

2020

## The Experiences of Minority Female Leaders in Educational Leadership: A Generic Qualitative Study

Gale Denise Beasley

Follow this and additional works at: [https://nsuworks.nova.edu/fse\\_etd](https://nsuworks.nova.edu/fse_etd)



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

## Share Feedback About This Item

---

This Dissertation is brought to you by the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact [nsuworks@nova.edu](mailto:nsuworks@nova.edu).

The Experiences of Minority Female Leaders in Educational  
Leadership: A Generic Qualitative Study

by  
Gale Beasley

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the  
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education  
and School of Criminal Justice in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Education

Nova Southeastern University  
2020

## **Approval Page**

This applied dissertation was submitted by Gale Beasley under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Daniel Turner III, EdD  
Committee Chair

Linda Gaughan, PhD  
Committee Member

Kimberly Durham, PsyD  
Dean

## Statement of Original Work

I declare the following:

I have read the Code of Student Conduct and Academic Responsibility as described in the *Student Handbook* of Nova Southeastern University. This applied dissertation represents my original work, except where I have acknowledged the ideas, words, or material of other authors.

Where another author's ideas have been presented in this applied dissertation, I have acknowledged the author's ideas by citing them in the required style.

Where another author's words have been presented in this applied dissertation, I have acknowledged the author's words by using appropriate quotation devices and citations in the required style.

I have obtained permission from the author or publisher—in accordance with the required guidelines—to include any copyrighted material (e.g., tables, figures, survey instruments, large portions of text) in this applied dissertation manuscript.

Gale Beasley \_\_\_\_\_  
Name

May 8, 2020 \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Acknowledgments**

I give all praises, honor and glory to God for empowering me with the perseverance to complete my doctoral program. This has been a lifelong dream, desire, and goal that is now my reality! I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

My heartfelt thanks to Dr. Daniel Turner and Dr. Linda Gaughan for your unwavering support and encouragement. Throughout the duration of this journey, you guided me into becoming a better writer and always made me believe I really could do this, even when exhaustion and doubt crept in. I will never forget you! Thank you!

To my precious son and muse, Jalen. You are the very best of me and I love you in a way words cannot articulate. Educational achievement is a part of your family heritage and I wanted you to witness academic excellence up close and personal through me. I expect greatness from you in all things. I will always be your biggest supporter, protector, and advocate. You are my heartbeat.

To the minority women of my study, who so powerfully impacted me with your transparency and sharing of your personal experiences as educational leaders, I am grateful. You are worthy of honor. I appreciate you for allowing me into your world.

My sisters in spirit, Rolita Brownlee, Ruth Helligar-Drummond, and Annquinetta Moss, thank you for praying for me without ceasing, holding me accountable, and being the greatest network of support that anyone could possibly ask for. I love you to life!

To my husband, Garry, your patience is infinite. Thank you for the endless demonstrations of support. Now, you can call me “Doc”. I will always love you.

The power of life and death are in the tongue. Grandma and Granddaddy Longstreet and Mama, you called me “Doctor” since I was a child and now it has manifested. Because of you, I did! I know you’re rejoicing in Heaven! I love you.

## **Abstract**

The Experiences of Minority Female Leaders in Educational Leadership: A Generic Qualitative Study. Gale Beasley, 2020: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: minority women principals, race and gender intersectionality, female administrators, educational leadership, leadership

Due to an underrepresentation of female minority leaders in the field of educational leadership, the scientific literature lacked evidence in understanding the experiences of those who, despite adversity, successfully secured administrative roles. The experiences of minority women who pursued and secured principal and/or assistant principalship appointments were examined using a generic qualitative approach.

The analysis of the data presented the challenges, barriers, and constraints that minority women were confronted with during the development and establishment of their careers as educational leaders. As a result of the complex intersectionality of race and gender, these leaders found themselves as the subjects of overt and covert discriminatory practices by subordinates and superiors in their careers. Among some of the practices endured were negative attitudes and disrespect from key stakeholders, pressure to assimilate, unethical practices of promotion, and inequitable expectations for the roles to which they were appointed. While these women were able to navigate successful careers, through resolute spirituality, building of community, and sheer will, implications for further research still exists for organizations as it regards to adopting practices and policies to create and maintain diversity through recruitment and leadership appointments in educational leadership. A critical implication for consideration is the provision of mentors by school districts to qualified minority women aspiring to educational leadership roles.

Future research is recommended to conduct comparison studies that would involve minority male and White female educational leaders to identify real or perceived barriers. The emphasis of these studies would be to determine the similarities or dissimilarities of experiences between minority males and White females compared to those of minority female leaders.

