are often found in urban schools that have been exhausted of resources and lack support (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). According to Eagly (2007), in the United States, women are increasingly praised for having excellent skills for leadership and, in fact, women, more than men, manifest leadership styles associated with effective performance as leaders. Yet, there is still a disproportionately low number of African American women principals. African American women are truly educational leaders from birth (Edwards, 2016).

African American women are underrepresented in the principal population within the United States. With this underrepresentation comes limited research on the challenges they face in their leadership position, experiences in the leadership position which helps them develop, the support received in obtaining leadership and successes of these leaders. An extensive search for dedicated qualitative or quantitative research on Black women principals in education produced limited results (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). Most information on African American women leadership and management is mainly situated within larger gender research on women in corporate, public or educational administrative studies (Anzaldau, 1990; Lather, 1991; Murtadha-Watt, 2000).

This study of eleven African American women leaders will attempt to identify challenges faced by African American females in becoming principal leaders and theorize the manner in which gender engages/intersects with race in operationalizing barriers to school leadership. This study will do that by examining the perceptions of female African American principals/assistant principals regarding their challenges, experiences and leadership strategies utilized during their leadership tenure.

Research Questions

The questions this research study seeks to answer are as follows: What are the major challenges faced by female African American principals? How does identifying as a black woman influence the way you are treated as an African American principal? What are the strategies utilized to overcome obstacles in the pathway to leadership and gain stakeholder buy in?

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to look at the challenges eleven African American women faced, i.e. racism and sexism, while pursuing and while employed in the Principal Leadership position. It will also attempt to understand how African-American female principals identify/understand/conceptualize/interpret/overcome the obstacles to school leadership. Historically, to ensure their own rights, Black women had to fight both gender equality and racial justice and build divisions within the white women's movement and Black national and power movements respectively (Douglas, H. & Tillman, L.C., 2014). This research seeks to analyze and pinpoint the characteristics of eleven female African American leaders and the strategies they used to overcome the obstacles set before them in their leadership processes.

The paucity of research that considers the intersection of educational research and African American women suggests that African-American women struggle for visibility; moreover, their experiences with family, culture, and religion influence who they are as leaders and prepare them for leadership. (Jackson, 1999; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). The extant research on African-American women school leaders seeks to determine how African-American school leaders define effective school leadership and how gender impacts those identifications. In the tradition of African American feminist theory, according to research (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Collins 1991; Reed, 2012), efforts to expand research centering on African American women's experiences of obtaining and serving in leadership positions will continue to contribute to theoretical claims about how gender and race influence career advancement and educational equity.

By exploring the experiences of African American women principals, the findings of this research can be used as a guideline/blueprint for new and aspiring leaders to assist

in proven best practices that can be utilized and implemented to promote more African American women to enter into the leadership field and become successful in the upward mobility of the leaders, students, schools and the educational system. Reed's (2012) study on the intersectionality of race and gender of Black women principals concluded that even with the laws that were enacted to benefit minorities and women, Black female secondary school principals continue to live with the challenges of race and gender. This study will provide evidence of how eleven African-American women principals, in the era of intensive education reform, perceive the barriers they face and limitations/challenges to advancement. According to Crenshaw (1989), one cannot understand the struggle of women of color without examining the intersection of their racial and gendered identities.

Conceptual Framework: The Intersectionality of Race & Gender

For this study, the paradigm of Intersectionality (Collins 1988, Crenshaw 1991) is the primary framework. Intersectionality theory is the study of how different power structures interact in the lives of minorities, specifically black women. Crenshaw (2014) is examined with a focus on Black women in principal leadership. This study uses the premise of intersectionality of race (racism) and gender (sexism). According to Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003), Black women must consistently fight against the myth of inferiority due to race and gender. Zane (2002) noted that women of color experience a double portion of disparity as they are members in two subordinate groups, both women and people of color. Loder-Jackson (2009, p.223) said, "African-American women have only recently begun to tap the glass ceiling of the principalship." Reed (2012) argues that the compound impact of oppression experienced by Black women educators, due to the

intersection of race and gender, have dictated that these women challenge racist and patriarchal structures in less overt ways.

Crenshaw states that intersectionality shapes the experiences of Black women. In her 1989 work on demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex, she recenters the phenomenon of intersectionality as the principal axis around which the Black female experience revolves. The experiences of Black women, Crenshaw argues, cannot be adequately understood without considering how race and sex interact to create a more complex phenomenological reality (Crenshaw, 1989). Her thesis is supported by interdisciplinary research in Sociology, Feminist, and Organizational Theory (Veenstra, 2012; Andersen, 2008; and Holvino, 2008). Using intersectionality as a conceptual framework, this research seeks to provide insight into the professional experiences and lives of eleven African American female principals. The focus of the intersectionality theory is necessary since, as stated by both Smith and Crenshaw, Black women are frequently absent from analyses of either gender oppression or racism, since the former focused primarily on experiences of white women and the latter on Black men (2013). Loder (2005) and Reed (2012) contend that race and gender intersect to have a major influence on job attainment and performance in the field of leadership for African American females. Witherspoon and Mitchell (2009) conceptualized that the combination of race and gender identities can offer a better understanding of how Black female principals are perceived in their leadership role vs. a single focus on race. The study of Black female principals is usually cloaked in the term 'women and minorities' Tillman (2004). That said, "the examination of racial and gendered inequities within school

leadership is needed to describe how these factors play out in the school leadership arena” (Reed, 2012, p. 43).

Conclusion

In summation, this is a qualitative study of eleven African American women principals and their perceptions of challenges faced in obtaining, maintaining, and retaining positions in educational leadership. The research will also determine how their career paths may have been influenced by race and gender. The literature focuses on African American women leaders and principals and theories regarding race and gender, as well as the impact of racism and sexism on leadership. The limited research on the lived experiences, dispositions, and methods of leaders who are neither male nor white must be extended to improve leadership in the field of education (Tillman, 2004). This dissertation answers Tillman’s (2004) call for further research that interrogates the intersection of race and gender in educational leadership. African American women come to leadership positions equipped with the attributes, knowledge, and skills to do the job (Epps, 2008). Yet, more than three quarters of public school teachers are female, while only 30% of educational administrators are female (Fugler, 2016). “While some women have made progress in leadership ranks, it is predicted that it may take an additional 75 to 200 years to overcome the inequities of African Americans in gaining and retaining leadership positions” (Epps, 2008, p. 270). As the Center for American Progress report points out, women of color will make up 53 percent of our nation’s female population by 2050 and to improve their life outcome, they need to be at the decision-making table (Cardenas, 2014). The limited research on the lived experiences,

dispositions, and methods of leaders who are neither male nor white must be extended to improve leadership in the field of education.

In conclusion, this research of eleven African-American women principals and their perceptions of challenges faced seek to identify those barriers that are hindering African American women from acquiring those educational leadership positions. The research will determine how their career paths may have been influenced by the intersectionality of race and gender.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

This section will include a historical review of leadership in general which will discuss trends in leadership over time. This discussion will commence with a review of leadership in the mid-1940s; likewise, this discussion will also include a conversation about diversity (or lack thereof) in school leadership. This chapter will provide a review of African American leadership prior to *Brown vs. Board of Education*, after *Brown vs Board of Education*, school leadership in the age of reform, and challenges faced by African American Principals in general leadership as well as strategies of African American Principals. The research will elaborate on African American women leaders throughout history. Finally, the literature review will explore challenges faced by African American women principals including racism, sexism and feminism, as well as the lack of research on the perceptions of African American women principals.

Conceptualizations of Leadership

At their core, most definitions of leadership are providing direction and exercising influence (Leithwood, 2003). Educational leadership is usually associated with formal

organizational positions within the school, whereas leaders work with others to create a shared sense of purpose and establish conditions that enable others to be effective (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003). Theoretically, leadership within a school influences the students, staff, parents and all stakeholders to be committed to a common vision of the school, though level of effectiveness and influence depends on the objectives and values of the person making the evaluation (Yukl, 2006). Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the processes of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives (Yukl, 2006).

Definition of leadership and types of leadership deemed effective have continued to evolve over time. In 1974 Ralph Stodgill described and named Trait Theory, a field that emerged in the 1930s and '40s which posited that some people were born with certain qualities that made them excel at leadership roles (Fleenor, 2006). In the '40s – '50s the Behavioral Theories began to offer a new perspective on leadership. These theories focused on the behaviors of the leaders as opposed to their mental, physical or social characteristics (Lussier & Achua, 2012). These theories measured the cause and effect relationships of human behavior observed in leaders. The theories were divided into two types of leaders, People Oriented and Task Oriented (Derue, D.S., Nahrgang, J.D., Wellman, N., & Humphrey, S.E., 2011). In the '60s, the Contingency Theories were developed and defined. The Contingency Theories argued that there was no single way of leading, and the style of leadership should be based on the situation. There were several theories attached to Contingency: Robert House's Path Goal, Hershey-Bland's Situational, and Victor Vroom's Decision-Making Model (Sergiovanni, 2007). The 70s

brought about the Transactional and Transformational Leadership theories. Transactional Leadership is a managerial style of leadership where the leader engages followers in a type of exchange to gain cooperation and completion of specific tasks (Green, 2010). According to Green, transactional “is a power-based rewards and punishment relationship” (p 12). Transformational Leadership is more facilitative. The leader fosters a vision to which the followers are bound (Green, 2010; Sergiovanni, 2007). According to Eagly (2007), leadership has historically been depicted primarily in masculine terms and many theories of leadership have focused mainly on stereotypically masculine qualities.

The previous eras of leadership were considered and presented mainly as managerial functions as the focus (Green, 2010). These managerial functions were typically concerned with organizational control and maintenance. “The 21st-Century school leader is the ‘chief learning officer’ of the school, an individual with a vision for the future of the school who can articulate that vision to all stakeholders” (Green, 2010, p. 3). Leaders now seek to improve instruction through instructional leadership which includes providing a learning climate free of disruptions, a system of clear teaching objectives and higher teacher expectation for students (Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe, 2008). Earlier formulations of instructional leadership focused on the principal’s responsibility and neglected contribution of the staff members (Hallinger, 2005). In recent research, the focus is more inclusive with measures embracing principals, their designees, those in positions of responsibility, and shared instructional leadership (Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe, 2008).

The History of the African American in Principal Leadership: Prior to *Brown*

Prior to the *Brown vs Board of Education* decision, when schools were legally segregated, there were many African American principals (Brown, 2005). According to Brown (2005), historically, African Americans have been underrepresented in school administration. “Prior to the 1954 *Brown* decision, the majority of African American students attended segregated public schools that were supervised by African American administrators” (Brown, p. 5). Displacement of many of these administrators followed the *Brown* decision (Brown, 2005). There has been a very slow rise in the number of African American principals and educational leaders since. In her article, Tillman asked a very important question: “Was the loss of employment for Black principals one of the (un)intended and (un)anticipated consequences of desegregation after *Brown*?” (Tillman, 2004 p 285). Tillman’s article did not directly answer the question of whether the loss of employment for Black principals was un(intended) but stated, “Clearly, one of the consequences of *Brown* and the segregation of schools was the loss of black principals” (p. 294).

The history of black principals in American schools has historical and cultural significance. Black principals helped in the establishment and operation of schools through solicitation of funding and other resources (Gay, 2004). These individuals played dual roles as educators and activists for the education of pupils from the black community. It is important that models of school leadership include paradigms and perspectives articulated by African American school leaders and scholars (Brown, 2005). The educational ideologies of black principals demonstrated to the shared spirit of the black community that education was key to their emancipation.

Black principals taught and nurtured significant percentages of the black youth in the community. They were vital role models and revered members of their communities (Milner & Howard, 2004). They also constituted a significant portion of the middle-class in the African American community. They served as role models of servant leadership and exhibited the code of service that obligated those who acquired literacy to transfer their knowledge to others in the community (Henderson, 2015). Historical literature points out that these individuals were central figures in isolated schooling and the African-American community, in that they served as connections between the schools and the community (Tillman, 2004; Henderson, 2015).

Black principals in the post-*Brown* era faced a new set of challenges compared to those present in the pre-*Brown* era. The number of African American principals declined despite increases in the number of African American children being educated. The decline was sparked by the end of segregation for schools. Although both African Americans and whites could attend the same schools, no African American principals exercised authority in schools where white students attended. This de facto prohibition caused a significant decline in the number of African American principals because there were fewer schools populated exclusively by African American students (Tillman, 2004). As time passed, more schools where African American students could be educated were opened although they were not in the best conditions nor were they provided the proper tools to efficiently, effectively and equally educate African American children. The roles fulfilled by Black principals in desegregated schools were more sophisticated compared to the preceding era. (Henderson, 2015). They were central to the academic achievement of students in their schools and the advancement of the black community at large

(Tillman, 2004). Post-Brown leadership challenges faced by Black principals were influenced by changing demographics in the schools, shifts in exercise of authority, and responsibilities to secure resources.

Strength, in the observable form of respected authority, and effectiveness in the form of measurable student competence were key characteristics and goals to African American principals in a bid to maintain the images of their schools. This image maintenance formed the basis of the counter-narrative refuting the notion that black principals were incapable of educating their students (Tillman, 2004, Milner & Howard, 2004). African American principals were charged with the mandate to set the schools' tones, decide on their desired instructional strategies, and oversee the organization and distribution of resources (Tillman, 2004). Moreover, these leaders were responsible for defining the mission and vision statements for their schools.

The weight of these responsibilities placed on their shoulders triggered the adoption of authoritarian styles of leadership that sparked diverging responses from both the students and teachers. African American males were seemingly expected to be strict disciplinarians while African American women were expected to be nurturing (Trinidad & Normore, 2005). This era was characterized by more emphasis on the effectiveness of leadership styles exhibited by African-American principals. There was a powerful urge for these principals to perform well to boost the academic performance of their schools while maintaining a high level of discipline among the students. However, amid performance pressure, African American leaders were torn between compassion for their communities and loyalty to their professional duties (Karpinski, 2006).

Furthermore, these principals were charged with the responsibility to ease the

barrier that existed between the schools and the community due to the cultural mismatch between black parents and students and white educators. (Rousmanier, 2007). Therefore, principals in the post-Brown era faced a tough challenge of eliminating the racial differences that stalled unified relations between the communities and the schools.