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Definition of Terms.....	15
Purpose of the Study.....	16
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	17
Theoretical Perspective.....	18
Historical Context.....	20
Characterization of Ethnic and Minority Female Leaders.....	23
Emergent Leaders and Familial Support.....	24
Multiplicity of Roles, Identities, and Spirituality.....	27
Challenges in Educational Leadership Programs.....	30
Androcentric Work Culture and Practices.....	37
University Sponsored Mentorships.....	49
School District Sponsored Mentorships.....	53
Factors of Success.....	55
Literature Limitations and Intention of the Study.....	59
Research Questions.....	60
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	61
Aim of the Study.....	61
Qualitative Research Approach.....	62
Participants.....	63
Data Collection Tools.....	65
Procedures.....	65
Data Analysis.....	67
Ethical Considerations.....	69
Trustworthiness.....	70
Potential Research Bias.....	70
Limitations.....	71
Chapter 4: Findings.....	72
Introduction.....	72
Qualitative Results.....	73
Participants.....	73
Participants' Background.....	74
Participant 1 (MFL1).....	74
Participant 2 (MFL2).....	74
Participant 3 (MFL3).....	74
Participant 4 (MFL4).....	74
Participant 5 (MFL5).....	74
Participant 6 (MFL6).....	75

Participant 7 (MFL7) .....	75
Participant 8 (MFL8) .....	75
Participant 9 (MFL9) .....	75
Participant Interview Protocol and Data Results .....	75
Sequential Analysis Steps .....	76
Presentation of Results.....	78
Research Question 1 .....	78
MFL1 Analysis .....	78
MFL2 Analysis .....	81
MFL3 Analysis .....	83
MFL4 Analysis .....	85
MFL5 Analysis .....	87
MFL6 Analysis .....	89
MFL7 Analysis .....	91
MFL8 Analysis .....	93
MFL9 Analysis .....	97
Themes for Research Question 1 .....	100
Research Question 2 .....	103
MFL1 Analysis .....	103
MFL2 Analysis .....	105
MFL3 Analysis .....	106
MFL4 Analysis .....	109
MFL5 Analysis .....	111
MFL6 Analysis .....	114
MFL7 Analysis .....	115
MFL8 Analysis .....	117
MFL9 Analysis .....	119
Themes for Research Question 2 .....	120
Research Question 3 .....	121
MFL1 Analysis .....	122
MFL2 Analysis .....	125
MFL3 Analysis .....	127
MFL4 Analysis .....	129
MFL5 Analysis .....	134
MFL6 Analysis .....	136
MFL7 Analysis .....	137
MFL8 Analysis .....	140
MFL9 Analysis .....	147
Themes for Research Question 3 .....	150
Summary .....	152
Chapter 5: Discussion .....	154
Study Overview .....	154
Research Background .....	154
Research Questions and Findings .....	157
Research Question 1 .....	157

Research Question 2 .....	161
Research Question 3 .....	165
Limitations .....	168
Conclusion .....	169
Future Research Implications .....	170
References .....	173
Appendix.....	185

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the ever increasing number of students from racially and ethnically heterogeneous backgrounds that had been indicative of contemporary student populations across the nation, the proportional or equivalent growth in the representation of female leaders (especially minority leaders as principals, superintendents, or appointed in influential positions in powerful networks within school district offices, and in the professoriate in colleges and universities), had appeared to be grossly insufficient and with marked underrepresentation (Brown, 2005; Chisholm-Burns, Spivey, Hagemann, & Josephson, 2017; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Echols, 2006; Elisha & Edwards, 2014; Fernandez, Bustamante, Combs & Martinez-Garcia, 2015; Fuller, Pendola & LeMay, 2018; Genao, 2016; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Leslie, Mayer & Kravitz, 2014; Murtadha & Watts, 2005; Polis, 2013; Pyke, 2013; Rusch & Marshall, 2006). Consequently, the problem had been that due to this underrepresentation of female minority leaders in the field of educational leadership, the scientific literature had lacked sufficient evidence in understanding the experiences of those who, despite adversity, had been able to successfully secure an administrative role in this field.

Contemporary student populations in American, public school classrooms had presented as increasingly diverse culturally, linguistically, ethnically, religiously, economically, as well as socially. However, leadership populations had not reflected the same diversity (Genao, 2016). Instead, minority female leaders, or those who aspired to prominent positions in educational leadership, had been challenged with the duality and

double marginalization of gender and race (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Banks, 2001; Collins, 1998; Doughty, 1980; Fernandez et al., 2015; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; King, 1995; Pyke, 2013; Reed, 2012; Reed & Evans, 2008; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). Historically, African Americans and people of color had been underrepresented in school administration and this trend had remained true in the representation of minorities, particularly for minority women in leadership preparation programs and appointments to administrative positions in educational settings (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Brown, 2005; Fernandez et al., 2015; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016).