The History of the African American in Principal Leadership: After *Brown*

One of the main purposes of the *Brown* decision was to eradicate racial inequality in education and eventually throughout other parts of society (Grant, 1995; Ogletree, 2004). This eradication did not occur, and its absence was felt particularly in the South where many Black principals lost their jobs (Watras, 2013). The loss of jobs among black principals came as an unintended consequence of the reform process, the reform intended to rectify the inequalities in the segregated schooling system (Clotfelter, 2011). In fact, it exacerbated these inequalities by relegating Black principals to positions of diminished authority in schools. While a fraction of Black school principals kept their jobs, the *Brown v Board of Education* decision had devastating effects on the careers of many other principals. The reforms made the work of advancing education opportunities to the Black children more complex for Black principals (Clotfelter, 2011). Today it seems as if the legacy of *Brown* has left many within the African American community as bewildered onlookers (Bell, 2001; Lyons & Chesley, 2004; Ogletree, 2004; Patterson, 2001).

During the first few years after the *Brown* decision, it was slowly discovered that there were many ways in which black educators could be removed from the classroom, thus reducing or eliminating their role in the education of black and white children. As efforts were made to desegregate schools, however, African American educators

sometimes lost their seniority and even their jobs (Karpinski, 2006; Reed & Evans, 2008; Tillman, 2004). Black educators served as role models for black students and motivated the students to embrace educational opportunities to decrease rampant levels of poverty. (Rousmanier, 2007). Therefore, by eliminating Black educators, desegregation also eliminated the most influential people in black schools (Rousmanier, 2007). In the post-*Brown* era, the displacement of black principals came in the form of demotions as well as sackings (Heath, 2011). In other cases, the principals were transferred to other central office positions such as serving as coordinators in federal programs. Some of the titles of the jobs were nontraditional to the education industry. They were assigned secretaries and desks but had no specified responsibilities. This was devastating for many former black principals since they appeared to be lacking authority and security (Heath, 2011).

The decade between 1954 and 1965 had the most devastating results for black principals. Immediately after the *Brown* decision, whites shared the belief that African American principals were largely ineffective in advancing education to Black children (Watras, 2013). The post-desegregation legal proceedings included expert witnesses who testified in the proceedings and called for the replacement of all Black principals with Whites as well as the dismantling of all Black schools (Watras, 2013). First, the dismantling of black schools would immediately render many black principals jobless. Missouri, Delaware, Oklahoma, Maryland, Virginia and Kentucky closed most of the all-black schools (Watras, 2013). The St. Louis School District was one where dismantling occurred post segregation. This was done through neighborhood rezoning first (Smith, 2009). Rezoning the school districts was a legal way to continue segregation within the school because the zoning left predominantly black neighborhoods out of the range of

new schools being built. Blacks in the low populated neighborhood were forced to move to urban areas if they wanted an education for their children (Smith, 2009). These closures left many principals without a job. More than half of all black school principals were dismissed from their jobs (McRay, Wright & Beachum). According to Watras (2013), even though the country needed about 6,000 Black principals to reach national parity, the desegregation system led to the loss of thousands of jobs for Blacks.

During this time, professional employment opportunities outside the segregated system were almost non-existent for black educators. (Lash and Ratcliffe, 2014). The racist context of the education system became more evident and pronounced than before. Post-Brown desegregation exposed Black students, parents, teachers, and principals to an unfamiliar space, i.e. greater poverty, less power within their communities and no control over their education (Clotfelter, 2011). The Brown decision made them more powerless than before by ejecting them from the places where they could influence the education policies, leaving them with no influence over the direction of the education of black children (Clotfelter, 2011).

While black students were being integrated into public school systems, black school leaders were being forced out of administrative positions. Still today amidst a growing minority student population, the teacher and administrator workforce remains predominantly white (Gardner, Davis & Anderson, 2008, Tillman, 2008). This shows that there still needs to be more effort/emphasis put on the recruitment and placement of African American administrators. Thus, those in the field of educational leadership need to challenge such notions and begin to address the lack of apparent social justice in the selection of African American Principals through the application of the Critical Race

Theory (McCray, Wright, Beachum, 2002). An important question today is whether African American administrators are still exposed to implicit discrimination or whether there are other factors. According to Tillman (2003), the field of education administration remains “under diversified” and predominantly White. As Brown observed, “schools in a racially diverse society will require leaders and models of leadership that will address the racial, cultural, and ethnic makeup of the school community” (2003, p 585). If there is a lack of African Americans in leadership, this will not be possible.

Despite the potential for a monumental impact, the *Brown v. Board* of Education decision has yet to fulfill its potential; it has not eliminated all segregation in the public schools. Consequently, vestiges of inferior education in some public schools primarily attended by African Americans (Johnson, 2017) continue to exist. Undoubtedly, the Brown decision resulted in substantial changes to the landscape of educational leadership and administration, especially for African American teachers and principals.

Challenges faced by African Americans in Principal Leadership

The principalship was the highest and most prestigious position in segregated schools. (Kafka, 2009; Brown, 2006, Karpinski, 2006) The principal was not only the leader of the school, but also the authority leader in the community. (Karpinski, 2006) However, their leadership roles were complicated by an assortment of challenges, some of which persist, in the current era of educational leadership. Some of the challenges faced by black principals in their leadership include racism, glass ceiling theory, which suggests there are informal and invisible barriers that impose ceilings on the advancement of blacks and minorities (Christie, Jackson & Babo, 2007; Gardiner, Enomote & Grogan,

2000), institutional silencing. i.e. misogynistic notions and cultural preconceptions among others.

African American principals face the challenge of racism in the principal leadership positions. Historically, the majority served in schools located amidst all black communities (Gooden, 2012). The differentials between available resources and the corresponding differentials in measurable achievement, known as opportunity gap, between students in segregated and desegregated schools were and continue to be significant. The historical context of racial challenges contextualized and became the backdrop for the plethora of challenges that black principals faced in contemporary educational leadership (Echols, 2006). Black principals were required to guarantee that the students would perform well, ensure cultural responsiveness towards the diversity of students in schools, and facilitate functional means of communicating among the parents, caregivers, and stakeholders of the school. This had to be accomplished while overcoming the interference of racial barriers (Echols, 2006). In spite of achieving these aims, racists and discriminatory assessments would have marked most black principals as incompetent.

Blacks principals could not fit in given the racial differences, because they were often deemed inferior (Echols, 2006). Through racial identity development, this challenge could be attributed to the emersion developmental stage, which is characterized by people's desire to surround themselves with people from their racial identity (Vandiver & Cross, 2002).

This challenge of being considered inferior and being the recipient of hostility often culminated in the lack of connection for most of these black principals (Echols,

2006). Most of the educators missed opportunities because exclusions from the social and professional circles enjoyed by whites denied them connection to respected individuals from the white community. In most cases, the black principals were not aware of opportunities that included leadership institutes, stipends for degree programs, professional memberships, social invitations, mentors, and grant monies (Echols, 2006). This lack of awareness contributed to a feeling of isolation among black principals and negatively impacted their opportunities for professional growth. To create a feeling of belonging, most of them had to obtain social capital through the practice of shifting. Shifting entailed adopting a different method of communication (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). This strategy was mostly used to increase one's chances of survival in a new environment or around new people.

There were numerous misogynistic notions directed towards female principals. Black female principals suffered hostility and exclusion from whites as well as their black colleagues (Peters, 2012). As a result, women principals were believed to be the leading shifters (Peters, 2012). Black women were believed to change their behavior more than any other minority group in history (Peters, 2012, Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). They were believed to conceal their true character to impress their colleagues (black and white). They were believed to shift to accommodate variations in class, gender, and ethnicity. “The struggles the African American women have endured, with regard to recruitment and retention in public school leadership, appear related to democracy” (Brown, 2014, p. 2) which, for many, stands for freedom. For African American women, this freedom has been challenged and stifled, and it often required

conformity or even a masking of their true selves in order to be what White society would have them to be (Brown, 2014).

Moreover, black principals were subjected to the glass ceiling theory and institutional silencing. Glass ceiling is the concept of artificial barriers to the advancement of women and minorities reflecting discrimination. It is also described as a barrier that is unseen, yet unattainable and keeps minorities from rising to the top of the corporate ladder (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). Black principals were deemed under-achievers and incompetent by white educational establishments and thought incapable of contributing ideas to school panels (Echols, 2006). Their role was to act as a liaison to corporations, politicians, and members of the school boards with leadership confined to administrative responsibility over school buildings. This constraint of authority and relegation to lower levels administrative responsibility stimulated the shifting from leader to a less controversial and more palatable role to gain relevance and respect. Through this shifting, most of the principals went out of their ways in the name of gaining significance in an environment characterized by widespread racial preconceptions and prejudice. “Research indicates that right from the beginning African American women are faced with what is termed “double jeopardy,” meaning both race and gender discrimination” (Shorter-Gooden, 2004, p.410). African American female principals not only deal with internal and external pressures to effectively lead schools, but also must navigate through the scrutiny that they sometimes encounter because of their gender and race (Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2006; Crenshaw, 1989; Sernak, 2004; Tillman, 2004). According to Grogan (2000), female principals must also address institutional barriers that are both inside and outside of the boundaries of historically and

socially defined norms. Oftentimes, for those who persevere, marginalization can follow and the result may be ‘self-silencing’ (Grogan, 2000).

Most black principals experienced extreme difficulties on their way up to the leadership level. This was often the case because detractors often made obtaining, maintaining, and retaining leadership positions relatively difficult for black principals. (McCray, Wright and Beachum, 2007). When a black individual took a leadership role, it often resulted in backstabbing and a competitive environment, rather than creating a welcoming atmosphere that could induce unity and collaboration.

Diversity in Leadership and Education Diversity in Leadership and Reform

The movement towards school choice is one the most prolific and sustained educational policy paradigms of the educational reforms intended to transform public education in the United States (Nelson, 2016). Under school choice, parents and guardians choose the schools they deem ideal for their children, and public funds follow those children to the chosen school. This model is designed to promote excellence in schools through competition. However, this reform was used to drive away black principals from their professions in the name of community control. (Carl, 2011) Unfortunately, school choice and education reform have generally led to the displacement of black educational leaders with white leaders who are typically not politically accountable to the predominately black communities in which they serve (Nelson, 2016). While the performance in these charter schools was advertised as better compared to those that did not have adequate resources data, data indicated that only a handful of charter schools outperform similar public schools. (Frankenberg, Siegel-Howley and Wang, (2011). The narrative of higher performance motivated parents to continue to

withdraw their children from the schools deemed unfit and enroll them in schools deemed better. This mass withdrawal of children due to lack of sufficient resources and excellence, forced the closure of some traditional public schools (Carl, 2011). The resultant underutilization of black schools ended many black principals' tenures as professional and necessitated their search for placements as teachers or acceptance of employment outside the field of education (Carl, 2011).

Although there may have been other factors behind these eliminations of black principals, racism is believed to have played a significant role. The closing of black schools was intended to dismiss most, if not all, black principals. Most of the black educators who worked in black schools (prior to desegregation) lost their jobs and were left unemployed when the schools were closed. They were left on their own to find other jobs to utilize their professional capabilities. In some cases, these leaders were compelled to seek legal advice to be restored to their positions. While school choice, ostensibly was a good reform, the people behind it anticipated different results that would favor the white community (Carl, 2011). The closure of schools meant that many black students were sent to schools in white areas, which often had enough educators (Smith, 2011). Consequently, the black educators from the closed schools were left with nowhere to go and with no students to teach. Another reason for this strategy was to eradicate schools located in black neighborhoods to gain the control of the education system. The fact remains that even with 'integrated schools', students are often either re-segregated by academic tracking (Fischer, 1996; Oakes, 1996, Stuart Wells, 1996) or re-segregate themselves along racial and ethnic lines. Even when black students were not sent to white schools, they were disproportionately likely to find themselves in poorly-funded schools

with few facilities and resources. (Fischer, 1996; Glickstein, 1996) or assigned top non-college preparatory courses of study. According to Gollnick (2005) one of the major challenges was demonstrating competency after historically having been defined as an incompetent race. Moreover, increasing diversity among educational professionals and students is one of the most critical adaptive challenges that schools/principals face (Gollnick & Chin, 2005). Unfortunately, school choice has failed to overcome this challenge as school choice forces segregation among teachers (Parker), and often results in fewer black teachers in classrooms.

Leadership Strategies of African American Principals

The type of leadership offered by school principals is critical to the academic excellence of students as well as the reputation of schools. African American principals are known for their ability to embrace new organizational structures and leadership roles to achieve instructional innovation (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). In the pre-*Brown* era, Black principals stood out as motivators and role models to the Black students (Carl, 2011). Their elevated leadership level as school principals meant that their leadership strategies emanated from their role as role models and motivators (Carl, 2011). They, therefore, worked with the understanding that the entire black community recognized their privileged role. Arguably, Black principals were instrumental in changing the status of schools from low to high achieving, as well as redefining what success was and is. They set realistic goals for students and formulated practical plans on how to achieve them (Washington, 2013). Historically, black educational leaders focused on influencing the attitudes of Black students (Dubois, 2001; Washington, 2013). The depth and breadth of segregation and inequality in the United States gave Black students wrong attitudes

regarding their ability to match the academic achievements of the white students (Zirkel and Cantor, 2004). Black principals realized the importance of having the right attitude for the students to have the zeal to learn (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). In many cases, Black principals reached out to parents to influence and support their children and left no child outside the concern of their schools (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012).

African American principals encouraged teacher leadership skills among the staff. The foundation of the teacher leadership approach lay in the need to have high levels of commitment and involvement among teachers. Black principals emphasized the role of collectivism in achieving academic success (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). The collective participation of the community, students, parents and teachers was very important to achieving integrative leadership. However, the collective involvement had to be purposeful, with the students at the center of every decision and action taken to promote the collective involvement. Nel Noddings (1984) believed in and has been able to demonstrate the significance of caring and relationship as an educational goal and as a fundamental aspect of education. Since black principals were among the most elite in their communities, they could command the attention of their communities and followers to implement their leadership strategies (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). The ethical and moral foundations of teaching, according to Noddings (1984), were commonly utilized in many black communities. In the pre-*Brown* era, black principals embraced the collective ownership of the education process. As school leaders, African American principals embraced the principles of fairness and consistency. Despite outside influences such as political pressure, black principals always recognized the need to be consistent especially

when dealing with the different personalities of teachers, parents, and students (Dempsey & Noblit, 1996; Siddle Walker, 2000).

The mentoring relationship among Black principals and students helped develop productive and purposeful relationships in the school setting (West, 2016). African American principals have always exhibited a strong sense of self-being within their communities and the school setting (West, 2016). Moreover, African American principals strive to embody the external contingency of education stakeholders. Through these leadership strategies, African American principals have been able to influence positive educational development within the black community, regardless of the continuous difficulties before and after the *Brown* decision.

History of African American Women in Leadership

In the early development of the teaching profession women, were often excluded from both receiving and providing formal instruction (Blount, 1998). According to Blount (1998), men treated women as if they had lesser intelligence and saw the practice of educating women as a waste of time. However, by the nineteenth century, more women in the United States were receiving formal education and being hired as teachers (Blount, 1998). African American female educational leaders moved from marginalization and obscurity and eventually assumed roles as leaders. Female pioneers such as Mary McLeod Bethune, who started Bethune Cookman College with \$1.50 in 1904 (Murtadha & Watts, 2005), was one of the first African American women leaders in education. The college served Black students and the community that began to settle in Daytona, Florida. Fannie Coppin Jackson, one of the first African Americans to graduate from college, was the highest appointed Black women of her time in the position of

principal at the Philadelphia Institute for Colored Youth in 1869. She was a leader in several organizations that fought for the educational rights of Black students and teachers (Johnson, 2012; Murtadha & Watt, 2005). Sarah Smith, Lucy Craft Laney, Margaret Murray Washington and others have been credited for not only fighting against inequalities that existed for students but also for championing equitable educational space for teachers and educational leaders (Tillman 2008). Despite the long history of female contributions to education, the prototypical image of a principal for many people remains a ‘male image’ (Eckman, 2003).

Though race and gender discrimination was a major obstacle for African American female leaders before, during, and after the era of de jure racial segregation in the United States, women/women’s clubs began to move their focus to the betterment and political advancement of the black community (Murtadha & Watts, 2005). The National Association of Colored Women, organized by Mary McLeod Bethune, began making strides in establishing public libraries, playgrounds, kindergartens and parks (Brooks 1993).

There were various groups formed whose priorities were to ensure the education of black students and to further the accomplishments of women in educational leadership. Some examples were the Colored Ladies Literary Society and African American Female Intelligence Society. Through these groups came established schools for the education of Black students; they also provided educational leadership for African-American communities (Murtadha & Watts, 2005). The National Association of Colored Women (NACW) was established in 1896. This organization worked to dispel negative

stereotypes for Black women (McCluskey, 1997). These women's clubs were the source of change in African American Education (McCluskey, 1997).

Challenges of African American Women in Leadership

In a study of women principals by Wrushen & Sherman (2008) some of the challenges pointed out by the survey participants were: finding a personal and professional balance; gender and leadership; ethnicity and leadership, and power. On the issue of personal and professional balance, the study points out "women are continuing to struggle with the task of balancing family and work; they are not finding role models in the form of women who have been successful jugglers of work and home" (p. 462). In a study by Lemasters & Roach (2012), factors found to be barriers for women in leadership were: limited time for career mobility; family responsibilities; limited access to mentorship; exclusion from the network system and entering the administrative positions too late. On the issue of gender and leadership, the study found "many of the women talked about the frustration of not being heard as women leaders." (Wrushen & Sherman, p.463). This has always been a concern of women in leadership positions because for years women have not been seen as leaders, but as mothers, wives, caregivers, etc. The study also points out that many women speak of their struggles with comparisons between their styles of leadership and that of any male predecessor. In general, people expect and prefer that women be communal, manifesting traits such as kindness, concern for others, warmth and gentleness and that men be agentic, manifesting traits such as confidence, aggressiveness and self-direction." (Eagly, 2007, p.4)

African American women face many obstacles to their entry and advancement in positions as school leaders because of the dual disadvantage of being female and African

American (Pollard, 1997). Lack of economic support is perhaps one of the greatest barriers for women of color, as they are often the primary or sole caregivers of their children and their elders, earn less, and have considerably less wealth than men of color and white men and women (Cardenas, 2014). African American women have to work twice as hard and be twice as good as other (non-black) leaders in order to obtain positions of leadership. Race and gender was continually a major obstacle for African American female leaders during as well as after the era of de jure racial segregation in the United States. It has been suggested that a ‘*good ole boy*’ network produces a ‘*glass ceiling*’ effect that influences opportunities for women and African Americans pursuing positions of leadership (Randolph, 2015). The ‘glass ceiling’ is an invisible upper limit in corporations and other organizations above whose ranks it is difficult or impossible for women to rise (Bell, McLaughlin & Sequeria, 2002). This theory suggests that the lack of women and minorities in leadership roles is due to informal barriers that impose ceilings on achievement for these groups (Christie, Jackson & Babo, 2007; Peters 2003). When African American women do obtain principal leadership positions, they are most often in schools that are failing academically and poorly funded (Bridges, 2010; Murtadha & Larson, 1999; Pollard, 1997). In the current era of education reform, these same schools are likely the target for state takeover and are likely located in urban or urbanized areas (Nelson, 2016).

The intersection of race and gender as experienced by the Black woman leader has resulted in her serving as a bridge for others, to others and between others (Horsford & Tillman, 2014). To further confirm this statement, according to Brown (2014), one of the women studied as quoted as saying “...even when it appears that the African

American woman is respected and liked as the leader, it may really be more about what the position can afford others” (p. 6). Alston (1999) found that gender and race were so intertwined for African American women that they had difficulty discerning which feature of their identities was the more significant contributor to constraints on their advancement to leadership positions in education. A study by Wrushen and Sherman (2008) also found that for minority women, race and gender doubly complicated their role as leaders. The study posited that there were difficulties in earning the respect of employees and fellow colleagues, something their male counterparts did not seem to experience (Wrushen and Sherman, 2008).

When it comes to women in leadership positions, sexist practices in the hiring and selection process have been noted as one reason for the limited number of females in administration (Alston, 2000; Gipton & Slick, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1999). The results of a study on women superintendents by Skrla, Reyes & Schurich (2000) found themes related to sexism, silence and solutions. In terms of sexism, the following occurred: women’s competence was questioned, and their abilities were overtly and covertly challenged because of their gender. African American women have struggled for years to gain equality in every aspect of life. Stereotypes of gender roles and traits associated to male and female leaders exist and affect educational leadership (Eagly, 2007). Successful leaders must portray masculine characteristics and traits that correspond to their behaviors. These characteristics and traits may not match with acceptable behaviors normally associated with women (Coleman, 2003; Grogan, 2010; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010). Societal perpetuation of gender inequality dictates that male leadership is valued and respected more than that of female leadership. The differential assignment of value

robs the education profession of the leadership contributions of women (Coleman, 2003). Women in leadership face a double-edged sword. On the one hand, as leaders, they are expected to demonstrate behaviors associated with masculinity such as being a strict disciplinarian. However, women leaders who display these behaviors are said to be too aggressive. Because leaders are thought to have more agentic than communal qualities (Poerll, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002), stereotypes regarding leaders usually resemble stereotypes for males more than stereotypes for females (Eagly, 2007). “Because of these stereotypes, men can seem usual or natural in most leadership roles, thereby placing women at a disadvantage” (Eagly, 2007, p. 4). Commonly, people dislike female leaders who display very directive and assertive qualities because such women are unfeminine, i.e. ‘just like a man or like an iron lady’ (Eagly, 2007). Moreover, African American women are characterized as the ‘angry black woman’ when they are assertive and/or refuse to accept things they know are not in their best interest. Even former First Lady Michelle Obama was condemned as being an angry black woman while campaigning during former President Barack Obama’s 2008 run for office (Rosette, 2012). Black women are deemed as too ‘sassy,’ but no one seems to take into consideration what caused them to be that way. Because of cultural stereotypes, Black women leaders face a double bind (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

More research should be focused on Black women’s daily experiences with anger, which is often fueled by racism and lack of power, control and respect (Fields, 1998). This double jeopardy discrimination defined by Grollman (2012) as additional barriers and burdens faced by individuals who hold multiple disadvantaged statuses (e.g. black women) compared to their singly disadvantaged (e.g. white women and Black men) and

privileged counterparts (e.g., white men), does not stop African American women from accepting the challenge and to taking on roles that have historically been filled by men. The term double jeopardy came into use to highlight the unique experiences of Black women, particularly their simultaneous exposure to racism and sexism (and classism) (Grollman, 2012). The study of African American women superintendents by Brown (2014) found that black women are passed over or denied further access into the role of leadership because of their race; once again supporting research that speaks of Black women who are often highly qualified needing a powerful mentor/advocate in order to be recruited and retained.

Although the racial discrimination is sometimes obvious, many African American women shy away from making their race an issue for fear of sounding paranoid, playing the ‘race card’ or being in a state of denial (Brown, 2014). Not wanting to ruffle feathers with the race card means African American women need to be even stronger and show they are more capable of doing the job in order to maintain a level of respect in any leadership position. Black women are penalized more for making mistakes as well in leadership positions (Hill, 2016). According to Hill (2016), because black women violate both the gender and racial stereotypes of what a leader looks like, they are held to higher standards of competence than people who violate only one of these stereotypes. (i.e. black men or white women). African American women indicate that their experiences with family, culture, and spiritual backgrounds influence who they are as leaders and prepare them for leadership (Alston, 1999; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Jackson 1999).

Eagly (2007) states that “women are increasingly praised for having excellent skills for leadership and, in fact, women, more than men, manifest leadership styles

associated with effective performance as leaders” (p.1). African American female leaders seem to always be required to conform to the expectations of others in order to be considered for leadership. For African American women, the process of negotiating and reconciling images of self has become a lifelong pattern of coping in predominantly White settings (Collins, 2000). “Often, when African American women enter a position of leadership and authority, the masks that society places on them can be fractured” (Brown, 2014). This fracturing might also be seen as an act of transformation. In addition to the social stigmas of race and gender, African American females who enter the principalship early in their career may be perceived as lacking sufficient experience (Peters, 2008; Young & McLeod, 2001).

Chapter III

Research Methodology and Data Collection

Introduction

This chapter examines the methodological approach for the study. As articulated in chapters one and two, this study explored the perceptions of eleven African American women principals/assistant principals of the challenges faced in obtaining and maintaining their principal leadership positions. The study aimed to answer the following questions: What are the major challenges faced by female African American Principals? How does identity as a black woman influence the way you are treated as an African American Principal? What are the strategies utilized to overcome obstacles in the pathway to leadership and gain stakeholder buy-in? To address the research questions, a phenomenological, qualitative study of eleven African American female principals/assistant principals will be utilized. The worlds the participants share,

according to Glesne (2006), are used to understand the social phenomena from the perspective of those individuals involved. Interviews will be conducted to bring to light the challenges faced by African Americans women in their path to principal leadership. Seidman (2013) contends, “Individuals’ consciousness gives access to the most complicated social and educational issues, because social and educational issues are abstractions based on concrete experiences of people” (p. 7). Interviews were conducted to illuminate the challenges faced by African American women in their journey to principal leadership.

Research Methods

A qualitative methodology was used for this study. This allowed the experiences of the African American female principals to be shared with others. Qualitative studies seek to “share the world of others to find out what is going on, why people do what they do, and how they understand their worlds” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 5). Qualitative research acknowledges differences in the situations of interviews and is designed to gain understanding of a situation through description and inference drawn from the human experience (Maxwell, 2012). Glesne (2006) contends that during qualitative interviewing, descriptions are sought that explain motives, intentions, and circumstances. The hope is that interviewees will provide detailed viewpoints of their roles as African American women principals and the process utilized to obtain and maintain their positions.

Van Manen states “phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (as cited in Patton, 2002, p.104). A phenomenological method was selected to allow individuals to describe their lived experiences of leadership challenges. The research captured the challenges from the

perspectives of the African American female principal and discovered the principals' strategies used to overcome those challenges. The study will entail semi-structured in-depth interviews 45 to 90 minutes. Interviews were designed to document individual and collective experiences/perceptions of obstacles overcome to obtain principalship and challenges faced in maintaining leadership. This research revealed similarities and differences in the leadership styles and behaviors of the eleven African American leaders.

Sampling Size and Study Participants

All participants in this study were African American females, currently or previously, employed in a principal/assistant principal leadership position. Participants were sent a recruitment letter informing them about the study and a consent letter to participate in the study. The eleven principals will be from three different school districts; with three or four African American participants interviewed from each of the three districts. This variation allowed a comparison of the challenges faced in urban school settings, from different areas to identify similarities and differences that arise based on geography. Literature was reviewed on African American leadership before and after *Brown* to determine the effect the decision had on the elimination of black leaders, the impact it had on the academics, discipline and social outcomes within minority-led schools.

Data Collection/Interview Procedure

The researcher employed qualitative interview techniques to obtain information regarding the perceived barriers in obtaining principalship as well as strategies used to maintain leadership as an African American female. "Interviewing is most consistent with people's abilities to make meaning through language; it confirms the importance of

the individual without denigrating the possibility of community and collaboration” (Sideman, 2013, p. 13). Moustakas’ (1994) procedures for data collection will be utilized. The procedure consists of identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketing out one’s own experiences, and collecting data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon. Interviews were conducted in one setting with each participant due to the interviewees being in several different states, the possibility of long interviews and the possibility of losing participants through attrition. Although it is recommended by Moustakas (1994), Creswell (2007) and Sideman (2013) to conduct multiple interviews, because of the nature of the principal position the researcher had no guarantee of access to participants on multiple occasions, or the ability to make multiple trips to the respective locations. The interview protocol was strategically modified to gain quality data in one interview. The interviews were audio taped, transcribed and analyzed for categories and coding by the researcher. Interview protocols were linked to research questions and the selected theoretical framework to gain an understanding of connections between leadership and potential barriers to the career advancement for African American women in the principal position. These connections were appropriately designed to flesh out interviewees’ perspectives on career trajectories, barriers, strategies and the impact of race and gender on the journey to the principalship.

An interview guide was developed to gather to ensure a common process in data collection from the participants in each interview. A phenomenological approach was utilized to understand the interviewees’ experiences. According to Creswell (2007) the type of problem best suited for this form of research is one in which it is important to understand several individuals’ common or shared experiences of a phenomenon. The

researcher will conduct an in-depth interview, which, according to Sideman (2013), leads to exploring the meanings of peoples' experiences.

Data Analysis and Coding

Upon completion of the interviews the sessions will be transcribed for analysis. The data generated can be enormous as the participants share details, situations, and emotions when retelling their experiences during the in-depth interview (Glesne, 2006; sideman 2012). LeCompte (2000) describes data analysis as the process of transforming succinct statements into an overall description or explanation of a given phenomenon. The analysis of the interviews will be accomplished using methods described by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2007) in their guidelines for analysis of phenomenological interview data, which will include coding for statements of significance, clustering for units of meaning, and writing a composite description that provides the essence of the phenomenon.

The participant's thoughts become embodied in their words (Seidman, 2013). To capture these thoughts the researcher gained permission from the participants to record the interview sessions. This will allow the researcher to refer back to the recordings and check for accuracy of their transcription and interpretation if necessary (Seidman, 2013). The researcher listened to the recording sessions multiple times to ensure accurate recording of the participant's responses. After transcriptions were completed, coding was utilized to uncover themes and patterns on which research could focus. Each theme was placed into categories and sub-categories that captured participants' structural descriptions of the phenomenon according to Moustakas (1994). Descriptions express participants' perceptions of barriers, strategies utilized, and motivations in their processes

of obtaining and maintaining positions of leadership. During the coding, the eleven participants were assigned a number and pseudonym for identification and confidentiality.

Research Benefits

A deeper understanding of the perceived challenges/barriers in obtaining the principal position as an African-American woman will provide a guideline for understanding the possible challenges that may arise for aspiring leaders. This understanding will assist aspiring leaders in their preparation to overcome those challenges through use of strategies identified by the study participants. The experiences of the participants may be utilized to motivate more African-American women to enter educational leadership. The research may also be used to provide a better understanding of the effect of the intersectionality of race and gender in education and possibly enable school administrator, politicians, and leaders in higher education to moderate the negative impact of these intersectional forces.

Limitations

Limitations outline boundaries for qualitative research studies and refer to potential weaknesses in the study (Cresswell, 2003). According to Roberts (2010), limitations refer to the particular features of the study that negatively affect the researchers' ability to generalize. The research will be limited to a sample size of eleven African American female principals. Although they represent African American female principals or assistant principal from three discrete school districts in three different states, the small number may affect the ability to generalize the findings at the national level. Limitations may arise from the fact that the study only examines the experiences of

African-American women in urban contexts, leaving the experiences of African American women in suburban and rural school districts unexamined.

While the population of the study was limited to eleven African American female principals, it could have included more than the number represented in this study. The researcher wanted to use manageable number of participants given the potentially large amount of data generated by the study design and elected to limit the number of participants but selected these from three different school districts to get a representative sample. In addition, the researcher focused on urban school districts that were large because many African American principals work in urban school settings.

Participant Profile

As previously discussed, the selection of the participants occurred using purposive sampling. The criterion required were: (a) African American female (b) Principal or Assistant Principal and (c) at least 3 years of leadership experience (Principal or Assistant Principal). The participants shared their personal experiences through interviews and dates, times and locations of their choosing.

The participants served in large urban school districts. Four of the participants were from a Northern District, four were from a Mid-Southern District, and three were from a Southern District. All participants self-identify as African American and ranged from 30 to 63 years. Four of the participants earned a doctorate degree while the remaining seven earned a Master's Degree. All of the participants had at least 9 years of experience in the field of education. The participants ranged from 4 to 28 years in leadership. Participants were assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and protect their identities.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Age	Highest Degree	Years in Education	Years Asst Prin.	Years Principal	School Level	District
<u>North</u>							
Kelly	62	Doctorate	32	5	23	High	Urban
Harriet	50	Master's	27	13	1	Middle	Suburban/Urban
Francine	49	Post Master's	26	7	3	High	Urban
Brenda	48	Doctorate	24	3	2	Middle	Urban
<u>Mid-South</u>							
Janice	49	Master's	25	9	3	High	Urban
Teresa	63	Doctorate	38	14	6	High	Urban
Barbara	44	Master's	18	4	1	Middle	Urban
Ursula	35	Master's	15	3	2	Middle	Urban
<u>South</u>							
Gail	34	Doctorate	14	2	3	High	Urban
Belle	30	Master's	9	2	3	Middle	Suburban/Urban
McKenzie	42	Master's	18	4		Middle	Urban

Kelly: This principal possessed the highest number of years experience as a principal. She is 62, one of the oldest principals interviewed. She is divorced and has one son. She earned a Doctorate degree as well as Principal Certification. She has been the principal at her current school for 23 years and also served as an Assistant Principal at the same school. Prior to administration she taught for three years. The interview was conducted in person. When asked about her educational philosophy, Kelly shared:

“Academics plus extracurricular activities equals success. I make a point to the students that you need to be involved in extracurricular activities, not just sports, but you have to be involved in something else beyond just being smart. The more students are involved, the better their grades are and the more options they will have for college. They must be well rounded”.

Harriet: This Assistant Principal has been serving in her current school for 13 years. Prior to working in this school, she served as the Principal for an Alternative

School. She has a Master's Degree as well as Principal Certification. The interview was conducted in person. Prior to administration she taught for 13 years. Harriet says her philosophy on education is to "just get it done, get it done at your best, but understand that your best can still be better than the person that might have gotten it done quicker. We have to educate the whole child, its decision making skills we're now pushing".

Francine: This Principal has been the Principal at her current school for 3 years. Prior to being the principal, she also served within the same school as the Assistant Principal for two years. Francine is 49 and has been in the education field for 25 years. She received her Master's Degree as well as entered in to a Doctoral Program. She also has her Principal Certification. This interview was conducted in person. Prior to administration she taught exceptional learners in high school for 4 years and was head of the Special Education department for 13 years. Francine's educational philosophy is that every child should have the opportunity and equal access to resources. Students should have the opportunity to the best quality education no matter what their background may be. "I just believe in things being fair and equitable.

Brenda: This Principal has been the Principal at her current school for 2 years. Prior to becoming Principal she served as the Assistant Principal at the same school for 3 years and taught high school math for 17 years as well as coached volleyball. She received her Doctorate Degree and a Principal Certification. Brenda is 48 and has been in education for 22 years. Brenda is married; her husband is also in the education field and is a coach. They have one daughter who is currently a senior in college. This interview was conducted by phone. Brenda stated, "all students can learn, that's my philosophy. I'm not saying all students can go to college, but I do know that we should be able to give

our students the necessary resources and give them the necessary demands of our society. We should provide them with everything they need to be successful”.

Janice: This Principal worked as a principal for three years and one school, then moved to a different school in the same neighborhood where she worked as Assistant Principal for 8 years. She received her Master’s Degree as well as Principal Certification. Janice is 49 and has been in education for 27 years. Janice is divorced and has one adult son. Prior to entering into administration, she was a teacher at the school where she served as principal for 12 years. This interview was conducted in person. Janice feels that her educational philosophy changes. She stated “I think the most important thing to try to remember is at some point we have to realize we are dealing with impressionable children. Everybody wants to say that every child can learn. I agree, but it’s at different levels of what we expect of them to learn. It depends on what level you’re looking for because it changes from day to day. The name of the game is growth. So, my view is; when a job is begun, never leave until it’s done. Be the task great or small, do it well or not at all”.

Teresa: This past principal is one of two with the most years in education and at 63, is the oldest of the principals interviewed. Teresa served 8 years as an assistant principal, then left to pursue her Doctorate Degree. She worked for several years in another state as a school turn-around agent, another leadership role in a different state as a school-turn around agent and eventually served 3 years as principal at the school where she was the assistant principal. She also has Principal Certification. As a teacher in the same school where she served as both assistant principal and principal, she also coached sports. Teresa is divorced and has two adult sons. This interview conducted in person. In

response to the question of her educational philosophy Teresa stated, “Ever changing, education is ever changing. Never be satisfied. I don’t care what your circumstance is, you can be the most gifted person in this room but you always have to have the ability to change and get better”. She stated that the philosophy came from the director of Upward Bound when she lived in Kansas City.

Barbara: This assistant principal is one of two participants who served as a principal for a year prior to becoming an assistant principal. Barbara is 44 and has been an assistant principal for four years. Prior to becoming the assistant principal at her current school she served as the interim principal at her prior school for several months. Barbara has a Master’s Degree as well as Principal Certification. She taught in an elementary school for 14 years prior to moving into administration at a middle school. Barbara is married and her husband is also an education administrator. This interview was conducted person. Barbara stated in regard to her educational philosophy, “My philosophy has changed. I do believe that all children can learn but overtime it changes and if we want to continue to reach our children we have to change the way we do things and try to reach our children. I believe every child has their own path and whatever path you take, yes you have to be educated in that path, but I just don’t believe anymore that everyone had to go the straight and narrow way”. Barbara believes students should be free to take whatever path they need in order to get to their destination.

Ursula: This principal is one of the newest to the principal leadership role and has been at her current school for 5 years. She was the assistant principal for 3 years prior to taking on the principal role. Ursula is 35 is currently engaged and has a son who is almost 2. She has a Master’s Degree as well as Principal Certification. Prior to taking on the

administrative role she taught for 45 days at the middle school. She became the assistant principal and worked in this role for 3 years. This interview was conducted in person. When asked her educational philosophy Ursula stated “I haven’t been asked that question in years but is all students can succeed all students. Everybody has something that they can be successful at I and I believe it’s our job as educators to figure out what that something is and to pull it out of them.”

Gail: This principal is one of the youngest participants. She is 34 and has been a principal at her current school for 3 years. Prior to being the principal, she was the assistant principal at the same school for 2 years. She has earned a Doctorate Degree as well as her Principal Certification. Prior to becoming an administrator, she taught for 9 years. Gail feels like she has always had some fascination with systemic issues in education and society and how they interact. This interview was conducted in person. When asked about her educational philosophy she responded, “I see education as a mechanism for social justice. I think everything has to do with who I am: my identity, and my K-12 experiences. I absolutely view education as an opportunity to have equity in society and for our kids to get things that they need and have rights to. It is the great equalizer”.

Belle: This principal is the youngest of the participants. She is 32 years old and has been the principal at her current school for 3 years. She also served 1 year as an assistant principal and 1 year as an interim principal within the same school. Prior to administration she taught for 5 years. She has a Master’s Degree as well as Principal Certification. Belle felt her transition was fairly easy because it was all within the same school. When asked her educational philosophy she stated: “It’s very cliché but I do

think all that all students can succeed regardless of class, social status, race, religion and exceptionalism. Everybody can succeed if we teach them the right way”. She feels that has been the guiding principal and has helped her with many conversations with teachers and parents.

McKenzie: This assistant principal is the second of two participants who have not served in the principal role. She has been the assistant principal at her school for 4 years. She is 42 years old and had been in education for 18 years. She has a Master’s Degree and her Principal Certification. This interview was conducted via phone. When asked her educational philosophy she responded, “All mine all the time”. She went on to explain “What it ultimately means for me in terms of how it developed is that it’s actually was kind of centered on my classes as an educator. Every kid that walks into my classroom is mine and I have to treat them like they’re mine. I mean like I birthed them. At no point can I believe that they are not mine. Because if I believe they are not mine then I can run the risk of giving them less than all I have”.

Chapter IV

Findings

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of African American female leaders and obtain their perceptions of obstacles in obtaining and maintaining principal leadership. Looking at the challenges eleven African American women faced, i.e. racism and sexism, while pursuing and while employed in the Principal Leadership position, the research also attempted to understand how African-American

female principals identify/understand/conceptualize/interpret/overcome the obstacles to school leadership.

This chapter will report demographic characteristics and findings from the analysis of individual interviews conducted with eleven African American Female Assistant Principals and Principals in Public Middle Schools and High Schools in a Northern Urban District, a Mid-Southern Urban District and a Southern Urban District. This study includes data that was collected through semi-structured interviews with eleven African American women in public school districts with three or more years of Assistant Principal or Principal experience. Initial communication was made through e-mail (see appendix A) and phone contact to 25 women Principals and Assistant Principals. Personal contact was made with the eleven principals agreeing to participate in the study. Data was collected from a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B). All participants understood and signed consent forms to participate in the research study. Each interview was conducted in a secure area in order to avoid disruptions and distractions. Each interview was audiotaped: the researcher took notes during the interviews. Interviews ranged from 38 minutes to 1 hour 23 minutes. Coding and data analysis was completed by the researcher and by hand. Qualitative data software was not used. Initial Color-Coding was done on each interview transcript to help identify the emerging themes. Within each theme the subthemes were coded.

Emergent Themes

The application of Saldana's (2013) coding techniques helped me identify the emergent themes. Through analysis of the data, common categories were identified then overlapping statements were removed in accord with Moustakas' (1994) process. In this

qualitative study four themes emerged after first cycle coding: (a) Barriers (b) Racism/Sexism (c) Mentoring (d) Strengths of African American Women (e) The Four Dimensions of Leadership. In addition to the major themes, subthemes emerged from the interviews as well. Emergent subthemes included (a) work-life balance, (b) staff push-back/resistance, and (c) silencing. Specific statements were shared from each participant to provide a look through the lens of the principalship of African American female leaders.

Table 2
Research Findings Table (11 participants)

Topic	Yes	No	Other
Available Mentoring Program Prior to Leadership	3	8	
Able to find Work-Life Balance	3	8	
Experienced Racism/Sexism	9	1	1
Felt Silenced in the Leadership Role	9	2	
Predominantly African American/Minority School	9	2	

Barriers

Each person discussed obstacles she faced as an African American female in their principalship. Each participant discussed obstacles she faced as an African American female in a leadership position. To get insight into the barriers, they were asked about their perception of how they were received as an African American woman leader.

Several barriers were described in the literature by Gosmire (2010), included: (a) gender bias from faculty and staff, (b) high work expectations for women in terms of work effort and time spent working, and (c) apprehensions about the female's capacity to lead and handle discipline. All participants in the study discussed facing some type of barrier in their principalship.

Work-Life Balance

The most common obstacle eight of the eleven women faced was “work-life balance”. Balancing work and family responsibilities is one of the most challenging obstacles for women seeking leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Sandberg, 2013). Participants described the difficulties in trying to balance the work load as a principal or assistant principal and maintain a family and household without feeling like one is suffering. When speaking about the ability to achieve work-life balance some of the principals shared the following:

Francine: “Balancing work and home was a one of the biggest challenges. I never did that. There was a lot of sacrificing with my family time and my daughter. I still regret a lot of things and not having a balance more with my family. So a lot of things I missed out on. I lost friendships/relationships because the phone stopped ringing. People stop calling you when you don’t have time to talk or say you will call back and never do. So I lost a lot of relationships. If I could do it over again I would do it much differently.” The sentiments were the same for Brenda who expressed:

“I don’t know if there is a balance yet because unfortunately I never stop. So I don’t know, ask my husband he’s going to say we’ve never overcome the challenge of managing work and home. It’s hard to balance and sometimes you can’t balance it as a leader. Family just has to understand. You have to deal with not having time for each. Another thing is you have to sacrifice as a mom, so you have to try to find time and make it work. There really is no balance around being a new principal”. Other statements in regard to trying to create a work-life balance seemed to reiterate the difficulties of finding balance:

Teresa: “As far as work to life balance, I used to have a life (laughter). I used to always have my kids with me when I was coaching. When I rolled into administration I was blessed that my sons attended the same school, so I could still oversee them. As time moved on I spent even more time at school. You lose a lot of the personal time and as the district changes in to different accountability stages, so does your personal life. You might not get a Sunday off that may be your only time to catch up on paperwork. Your time is not your time. You’re 24/7 on call. If they call you have to answer. So, when you accept the position you must understand that.”

Janice: Working in a high school setting can be tricky. We had middle and high so there were always different functions going on. So, you are always at work, seems like you’re never at home. It’s hard to say you want to balance your personal life when everything revolves pretty much around work. I can remember one specific time I was at home relaxing and got called on a Sunday night about 9pm because the alarm was going off at the school. They could not get in touch with the building engineer, so whose responsibility was it? Mine. Janice also shared that the few African American women she did know who were married when they took on the role are either having marital issues or divorced now.

Gail: I don’t know what a life is (slight laughter). That’s one of the things I think is also making this overwhelming. The uglier experiences I’ve had hurt more because I start thinking about I am totally neglecting my own family and friends. I don’t have a husband, but my mom, my siblings and family. I give so much to this profession and I need to find be more balanced and focus more on the people that love me. So, I don’t have a balance right now and that’s something I am working on.

Belle stated, “I don’t know if you will ever fully 100% jump the hurdle on balancing work and home life. My home life really struggled in my first year. When you think about work life balance I was really struggling. It became a real problem around March/April of the first year and my husband and I had to have what I call a “come to Jesus” talk. I had to determine if I was going to keep pursuing this, what it means for our home front.

Staff push-back/resistance

The second most common barrier found was push back/resistance from staff/trying to get total buy-in. The interviewees experienced various types of push back for various reasons including racism, doubt of qualifications as a woman, and simple resistance to change. It takes time to get total buy in from the faculty when you are a new administrator even when you were previously a teacher within the building. *Janice* stated: When I got into administration it was at a school where I taught so naturally you are going to receive some push pack, because now as opposed to them looking at me as their peer they looked at me differently, the question from them was can I make the transition from being one of them to being their leader. Most of the pushback came from two white women who were always trying to find a loophole. Everything I did I felt like they were always trying to see in what ways they could sabotage it.

Gail felt push back and resistance from staff as well stating, “I’ve struggled the most with white women I think and I’ve had white women teachers that are absolutely not going to listen to you. They feel they can challenge you at every turn. I don’t know what that’s about. You always have your few that want you to lower standards and

expectations for them. So I have had some interesting experiences in terms of how I am being received as an African American female principal.

McKenzie stated, “There were times when there were issues, not with people of color but honestly with white women I felt push back. I think a lot of it just had to do with me being a black woman, but it also could be that I was 30 and they were 23 so it could have been an age thing. At the same time my whole leadership team was black so they could have been reacting to all of us being black. Their push back could have been of the decisions we made as a leadership team”.

Francine stated, “The push back I received was from white males who just thought, me being an African American woman, that was a strike against me and they felt they knew more than I did so I had to be very careful on how she carried herself. I feel there were things said to me that would not have been said and push back I would not have gotten if I was a white male”.

Brenda received push back from her faculty because of a lack of consistency in leadership. Her school had 4 principals within a matter of months. She stated “I was the fourth principal during that period, so that’s saying something right there. That means there is no stability, when somebody tells you to do something you’re like oh I don’t have to listen to you because next month we’ll probably get somebody else.”

Silencing

A feeling of being silenced and not unheard was an obstacle for several of the African American female leaders. They felt many times their comments and/or suggestions were not being heard and were over looked. This silencing happened frequently in meetings where the majority of the leaders were males or in situations

where there was a belief that as an African American female leader her opinions were not important.

Harriet: In my leadership I have learned to always stay positive and you have to have thick skin as an African American female. You figure out how to survive and not allow them to control you. One thing I did learn is they tell you that you have a voice but when you don't say what they want you to say, your voice is silenced.

Francine recalled having conversations with her mentor (who is also an African American female) about how amazing it was that they could be in a meeting and be totally overlooked. Everybody would be offering their thoughts and they could give their opinions and suggestions about things and they would just be danced over like no one was listening. Some other non-African American person would come back and say the same thing and now it's the best idea in the room during the duration of the meeting. (Seriously angry/frustrated look). "That happened to me repeatedly, even in my own meetings".

Racism

The intersectionality of race and gender plays a major part in the success of African American Women. Though both racism and sexism could be considered a barrier, the African American Women principals did not view them as a barrier in obtaining leadership, but as situations that must be faced, dealt with and overcome in order to maintain their principal leadership. There is no monolithic "women's experience" of leadership. Women always have a race and an ethnicity, so a discussion about gender without reference to race and ethnicity (or vice versa) is simplistic and can be misleading (AAUW, 2016).

The women interviewed experienced various forms of racism as well as sexism while in their leadership positions. Coupled with the racism and sexism, came the tendency to feel ‘silenced’ or unheard when expressing concerns about these issues. Not only do women of color confront race and ethnic discrimination that white women do not face, they also experience gender bias differently than white women do, and they experience racial bias differently than do the men in their racial or ethnic group (Williams, Dempsey, & Slaughter, 2014). Critical Race Theory and Black Feminism suggest that race and gender should be a major component for analysis of African American leadership.

When speaking on their experiences and how they were received as African American women leaders some of their personal experiences were brought to light. In some instances, the racism was subtle and in some instances, it was blatant. One interviewee recalled the following encounter during her first year as assistant principal:

Harriet: “During my first year as assistant principal there was an incident when we were in a meeting. We were about to be dismissed from the meeting and a white lady looked at me and told me, ‘If y’all could just get back on the boat everything would be okay’. Then she stated, ‘...it’s a white man’s world’. I could not believe my ears, so I leaned forward, looked at her and said, Pardon me? And believe it or not (with a very surprised look on her face) she proceeded to repeat herself with no hesitation. I was literally in shock, so I wrote her up. Interestingly enough the letter I wrote was corrected and they asked me to take out the fact that I was African American. I decided with all the corrections they wanted me to make to the write up it would not be a valid write up, so I kept the document, I still have it to this day. I have kept that for 13 years as a reminder.

Her excuse was her ex-husband was a black man and that's how they used to joke with each other and she thought it was okay. My fear was, if she would say that to me and make me feel uncomfortable as an African American adult, how is she making the children feel? ”

Another encounter with racism from Francine was not as directly blatant but displays the subtle racism that still exists today. Her experiences were more in the way she was treated and spoken to as an African American female leader as compared to her white counterparts.

Francine: “I realized there are definitely double standards. I've noticed how my chief (who happened to be Latino) treated other white principals and administrators differently than how he treated me. The way he treated and spoke to white women was different from how he spoke to me. I felt like he was more casual and laid back with me and more professional with the white women. When he would come to meetings with me he would come unprepared like on a whim, no written agenda. But when he went to meetings with other colleagues of mine who were white he would have things prepared, written down, he would have feedback and solid goals for them”. (Frowning with a distraught look) “Now why would that be acceptable that he would not come prepared to offer me the same kind of experience that they had?” (Serious thought).

Belle shared an encounter with a white male department head while in an athletic meeting with her CEO, a white woman, the director of Human Resources, a white woman and his principal, a white male. He was upset and allowed to yell loudly at her and beat on the table because he could not have his way. After she clearly told him what she would and would not do he continued to be irate and no one in the room said anything

about the behavior. She stated, “I was thinking if my husband or dad was here I don’t think this guy would be acting this way. But because I was an African American female, he felt it was okay to come to this meeting and act this way”. When speaking with the head of HR and expressing that she felt threatened she was met with the response, “I would argue that he didn’t threaten you”. Yet a similar incident happened with a white female who was speaking with a black male who did not do half of what the white department head did in my meeting. When she told HR she felt threatened by him they were willing to have conversations about the encounter.

Brenda spoke about the racism in the hiring process. She stated, “I was talking to my husband about how it’s a disparity and it’s inequitable. They will put me at a black school but if I’m interviewing for a white school or a Hispanic school, they won’t put me there. But the white women and Hispanic women, they won’t come to my school in the hood with only black kids and mostly black teachers. But if a white woman did come to my school to interview, they would hire her over me. So culturally they’ll hire a white woman in an all black school but then when I got to a north side (white) school to interview they won’t hire me over there.”

These types of situations are not uncommon experiences for African American women in leadership. Situations like the experience Belle had also show that black women are still being silenced and expected to not voice their opinions even when they feel they are being treated unfairly.

Sexism

Sexism in the workplace is complex and layered. Rather than exclusive representation in male resistance to female authority, it exists in differential responses by

female authority by both sexes. Society accepts the exercise of power from men more readily than women, and certain things are more acceptable for a male to do than a female. The female leaders interviewed experienced sexism on several levels.

Janice: I think African American women have to work twice as hard to prove they are worthy or that they belong. When you have a female African American leader, if something goes wrong, especially if it's something negative that's highlighted about your school it becomes a big deal or it's exponential. But maybe if you have the same situation at a school where there is a white male leader, it's not going to be as big. It's always swept under the rug.

Ursula feels it's an oppressive mindset, she stated "To me it's a mindset thing. The oppression is to be defiant. I'm very passionate about what I do and for some people that has not been the norm. So it's a mindset. I do think that because I am an African American woman, if a man came in and did the same things I am doing he would not have to deal with the mindset and the extra layer I have to deal with being an African American woman".

Teresa pointed out that as women, especially African American women on leadership; you are no longer able to hang out with your friends. People that used to run with you can no longer do so now because you're on a different level and they look at you differently, but men can do it they can do whatever, women can't. You have to make those tough decisions and you can't take it personal. She also stated with men the expectations are different. They will accept men being mediocre or falling or making mistakes. They are accepting of men with flaws. Black women are unforgiven PERIOD (serious face). White women can make mistakes all they want. They'll cry and get out

from under. She also stated “Men could have gone out and done anything and everything with everybody and come back and they will reward them with promotions or even their same positions. I’ve seen that, I’m like oh my God what if that was me, they wouldn’t let me come in the door if I did that. But this district has done that. They don’t do that with women. If they bring a white woman back, it’s because she knows someone, or she has some powerful people to help her and bring her back.”

Barbara’s experience with sexism came in a different form. It was from the expectations of people in general. She recalls her experience when she was in the principalship at her previous school: “I had a male assistant principal that worked under me. People would walk in and immediately walk to him before they would walk to me. Now I’m almost 6 feet and he was 5’4” and they would immediately walk to him saying ‘I’m here to see the principal’ and they expected it to be a male. I would say okay how can I help you? They would comment ‘I’ll just wait on the principal’ (laughter) And I would say, here I am, I’m what you got. So they just assumed he was the principal.

Kelly is one of the only principals who did not experience any racism, sexism or silencing being and African American female principal. She believes her years in the leadership role have given her the ability to say what she wants and be heard. In her statement it is evident that although she may not experience it, it still exists. Kelly stated, “I think in society in general the white male is going to get the ear, but I think that I have figured out a way for them to listen to me. I think I am the most senior principal that they have in the district. I am not going to be quiet about issues I think are important. So, with that, I have become empowered, so it’s really not a black or white issue with me”.

Mentorship

Mentorship is very important the principal leadership position. Mentorship and training provides the necessary tools for leaders to prepare themselves to be able to lead and organization and deal with the challenges and the complexities or that organization. Tillman (2003) has found that leadership preparation programs must take an active role in helping to place African American administrators in school districts to increase the numbers.

The participants were asked about the types of mentorship they had in their transition to leadership as well as who provided the mentorship. Several of the participants discussed the need to seek out mentorship from other principals they knew in order to get assistance with what they did not know when entering into leadership.

Kelly, who has been a principal the longest stated, “There really was not direct or organized assistance given to me. There were a few principals I knew who were good friends and would mentor me and give me advice on certain things, but as for a program that assisted me in my transition, there were none.” She felt she was pretty comfortable transitioning into the principalship because she was already the assistant principal.

Harriet stated, “I did not receive assistance unless I reached out to someone. I didn’t know what I didn’t know until I didn’t know it. I reached out to people outside the school to help me who I knew had been through this experience. I really was the first administrator in my circle, so my circle of influence was really shallow.”

Janice responded, “When I first became an assistant principal I reached out to others whether they were assistant principals or principals. Most of the time I reached out, and it’s ironic, that I reached out to male principals because I knew they had been doing it for a long while. The one I reached out to I felt comfortable enough to know that

they were not going to steer me into anything that was going to be uncomfortable. Later on I had a former principal who worked at the district who would become my mentor.”

Teresa received assistance from the first principals she worked under as an assistant principal. The second principal she worked under gave her some ideas and guided her as well. She then stated “once I became a principal they didn’t send one person to assist me as a principal, they would send people to observe me, which I thought was unique, but why just observe and never give any feedback? They eventually sent someone from the State and all she did was give us incorrect data and it confused not only me but my staff.”

Barbara stated in her transition, “My husband was a principal, so I walked that walk with him as a spouse. I would say he is my mentor by way because I was his spouse and I heard a lot of stuff he was going through. When I formally moved into leadership my principal at the time was my mentor. I was technically the facilitator but also considered the assistant principal because it was just the two of us. The only other training I got was the leadership program from my professors.”

Ursula felt her principal was training and mentoring her while she was a teacher. She stated “she saw something in me that I didn’t see myself. She would walk me through or let me sit in and observe. When leadership opportunities came she wouldn’t just give them to me, I had to apply but I realized those time she let me see what she was doing had a lot of impact”. When she went to another school, as a teacher, she had a male principal who again saw something in her. Ursula stated “what he saw in me was the discipline aspect so when different major discipline issues were going on in the school he would pull me and walk me through what should be done and what not to do and this was

before I ever went to a leadership class or anything”. There was no formal leadership program or mentoring provided before she entered into the principalship 45 days into the school year at the third school where she taught.

Gail also expressed that there was no formal mentoring program prior to her entering into leadership. She stated, “I lucked up in a few roles where I had my supervisors be black men or women with PhD’s and awesome leadership experiences that have made sure to mentor me in my development. Through the good, bad and the ugly it’s been important that they have done that and it’s something that I didn’t ask of them but they felt it was their duty to do and I am thankful for it. There was no formal leadership program or mentoring programs outside of my schooling.”

McKenzie’s experiences were a little different; “I got opportunities for leadership through a nonprofit organization I worked at. My leadership journey started not in school, but in a small nonprofit. At that stage there were women mentors who helped me understand the landscape of things. When she transitioned to executive director it made space for me to step into leadership opportunities. There were mentors assigned when I got my graduate degree and there were some kind of assigned to you a principal resident. I would find smart black women and ask them how I could become better. I’ve also been in a leadership development program at a company where I was in a three-year leadership network with them where I had a mentor as well. But not necessarily was there a mentor in education, just a mentor in my leadership journey”.

Francine was invited to serve on leadership teams by her principal, she also mentioned the leaders must have seen something in her and invited her to serve on leadership teams which she felt gave her the advantage of hearing the conversations

about what it took to run a school. She was also a special education case manager and stated “from there I transitioned into the assistant principal position. My former principal knew that I aspired to be an administrator, felt very comfortable with me and felt I was level headed and I joined her staff. She had two assistant principals and they would just brainstorm and talk about issues that were her way of coaching to two of us. Once I became a principal that was when I was contacted to be a part of a principal association program and was assigned an official mentor.”

Each of these participants felt the non-formal mentoring they received was helpful in their transition to leadership. Two of the eleven African American female leaders were part of leadership programs prior to taking on their leadership positions. Brenda participated in and was part of the New Leader’s program (National program now called new Leaders for New Schools) and the Emerging Leaders Program. In these programs they had coaches and if they felt you qualified you matriculated to the next level, which was a program called APP (Aspiring Principals Program) where again you were paired with a principal who had 5 or more years as a successful principal. She is now in her third phase called Principal Institute, where you are the principal and they support you the first two years of your principalship. She stated, “It’s awesome because there is a mentor coach, a program coach and then my network gives me a retired principal to talk to and meet with monthly so that’s a lot of support”.

Belle believes her former principal Amanda really groomed her as far as mentoring. She sponsored her and before taking on the principal role she entered into a program called Relay (National principals fellowship program). She recalled, “I did Relay, it was a year long program to prepare me to be principal. But that’s only the

technical piece. It doesn't prepare you for all the things you do on a day to day basis.

Actually, I studied Amanda. There were a lot of books I read in preparation, but Amanda was my primary resource.”

Strengths of the African American Woman

When interviewing the African American women leaders about the obstacles they faced in their leadership and inquiring about their leadership attributes several common strengths were highlighted. The participants felt there were certain strengths that assisted them in continuing to prevail in their leadership roles and in coping with the difficulties within the role of assistant principal/principal. The most common themes of strength are listed below:

Resilience: African American women are very resilient: they do not allow hard times or difficult situations to stop them from progressing forward. The participants made the following statements:

- We don't let things knock us down and keep us down.
- We are able to adapt and adjust to difficult situations.
- We have that bounce back power, the ability to shake things off and keep moving.
- We are able to handle tough situations and don't fold under pressure.
- We are like a Phoenix because we are always going to rise to the top.

Nurturing/Mothering: Study Participants felt African American women are nurturing by nature making the following statements

- African American women are seen as nurturing.
- We have the ability to nurture, mother and be empathetic to others because we understand the struggles others have gone through.

- As a leader, one must be able to show that you care about those you lead.
- Our ability to be nurturing allows us as African American women to be more compassionate towards others.
- Because of all we have overcome as African American women know what it feels like to be judged.

Code-Switching: The intersectional impact of responses to their presence in leadership spaces requires that African American women be able to match their styles of communication to the situation. Stereotypes of African American women often portray them as un- or under-qualified for leadership roles, and further miscategorizes them as “angry” when they act with agency to make decisions or exercise power. To counter these narratives, African American women understand and employ, acceptable, as defined within their political structure, speech and sometimes self-censure, their communication. The African American women in this study reported using code switching. Several of the participants gave examples of situations when it was necessary for them to use that strategy:

McKenzie: We know how to talk to different audiences. We know where there is a time to say, “Hey you are screwing up” that’s not a difficult thing for us to say. But also there are people who need the massage and the confidence sandwich; we know how to do that as well.

Harriet: Feels African American women were taught a long time ago to code switch. “I know how to speak a little more proper when I’m talking to certain people and I need them to hear me. Also, when parents come I know how to talk to them so that they understand what I am saying”.

Belle: Belle uses code switching in a different way; she believes the way she grew up and having an Asian mother has helped her and her perspective on how to talk to parents when they come in a less sophisticated form. So how do we translate what we are saying to parents in a way that is not demeaning or not degrading and in a way we are still sitting at the table with the best interest of the child.

Level of Confidence: African American women use their confidence as strength. Because African American women have always had to struggle with the double jeopardy of being black and a woman they have to be more confident in themselves to push past all of the doubt people have in regard to their ability to lead. The participants felt that African American women exude confidence. They have the ability to handle tough situations. African American women know their self-worth and are able to stay composed. The participants also felt they had the ability to handle tough situations and not fold under pressure. Gail called it “Black Girl Magic”.

Despite their acquired professional and academic qualifications, stereotypes, i.e., Mammy, Sapphire, Crazy Black Bitch, and Superwomen still have profound effects on African American females’ outcomes in the workplace, despite their acquired professional and academic qualifications (Dobbs et al., 2008). The African American participants in this study find the common stereo types to be some of their greatest strengths turning what could be a negative into a positive. These are signs of confidence and resilience in dealing with stereotypes. Below are definitions each stereotypical image as defined by Dobbs et al. (p. 136):

- Mammy: Motherly, loyal, self-sacrificing, servant, nurturing
- Sapphire: Loud, overly assertive, talkative, dramatic, bossy, angry, wisecracking, complainer

- Crazy Black Bitch: Crazy, unstable, angry, vindictive, aggressive, defensive, untrusting of others
- Superwoman: Overachiever, intelligent, articulate, professional, assertive

Teresa stated, “As a black woman you have to be very confident, everybody is not going to believe in you, everybody is not going to see what you see, or see your strength and down the line they may see it. Black women have to not walk around with a chip on their shoulders and at the same time not be weak in this game. With everything that’s said and done you have to let it pass you and move on. Don’t hold on to it. We have these qualities.”

Summary

In Chapter IV the findings from the analyzed interviews conducted with eleven African American women leaders was reported. The transcripts from the recorded interviews were utilized to group participant’s statements into themes. The five emergent themes were presented and discussed as the eleven women perceived them. They were (a) barriers were work-life balance and faculty push back were the most common; (b) racism and sexism which also included the feeling of being silenced, which was experienced by most of the participants in their principalship; (c) the need for Mentorship (d) the strengths of African American Leaders which are imperative in being able to deal with the experiences of racism and sexism as well as use them to overcome possible obstacles and barriers to their success in leadership. (d) use of the Four Dimensions of Principal Leadership, which was an unanticipated theme but was visible throughout all of the transcriptions from the interviews with the eleven African American female leaders.

Conclusion

Eleven African American female assistant principals and principals in a Northern School District, Mid-Southern School District and a Southern School District identified barriers to the positions of school principal or assistant principal as an African American leader. They identified work-life balance and staff push-back to be major barriers in educational leadership. The study participants identified racism and sexism to be the prevalent barrier for African American females in maintaining the leadership position of school principal or assistant principal. The African American female leaders all felt their experiences in k-12 education had an impact on their leadership as well as their life experiences. The study also identified the need for more mentorship programs prior to the principal position.

Chapter V

Strategies used to overcome barriers

The Four Dimensions of Principal Leadership

The Four Dimensions of Principal leadership is a framework for leading 21st century schools. Each of the four dimensions is significant but they build on one another. According to Green (2010) the essence of leadership effectiveness clearly emerges when all four are working simultaneously. The four dimensions of principal leadership was not the initial Conceptual Framework for this study but after transcribing, examining, reading and coding the interview of the eleven African American female principals, their usages of the Four Dimensions emerged from the study.

The four dimensions were most visible when the leaders were describing strategies and skills they used to overcome certain challenges. The Four Dimensions are

(I) Understanding Self and Others (II) Understanding the Complexities of Organizational Life (III) Building Bridges through Relationships and (IV) Engaging in Leadership Best Practices. These practices were utilized throughout the exercise of leadership in their role as principal or assistant principal. This section will examine how the eleven African American female leaders implemented the Four Dimensions in their leadership practice.

Understanding Self and Others

The ability to understand one's own strengths and abilities as well as those of people whom one works with assists leaders in being able to eliminate barriers and maneuver around problematic situations that may cause problems when leading an organization. "We define understanding self as the knowledge an individual possesses relative to his/her personal beliefs and thought processes and how he/she might behave in a given situation" (Green, 2010, p. 26). With true understanding of self, one can influence the values, beliefs, strengths and personal aspects of other, i.e., disposition, communication style and approaches to decision making. The African American female principals interviewed showed their utilization of this first dimension of leadership when faced with the challenge, push back from faculty in the statements that follow:

- You have to realize what you can do to affect change and then you have to work with the skills your staff has.
- You have to realize that sometimes you are going to be unsure of yourself and what the expectations are
- Understand some people will rise to top faster than others even though you're doing the same work
- Everyone is not going to believe in you, you have to be confident and not walk around with a chip on your shoulder.
- Understand sometimes you have to be an open book to try to remove the fears, assumptions and preconceived notions people may have.
- It's about being transparent with people, so they know you're not alone in this we can make it through his together.

- I had to learn to deal with people with different personalities and get them on my side. It's about knowing your team. I had to understand how they respond to encouragement and criticism.
- You must learn what the expectations are and then learn how to manage the transition of those expectations.
- When dealing with the everyday problems you just really have to watch people and how you treat them and how you are treated. You have to know who you are working with in order to work around situations
- When stepping into a leadership role make sure you know your community you're serving and by all means get the parents on your side.
- When walking into a situation you have to figure out where the loss is for people, where the gain is for people and you do that through listening.
- A huge strategy of mine is knowing who I am and knowing what my strengths are in terms of a leader.

Each of these statements were expressed when discussing how to deal with the challenges of getting staff to be on board and buy into your mission and vision for the school. Each leader understood she had to assess herself, her personality and her responses to stress. One leader, *Brenda*, realized she was a perfectionist and had those expectations for her staff, but because they had gone through four leaders within a school year she had to find other ways to get them onboard and ease them into her expectations. *Gail* realized she had a tendency to, “go off, or get snappy,” she realized she had to learn to try to ignore certain small comments or be more strategic about how she addressed or isolated those people and issues. *Francine* realized that she reacts in her body language though she doesn't say much. She stated, “I had to figure out how to watch my body language so that I wouldn't be kind of exposing how I was really feeling”. Green (2010) points out those leaders who understand themselves are able to formulate perceptions about how things are and why people behave in certain ways.

Ursula realized her challenge was that she was coming from a teacher mindset and had to look at the whole building mindset. About being a new leader, she reflected: “it

just really required me to stretch myself and I had to learn what leadership style would work. I had to learn my own.” She also realized when giving feedback, “if it’s not the feedback people want to hear, the constructive feedback can be perceived as picking on them or a personal attack...” so she had to pick and choose how to approach and respond when giving feedback.

Each leader additionally discussed determining what the strengths of the staff members who gave the most push-back was and inviting them to share their expertise with the faculty/leadership team to gain their trust and ensure them they were an integral part of the changes being made within the school. Making them feel important was a way to slowly eliminate the doubt that the leaders had their best interest at heart.

Francine felt you don’t have to pretend you have all the answers, She reportedly employs the strategy of admitting not knowing the answers to all aspects of the school as well as instructional needs and suggests surrounding yourself with other people who come with some area of expertise on your team who can help guide you and be a resource to you. According to Green (2010, p. 58), “if school leaders want to acquire the commitment of followers, rather than have them to simply comply, they have to utilize their skills and attributes in a meaningful way”.

Understanding the Complexities of Organizational Life

Leading an organization can be a very difficult job, especially in education when there is so much at stake. Schools are multifaceted organizations and leaders must take into consideration the culture and climate, the lives and needs of hundreds or thousands of children, the lives and needs of faculty and staff as well as the needs of the parents and the community you serve. New leaders must go into the leadership role with an open

mind and willingness to learn the culture prior to making changes. The culture of an organization contributes to relationship building, commitment of followers, establishment of policies and procedures, program development, and the level of trust that exists among organizational members (Sashkin, Rosenbach, & Taylor, 1993).

The eleven participants show in their responses to the interview questions that they work to gain and understand the complex process of being an educational leader and working with a diverse staff and trying to ensure they develop and maintain a working relationship with them. The African American female leaders have utilized this dimension to assist in the challenges of developing and sustaining the culture of the school, promote collaboration amongst staff, develop trust and assist in moving into Dimension III.

Belle spoke about a lot of change going on in the school and she understood it's a lot of political things not necessarily in her control and grappling with shielding her staff. She understands that as a principal she serves as a liaison between keeping your school family safe and still having to report to a CEO or the board. Understanding the complex nature of the structure of her school helps her to keep the culture and climate of the school positive.

Francine understands the principalship is more complex than what she thought as a teacher. She stated, "I have a better appreciation of what's involved. It's not so cut and dry. You begin to see things that you were not privy to and that's intentional". She understands it is the role of the administrator to protect the teachers in the classroom, so they can do their job. (After pausing and serious thought) She continued, "We take the heat because we want to shield you from it so it doesn't become a distraction. Let us, the

administrators try to figure that out, at some point you bring them into the conversation, but our goal is to protect the integrity of our instructional program”. That’s a lot to deal with when trying to successfully run an organization.

When there is an issue in the building the complexities of running the building become even more evident. Several of the participants had situations that arose and to overcome them understand they have to be strong for the teachers who have to walk into a building where the news media reporters may be. They have to support student morale, deal with student attendance, parents and stakeholders in the community. So it’s more than just managing. Taking all these things into consideration when in the principal leadership role assisted the African American female principals stay composed and keep the faculty together.

Teresa spoke of struggles she had to overcome as an African American female principal in a system that was dominated by males when she first obtained her leadership position, but her knowledge of how the organizational system runs allowed her to improve the working conditions in the building. She was put in a leadership position in a school where the principal at that time (male) had no idea she was taking his place. The assistant principal was also a male. She stated, “I was put in a sink or swim position, the students were supposedly the worst in everything; Poverty, graduation rate, socio economic status, etc. I had to calm down and do what’s best for the kids”. Understanding that she had to build a culture of belief as well as bringing in the parents. A lot of the white teaches transferred. She expressed having to deal with a lot of male staff who would not correct students unless they were one of their athletes. Teresa had to deal with ‘legacy’ men in administration getting rid of staff members because of ‘run ins’ they had

with their fathers. Teresa also stated, “There were a lot of behind the scenes problems that people did not see. These are the type of situations you have to understand as an administrator”. So the struggle she had to overcome using Dimension II, was changing that culture as well as trying to get students to understand they could learn, they just had to realize it.

These eleven African American female leaders understood when you transition from the classroom into leadership it’s not just controlling your students, you now have hundreds of students who look to you for guidance, you come out and still have to work with curriculum, the operations, the bus duty, the fire drills, working with the counselors. And then you have to supervise all these people, adults and kids with all different dynamics. Also understanding at the same time that as an Assistant Principal or Principal you are only as good as the leadership team, faculty and staff you surround yourself with. So the principal must be able to select and maintain quality staff, provide mentorship, professional development and coaching to ensure instructional improvement for those who may need assistance. Some examples of these practices with the participants follow:

Ursula: “As a teacher I really didn’t believe you could coach, when I became an administrator I realized you can coach people through. I also saw the importance of professional development and the outcome that can take place when it is provided.”

Brenda: “I was a teacher who wanted to get better and that’s an expectation I have for my teachers, so I provide professional development opportunities. I noticed the teachers that have dedicated their time in the summer are better teachers for me in the fall. Some of the teachers who gave up their time are now my teacher leaders in the building. Some others if they cannot get it I will coach them. I can’t teach them how to

care but I can teach them how to teach. If they have it and you are a part of my team you will survive. If you don't have it or do not want to be a part of the team, I will couch you out.”

Building Bridges Through Relationships

The ability of a leader to build bridges and relationships is crucial to the success of the school organization. It is literally a combination of the first two dimensions as well. In order to build bridges and relationships you have to understand self, what you are capable of, how you communicate, what your strengths are as well as you style of leadership. You must be able to motivate people to be a part of your team and see your vision. To do that you must understand what motivates others. As a leader it is important that you pay attention to and learn your staff to be able to successfully communicate with them and determine what makes them move. “Effective leadership is tantamount to the existence of positive relationships, as they are essential in establishing and maintaining the foundation needed to acquire the desired outcomes of school programs and activities” (Green, 2010, p. 133).

The participants spoke about the problems and issues they had during their earlier years in leadership and in their conversations the utilization of Dimension III emerged. They spoke about the ways in which they built relationships within their school buildings and were able to get cooperation and buy in from the staff. Some examples are:

One of the ways several of the women stated was that they were transparent with their staff. Maybe sharing a story and trying to keep an open line of communication and let them know they understood what they may be going through because they have

experienced some of the same issues. Other examples of multiple participants utilizing Dimension III to Building Bridges through Relationships were:

Janice, Ursula, Kelly: Inviting faculty and staff to be a part of the leadership team. It's hard for someone to speak out against you when they are part of the team.

Francine, Belle, Gail, Barbara, Teresa: Being involved with throughout the building. That lets the staff know you wouldn't ask them to do anything that you wouldn't do.

Janice, Teresa, Kelly, Brenda: Having organizations come in and provide community service activities

Teresa, Harriet, Janice, Belle, Ursula, Kelly: Meeting with parents, community leaders and working on committees.

Francine, Gail, Belle: Be open to learn from other people and their experiences. Be willing to hear and making time and working on building relationships with people.

Francine, Brenda, Harriet: Taking time out to talk students and staff and having an open-door policy.

Francine, Janice, McKenzie, Ursula: Being willing to serve the staff at times, most bosses won't serve

Kelly, McKenzie, Gail, Barbara, Teresa, Janice: Uplifting and giving praise to staff members for doing a good job.

Several of the participant agreed that giving praise and recognition is one of the most important ways to build relationships. *Kelly* stated: "I praise them; I honor them and thank them because this is a thankless job and a very difficult job for people to do each and every day". *Janice* also uses praise and individual appreciate to her staff. She recalls a teacher telling her "you are making it hard for us because we just want to come to work and work but you are making us build camaraderie so it's really hard to tell you no, because you are always trying to make sure we have what we want and you're always

trying to give us the pat on the back that we seldom get”. These examples show that importance of establishing positive relationships in schools.

When dealing with the students there needs to be positive relationships as well. Two of the participants work in schools that also have Spanish speaking students and parents, so they work on building relationships with the students and parents by learning the language and speaking to them in their native language. *McKenzie* stated, “With parents you have to be your authentic self with that they fix any kind of bias they have against us. With my Spanish speaking parents, they just like the fact that I am trying to speak Spanish with them.” *Francine* felt like being a black woman she had to overcome the language barrier. She stated, “I would go into classrooms and the kids would see me trying to speak the language with them that helped build relationships with them too. I think it sent a powerful message”.

Engaging in Leadership Best Practices

There is no one correct way to lead a school, no best leadership trait to have and no one size fits all theory of leadership. In order to successfully lead the complex school organization a leader must be able to determine which methods work best on any given day in any given situation and that is the essence of Dimension IV, Engaging in Leadership Best Practices. Leaders of effective schools must be confident in their knowledge of the best practices necessary for their school and staff. Through the utilization of Leadership Best Practices, the eleven African American female leaders interviewed were able to open up communication in difficult situations, manage conflict and promote change within their buildings. In answering the interview questions their usage of best practices emerged.

Gail: “I think I’m in a phase right now where I may be shifting my leadership style. I don’t know what it will end up being I wanted to be a transformational leader I wanted to collaborate and work together towards things. But I’m learning everybody isn’t necessarily built that way. I think I am actively redeveloping myself and how I approach things”. Understanding when your approach does not work and being willing to change is as important as finding what does work.

Belle took a negative situation with the head of a department, previously discussed, realizing if she approached him a different way and had a discussion with him one on one, they may be able to resolve their issue. And now he comes to her school every week and talks to the boys. She realized she could manage that conflict on her own by taking a different approach.

McKenzie: “I believe using the “all mine all the time” across the board even for the adults I manage. It allows me to work through conflicts. I don’t believe in beating around the bush and my team appreciates my directness in the form of praise for the things they are doing great and also when we have to have a challenging conversation.”

Janice: Believes her use of leadership practices comes from her experiences growing up. She stated, “It taught me how to adjust to situations because most of the things we do are based on experience. In leadership you have to play different roles. Sometimes you have to be a nurturer, sometimes you have to be a fusser. Its many hats you have to put on as an administrator. When issues arose, I tried to make sure there wasn’t a dictatorship. It’s always been more or less let’s talk and figure out what’s the best solution for the populations we serve.”

Teresa: As leader coming into a negative situation she had to decide how to tackle the problems of the school, the community and the expectations as well. She invited the community leaders, school board representative and superintendent into the school building to dispel what they had been hearing but not taking the time to truly recognize the good in the building. To be the change agent for the school she stated “I had to make some hard choices because I had to do the staffing, make sure it was fair and not let emotions get into it. Knowing that money controls how you do things legally, you have to make change financially and within your educational and professional beliefs too. You have to put everything on the table. It made a difference”.

Ursula: “Being a new leader I watched first, I had ideas about things that needed to change and be more data driven. Every decision I make is based on data to support the need for change. In the past they didn’t have data to support a lot of my decisions were questioned. I understand the best practice for me to communicate the need for change is through data.”

Harriet: Her leadership best practices are used through motivation. She uses motivation of the students and the faculty even when dealing with discipline. Harriet spoke of how teachers would send a child to the office and seem to want that kid beat down verbally. “I am not a whip don’t use me to bruise the student or his ego. I am a motivator, so he leaves out motivated with his punishment. He may hot back to class smiling but he’s going home with his suspension. I make them explain to me why I’m giving them the suspension. I flip the negativity, if I’m sitting in a room and the conversation goes left or if you are not talking about making this place better, I get up and leave the room.

Even when dealing with parents in order to get them on your side and change things, you have to meet them where they are.”

Francine: In her first years of leadership, has to find ways to regain the trust of a staff who believed, because there were budgetary cuts and a loss of 30-35 staff members, that she was the face of the decisions. She had to do major restructuring, she had to ensure she made the staff feel comfortable and safe in their positions by including them in conversations, inviting the nay-sayers to be a part of the leadership team and conveying to them it’s a team effort. She stated, “I would always think about how I wanted to be recognized as a teacher and made sure to continue to recognize the efforts of the staff to ensure they stayed on track with the school’s goals and mission to serve the students.”

Brenda: When speaking on how she deals with possible challenges and or push-back from staff and how she keeps them motivated toward the goal she stated, “what I do is start small. I have to start with celebrations. Even if they are not teaching the way I want or capturing students I may highlight their attendance. I do teacher SWAG and start with the warm and fuzzy I raffle things and pulling out celebrations. Once they feel comfortable and motivated I start pulling in celebrations academically, like how a teacher is applying her guided reading with fidelity. So now I’m tapping into the growth of a teacher educationally and she wants to grow more. Adults are like children and they want to be recognized too, they want the pat on the back and when they see their colleagues getting what I call “staffirmation” they want that too. That’s when I start to see others getting in on the program. So that’s how I deal with resistance.”

Summary

According to Green (2010) Effective school leaders must pursue their vision of educational excellence in a way that moves the school, remain conscious of effects their actions have on faculty, staff, student and community and use best practices in the areas of change, decision making, communication and conflict management. All of the eleven African American female principals in this study have demonstrated use of these Four Dimensions of Principal Leadership.

Chapter VI

Discussion, Implications and Recommendations

Overview

Women represent the majority in the U.S. teaching profession but are considerably absent in the role of school principals. The number of African American women in the role of school principal is even smaller. Seventy-six percent of the education workforce consists of women, yet the number of women in secondary leadership positions is a fraction of that statistic (NCES, 2013). Nationwide, women account for only 30% of high school principal positions throughout the United States (NCES, 2013). This research contributes to the astonishing statistics of the underrepresentation of African American women in the school principal role. Despite improved prospects for women and African Americans in other careers in the United States, women and African Americans still have limited access to leadership positions in schools such as the assistant principalship, the principalship, and the superintendency (Reis, Young, and Jury, 1999; Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of African American women principals and assistant principals to uncover challenges faced in school leadership. A phenomenological approach was utilized to collect data on the participants' perspectives of the challenges they faced in the principal leadership position. Data was collected in face-to-face and phone interviews from eleven participants who currently serve as African American Women school principals or assistant principals in three different Urban School Districts as described in Chapters III, IV, and V. Themes emerged from the analysis of the data and revealed similarities in the participants' experiences of: Facing Barriers, Racism & Sexism, Need for Mentorship, Identifying Strengths and the use of the Four Dimensions of Principal Leadership.

As an African American woman who has had some leadership experience and anticipates becoming an assistant principal/principal, the researcher had a personal interest in exploring the perceptions of African American women in the school principalship. The researcher wanted to examine the experiences of current African American women school leadership in hopes that valuable information could be shared regarding the challenges of the position. More broadly, identification of challenges faced by these participants, and strategies used to cope with the impact of racism and gender stereotyping may contribute to improved practices and trainings. The study highlights a number of the concerns that current African American women school principals encountered along their career paths. In bringing forth the stories of African American women school principals and assistant principals the results from this research will assist principal preparation programs, district administrators, and African American women aspiring to become school principals. These women offer an important lens into the

principalship experience of African American women. By studying their experiences in terms of background, barriers, support, and strategies used in their leadership, the researcher hopes to enhance the current body of knowledge regarding effects of the intersectionality of race and gender on African American female principals.

In Chapter VI, discussions, implications, and recommendations will be presented in relation to the research questions. Additionally, findings will be discussed to the context of the literature review, and in relation to the conceptual framework. Lastly, recommendations for future research and practice will be provided.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Questions

The central research questions guiding this study:

1. What are the major challenges faced by female African American principals?
2. How does identifying as a black woman influence the way you are treated as an African American principal?
3. What are the strategies utilized to overcome obstacles in the pathway to leadership and gain stakeholder buy in?

Consistent with the literature, this study found women educational leaders continue to encounter barriers from gendered perceptions (Coleman, 2005; Wallace, 2015). Hite (2004) studied the experience of both Black and White female managers and their perceptions of their access to higher-level career opportunities. The research showed Black women are fully aware of the disparities in regard to race, gender and their growth potential within organizations. The current study showed that participants encounter racism and sexism within the principal leadership position and use their intrinsic and inherent strengths to overcome these. Findings revealed that the overwhelming majority of participants perceived themselves to be doubted in their abilities to lead, consistently received push back and resistance from their staff, and are made to feel silenced. The

single participant who did not report direct experience of these issues did affirm their existence.

Eleven African American women principal or assistant principal in three different urban school districts responded to interview questions. The interview questions were aligned with the research questions listed above. The study participants described their experiences and from these several themes emerged: (a) barriers they faced in the principal leadership position (b) direct and indirect racism and sexism; intersectionality (c) lack of mentoring prior to the leadership position (d) strengths of African American women leaders and (e) strategies utilized to deal with and overcome the barriers faced in leadership. Participant responses also revealed strategies employed to cope with these barriers. The strategies described by participants aligned with Green's (2010) Four Dimensions of Principal Leadership and were primarily deployed in the maintenance of their leadership and in their daily practices when dealing with challenges in their schools. The principals in the study kept the needs of the students first even when facing barriers.

Discussion of Barriers in Relations to Literature Review

Wrushen and Sherman (2008) found that women principals experience the challenges of finding personal and professional balance, gender and leadership, ethnicity and leadership, and power. The current research findings confirmed that African American women participants found work-life balance to be a major problem. Eight of the 11 participant responses described significant disruption in their home lives. Responses ranged from difficulty in maintaining boundaries between personal and work time—up to family and relationship problems relating to work load. The study established the participants find the principal position to be very time consuming and

confirms the Wrushen & Sherman findings that women continue to struggle with the task of balancing family and work. This confirmation calls attention to the need for a mechanism of support to help African American female principals deal with the excessive time demands of their positions. Because African American female leaders have to work twice as hard to prove they are worthy of the principalship, stresses of the position are inevitable.

Providing aspiring as well as current African American female principals and assistant principals with more efficient and relevant mentoring would be a way to prepare them for the challenges they will face in the leadership position. The majority of the women in the study were not provided mentorship until they were already in the assistant principal role and in some cases, mentorship was not provided then. They had to locate leaders on their own who were willing to assist them. Participants felt mentoring provided though the educational preparation programs within the universities only focused on the technical side of leadership. Despite the mountain of evidence in educational research suggesting that African American females face unique challenges in leadership positions, educational leadership program design failed to address, and therefore prepare graduates for the specific barriers they would face.

To be effective, universities and leadership programs currently offered must include relevant real-world situations in their preparation programs that include the type of challenges i.e., racism and sexism African American women will inevitably face. Research show there are increasing numbers of African American women pursuing higher education and leadership degrees, yet the programs have yet to change to meet the demands and requirements of the African American female students they serve.

Mentorship is one approach through which programs can achieve the needed improvement. Matching educational leadership students with actively working African American female principals will afford these students access to the wealth of experience amassed by professionals who have experienced the same challenges. Establishing same-race mentor-mentee relationships will exploit the mutual understandings that grow out of having common cultural experiences. Providing same gender mentors will reduce tensions around gender role beliefs and will open communication regarding career options and attitudes (Elprana, Felfe, Stiehl, & Gatzka, 2015).

In order to efficiently mentor an African American female leader and provide proper preparation in dealing with the push back that comes specifically because she is African American and female, one must have actually experienced it, not just read about, heard about or witnessed it from a distance. As an African American woman in a leadership program the researcher cannot recall any scenarios in her learning specifically focused on dealing with racism and sexism that may be faced in the Principal Leadership Position. This has to change.

Literature revealed that Black female principals suffered hostility and exclusion from both their whites and black colleagues (Peters, 2012). Participants in the current study reported experiences of hostility.

Francine: Stated that when talking to her Hispanic, male chief, she felt like there was always going to be a battle or a fight. “He would say, ‘Calm down’” In response, she questions why he would feel she needed to calm down? “What have I said to make you feel I’m upset?” She stated that she, “...thinks those are preconceived notions that we can be very explosive and very aggressive.”

Gail: Reported an incident in which a white woman arrived at her school unannounced and without an appointment, but insistent on meeting despite being told that Gail had other commitments. Gail suggested that the woman make an appointment. When Gail left the room, the woman pursued her up the hall and berated her saying, “Hold on, Sister! Watch the attitude!”

Belle: Shared an encounter with a white male department head that occurred in the presence of two other white colleagues. During the encounter the department head yelled at her and beat on the table. None of the people present acknowledged or addressed the behavior.

These summaries demonstrate the magnitude of the hostility African American women face on a day-to-day basis as they attempt to navigate work environments in which they are neither appreciated nor respected. Francine’s anecdote can be said to reflect her colleague’s expectation that he was dealing with ‘Sapphire’ or the ‘Crazy Black Bitch’. Gail’s anecdote might be said to reflect the white female aggressor’s resistance to encountering the articulate professional ‘Superwoman’, who in the aggressor’s estimation, had no right to refuse her demand. Belle’s encounter signals the department head’s assumption that he was dealing with the self-sacrificing, self-effacing ‘Mammy’.

In addition, they experienced multiple forms of push back and resistance from staff members, both black and white, upon stepping into the leadership role. Resistance occurred in the form of direct verbal challenge, failure to accede a point, or efforts to sabotage initiatives. Avoidance of resistance is, according to Peters (2012), the reason African American women code-switch. Code switching allows them to moderate

perceived differences in class and minimize the effects of the differences in gender and ethnicity. The study participants pointed to code-switching as a coping strategy in handling the push back they experienced. They also named the additional characteristics of resilience and nurturing as important strengths in maintaining their success in their leadership positions. They attribute each of these strengths to all African American women in ways that reflected a sense of pride and esteem. Myers (2002) in her work on Black women in the academy revealed that a primary source of stress for these Administrators is derived from their experiences of racism and sexism.

Discussion of Findings in Relations to Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that guided this study was based on Intersectionality “of race and gender” By listening to the voices of these women, we can assist future generations to reach gender equity in the school principalship. *Intersectionality* is a multiplicative means of explaining the simultaneity of oppression African American women encounter in various social realms (Crenshaw 1989). Consistent with the literature the findings in this study confirm the existence of barriers due to the intersectionality of their race and gender. For many women, they could not truly determine if the barriers and push-back was because they were African American or a woman. The literature points to a study by Alston (1999) that found that gender and race were so intertwined that they have difficulty discerning which one is more of a contributor to the leadership challenges of African American women.

Race, class, and gender, as intersecting social constructions are seen as important when viewed together, as these intersections are incorporated into concepts that further explain the oppression and devaluation of African American women (Chow Wilkinson &

Zinn, 1996;). The experiences of racism and sexism by the African American female principals/assistant principals doubly complicated their roles as leaders. Sexist practices resulted in the questioning of the African American female principal's competence and abilities to lead.

African American women need to counter the use of intersectionality as an empty rhetorical device in educational leadership. Society's failure to attend to intersectionality's movement limits our ability to see this theory in the workplace. The participants in this current study confirm then need for furthering the research on intersectionality especially in leadership. When asked about growing up as a black woman and the effect it has on their leadership they gave the following statements:

McKenzie, "I can't separate being black from being a woman or from being McKenzie. I do think that living in a society where the structures of society tell you that you are less than and black families try to succeed is like the counter narrative to that."

Gail feels growing up as a black woman affected her leadership and stated, "As black women we are conditioned and expected to get it done, we don't get to complain. So as a leader that is how I operate." She also stated, "The black women I have seen in my upbringing, it's embedded, it is expected, and it's like unspoken expectations. This is who we are, and this is what we do."

Francine feels the experiences growing up as a black woman affect leadership. She stated, "...it has affected my leadership and of course you bring all of that with you. It even makes you a little bit defensive. Having to always prove you are worthy to be in this role. I think my experiences as a black woman, I don't separate them, and they have impacted me in being the person I am today."

Brenda stated, “I think by growing up as a black woman it has taught me how to adjust to situations. I think that growing up as an African American woman typically in different situations you realize that your forms of leadership styles are incorporated from many aspects of your life, you cannot separate that. Growing up as an African American woman has shaped who I am as a leader.”

When looking into the leadership of African American women it cannot be marginalized into just being African American or just being a woman. Despite an enormous range of research addressing concerns of many racial and ethnic groups, genders, sexual orientations, and so forth, scholars have criticized intersectionality for focusing ‘too much’ on Black women (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays & Tomlinson 2013). Intersectionality’s focus on Black Women is relevant. Historically the paradigms pertaining to race and gender have inhibited intersectional knowledge by focusing on each separately as opposed to the way race and gender mutually constructs each other. To overlook Black women and their experiences in the intersectionality of race and gender is to allow the continued oppression of African American women not only in educational leadership but in all aspects of leadership.

Recommendations for future African American Female Leaders

There are several recommendations that emerged from research as well as the interviews with the eleven African American women principals. The participants gave the following suggestions for African American women seeking principal leadership:

- Take your time and learn all that you can; obtain as much knowledge as you can about leadership theory and practice.
- Stay professional at all times with poise and dignity.
- Take care of yourself and learn to strike a balance between work and home.

- Get the professional development and mentoring you need.
- Make sure you believe in your heart that this is the right seat on the bus.
- Keep the students as the focal point in everything you do.
- Make sure you know the population you are serving, get to know your community and students you are serving.
- Be open and willing to share.
- Be strong in who you are and firm in your purpose; don't be afraid to be a risk taker.

Recommendations for Further Research

The goal of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions African American women leaders of the obstacles faced in obtaining and maintaining principal leadership. This study examined the leadership, barriers, supports, strategies, backgrounds, and personal experiences of each of the eleven participants. The participants were all African American women Middle or High school principals serving urban school districts in three different regions; Northern, Mid-Southern and Southern. Based upon the results of this study, the following recommendations for future research are provided:

- 1) Expand the study to include perspectives of African American women principals not working at predominantly African American or Minority schools to determine if the challenges would be consistent.
- 2) Explore the identified strengths of African American women to determine if they are actual strengths or coping mechanisms.
- 3) Explore the role of same gender, same race mentoring for African American female leaders and its effect on the principal position.

- 4) Replicate this study using White women principals in Predominantly African American or minority schools to determine similarities/differences in the perceived barriers in the leadership position.
- 5) Explore the effect of the stresses brought on in the Leadership role by African American female principals and the related health issues that arise.

Conclusion

By allowing African American women to express their experiences as principals in an urban school district the finding of this study added to the knowledge of obstacles faced by African American female school leaders. The participants openly and honestly shared the joys, frustrations, barriers, supports, strengths and rewards as a principal leader. Each of the participants described the importance of being strong, confident, understanding their strengths as well as getting to know the faculty and their needs to build relationships.

According to the research as well as the findings from the participant interviews Racism and Sexism are in the DNA of our society. African American female leaders not only have to deal with the racism that is ever present, but they must simultaneously deal with sexist practices faced on a daily basis. African American women cannot separate being a woman from being African American, therefore; these issues must be considered as one, not separately. Loder (2005) and Reed (2012) contend that race and gender intersect to have a major influence on job attainment and performance in the field of leadership for African American females. There is still a need for continued advancement in dealing with the intersectionality of race and gender for African American women in leadership. Until these issues are dealt with and faced by society,

there will continue to be the need for mentorship for African American female leaders to prepare them for challenges they must face in the principal leadership role.

It's time for Black women leaders to exercise their push-back. Push back on stereotypes that consider them to be less than qualified. Push back on those characteristics that are considered to be unbecoming of a female leader. Push back on unequal pay for the same positions in which they much work harder to prove they are worthy to acquire. Push back on leadership programs that fail to consider their intersectionality in the preparation for leadership. Push back on leadership positions offered in schools that are underfunded and predominantly in minority or low-income neighborhoods. Push back on racism and sexism in the workplace which causes unwanted stress in leadership positions.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Jennifer D. Jackson-Dunn
3217 Whitney Road
Memphis, TN 38128

October 7, 2017

Name
Address

Dear _____

My name is Jennifer D. Jackson-Dunn. I am a graduate student at University of Memphis completing my dissertation to earn a Doctoral Degree in Educational Leadership. My Study is entitled: *African American Female Leaders' Perceptions of Challenges Faced in Obtaining and Maintaining Principal Leadership*. You have been identified and invited to participate because you exemplify the characteristics that the researcher is interested in studying. As an identified Principal/leader you will be asked to complete a biographical data sheet and participate in an interview.

You will be one of about 12 African American female leaders participating in the study. Examining the perception of African American women regarding their challenges as Principal/Assistant Principal leaders will provide a unique lens in which to view educational leadership and to inspire and encourage other African American Women to pursue Principal Leadership.

If you agree to participate in the study I will contact you to arrange signing of a consent form, as well as a time/date to participate in a face to face interview. It is my hope to have interviews completed by November 25, 2017. If you have any questions you may contact me at 901-603-7496 or my Advisor, Dr. Steven Nelson at 504-452-7634. I

am looking forward to meeting with you soon. I would like to thank you in advance for your participation and contribution to this study.

You can e-mail, call, or send a written reply of confirmation to the following:

Jennifer D. Jackson-Dunn
3217 Whitney Road
Memphis, TN 38128
E-mail: jdjcksnsd@memphis.edu
Phone: 901-603-7496

Appendix B
Biographical Data Sheet

Participant _____

Select the appropriate age range

- a. _____ 25 – 35
- b. _____ 36 – 45
- c. _____ 46 – 55
- d. _____ 56 – 65
- e. _____ > 66
- f. _____

How many years have you been/were you an Assistant Principal?

- a. _____ 0 – 5 years
- b. _____ 6 – 10 years
- c. _____ 11-15 years
- d. _____ 16 – 25 years
- e. _____ > 26

How many years have you been/were you a Principal?

- a. _____ 0 – 5 years
- b. _____ 6 – 10 years
- c. _____ 11 – 15 years
- d. _____ 16 – 25 years
- e. _____ > 26

Total years in education

- a. _____ 0 – 10 years
- b. _____ 11 – 20 years
- c. _____ 21 – 30 years
- d. _____ 31 – 40 years
- e. _____ 41 or more years

Past Experiences: Check all that apply and list the number of years

- a. _____ Assistant Principal _____ years
- b. _____ Counselor _____ years
- c. _____ Supervisor _____ years
- d. _____ Teacher _____ years
- e. _____ Other _____ years

Appendix C

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

African American Women's Perceptions of Challenges Faced in Obtaining Principal Leadership

You are being invited to take part in a research study about Leadership from the perspective of African American Women Principals. You are being invited to take part in this research study because your time spent in leadership and your opinions, perceptions and experiences are vital to the research. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about 9 people to do so.

The person in charge of this study is Jennifer D. Jackson-Dunn of University of Memphis Department of Education Leadership. She is being guided in this research by **Dr. Reginald L. Green**. There may be other people on the research team assisting at different times during the study.

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of African American women regarding the challenges faced in obtaining and maintaining leadership positions

By doing this study, we hope to learn how African-American female school leaders define effective school leadership and how gender impact those identifications. Hopefully the findings of this research can be used as a guideline/frame of reference for new and aspiring women leaders. The results will also assist in identifying proven practices that can be utilized and implemented to motivate additional African American women to enter the leadership field.

1. The interview will take 1 hour and will include filling out a data form.
2. The interview session will be audio-recorded.
3. There are no treatments involved in this study.
4. You will be released from the study without any repercussions upon request.

To the best of our knowledge, you will incur no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

Your information will be combined with information from other Principals who are also being interviewed separately. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential.

All records will be coded with pseudonyms, kept secure in a locked file cabinet of which only the researcher will have access. After 5 years of the completed study all records will be destroyed. Your information may be shared with the University of Memphis or the government, such as the University of Memphis University Institutional Review Board.

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

The individuals conducting the study may need to withdraw you from the study. This may occur if you are not able to follow the directions they give you, if they find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you.

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, **Jennifer D. Jackson-Dunn** at **901-603-7496** or my Faculty Advisor **Dr. Reginald Green** at **901-678-3445**. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at 901-678-2705. We will give you a signed copy of this consent form to take with you.

If the researcher learns of new information in regards to this study, and it might change your willingness to stay in this study, the information will be provided to you. You may be asked to sign a new informed consent form if the information is provided to you after you have joined the study.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of [authorized] person obtaining informed consent

Date

Interview Protocol

Obstacles/Resistance/Supports

1. Explain the ways in which you received assistance and/or mentoring in your transition to leadership? Who provided these supports?
2. Discuss the different strategies, if any, that you've used to overcome obstacles and/or resistance to your leadership.
3. Explain the challenges, if any, that you've faced in maintaining a work-life balance. How have you overcome these challenges? How have these challenges proven to strengthen your leadership?

Career Trajectory

1. What is your educational philosophy and how did you develop this philosophy?
2. Discuss your motivation to become an educational leader.
3. How many years did you serve as a principal? Were there some years that were more difficult than others?
4. If you could share experiences with a potential educational leader, what might you say to encourage other African-American women to seek and obtain school leadership?

Perceived Comparisons to Other Leaders

1. How would you best describe how you were initially received as a Black woman leader?
2. Do you feel that expectations are different for African-American women leaders as opposed to male leaders and/or white women leaders? Explain
3. Do you believe that there is truth to allegations that Black women leaders face double standards in leadership positions in education? Explain.
4. How, if at all, do your intersectional and multiple identities result in oppression or repression? How has this impacted your leadership in the educational context for students? Parents? Teachers?

Leadership Strategies

1. Describe your experiences as a K-12 student. How have these experiences impacted your practice of educational leadership?
2. List and describe the leadership attributes that African-American woman have to offer as a leader that might be different that other leaders?
3. Do you believe that growing up as a Black woman affected your leadership strategies? Explain.
4. What impact, if any, has moving to from teaching to administration had on your educational beliefs and/or philosophy? Has this change impacted your work-life balance?