Implications had also been cited for institutions of higher learning as it pertained to educational leadership programs for women and minorities (Fernandez et al., 2015; Kearney & Herrington, 2013; Spiller, 2013). According to Brown (2005), leadership programs should have provided aspirant leader programs that reinforced collaborative models of leadership; attended to candidate beliefs, attitudes, and philosophies about educating all children to improve equity and equal opportunities for all racial and ethnic groups; and finally, should have addressed the politics of race and gender as a contextualized variable in the business of schooling and the possible impact as a result of appointments to positions of leadership (Fernandez et al., 2015). Additionally, leadership aspirants should have been exposed to culturally responsive curriculums and programs that were inclusive of the practices and policies that created and nurtured inclusive educational environments (Fernandez et al., 2015; Genao, 2016; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Watson & Rivera-McCutchen, 2016).

Disaggregated reports provided a telling depiction of the underrepresentation of minority female leaders in the field of education (Alston, 2005; Jean-Marie, 2013; Roane

& Newcomb, 2013; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). Female principals secured positions at the primary level where female principals were more accepted (Coleman, 2001; Dimmock & Walker, 2006; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Pollard, 1997). The racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the United States had continued to evolve and change. Even though the *browning* of America had represented so many varied races and cultures, the teaching pool had remained majority White and female with disproportionate numbers of White and male leaders represented in principalships and the superintendency (Delpit, 1995; Foster, 2005; Howard, 2000; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mendez- Morse et al., 2015; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, 1992; Sleeter, 2001).

**Phenomenon of interest.** The scarcity of minority female leadership in the upper ranks of academia had appeared to be a worldwide phenomenon (Coleman, 2001; Fernanadez et al., 2015; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; McLay & Brown, 2001; Moorosi, Fuller, & Reilly, 2018; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008) and had been indicative of the double marginalization of gender and ethnicity which had appeared to be a determining factor in *how* or *if* women of color obtained secondary or district level leadership positions. Equally important had been the lack of studies that depicted the obstacles and challenges faced by minority female leaders (Fernandez et al., 2015; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Knaus, 2014; Reed, 2012; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014) and the strategies and resources that were utilized that ultimately facilitated success in the endeavors and efforts toward achieving secondary and district level administrative positions in schools and within school districts' centralized offices (Alston, 2005; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Dimmock & Walker, 2006; Fernandez et al., 2015; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008).

While there had been numerous initiatives to increase diversity among all levels of personnel in both the private and public sectors, including school districts across the nation, the research that had provided insight into the successful recruitment, training, mentoring, or collaborative experiences necessary to facilitate successful minority leaders had remained scant, at best. Providing a voice for the expression of the experiences of minority female leaders that successfully navigated the course toward securing district level administration had continued to remain not only relevant, but also imperative. In particular, the experiences of these women regarding family support and cultural background, making sense of school leadership, leadership styles/traits, and power as it relates to female minority representation in school leadership were addressed in this study. Understanding these experiences may lead to an increase in the number of female minority leaders in the field of education.

**Background and justification.** Historically, women had been underrepresented at the secondary and district level in education (ah Nee-Benham & Cooper, 1998; Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2006; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Fuller et al., 2018; Grogan, 2005; Hagemann & Josephson, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Pyke, 2013; Sanchez & Thorton, 2010; Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007; Spiller, 2013; Young & McLeod, 2001). In addition, evidence had suggested that representation becomes increasingly nonexistent when gender and ethnicity were factors of consideration (Alston, 2005; Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Brown, 2005; Coleman, 2001; Dimmock & Walker, 2006; Fernandez et al., 2015; Foster, 2005; Jean-Marie, 2013; Lansford, Clements, Falzon, Aish, & Rogers, 2010; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Mirza, 2006; Pollard, 1997; Reed, 2012; Reed & Evans, 2008; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Wrushen & Sherman,

2008). The available research had alluded to varied perspectives and evidence that had been indicative of the facilitation of this trend. Much of the literature, like Morse et al. (2015) and Jean-Marie (2013), that pertained to minority female leaders in the field of education focused primarily on the lack of accessibility to secondary and district level leadership positions, as well as career opportunities and trajectories that had been provided or made available to these aspiring leaders. In the same way, there had been a strong focus on the styles and approaches to leadership that had been utilized by women who had occupied these positions. In the literature pertaining to this subject, comparisons had been made between female minority leaders and their male, non-minority counterparts (Hekman, Johnson, Foo, & Yang, 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Moore, 2013; Shakeshaft, 1999; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008).

Increasing the number of women in secondary and district level positions provided a foundation for creating an administrative pool that may have been reflective of the overall composition of educators. Actively recruiting (Brown, 2005; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Fernandez et al., 2015; Howe-Walsh & Turnball, 2016) and including women in the hiring and promotional processes (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Fernandez et al., 2015; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Spiller, 2013) with relevant experiences and varied racial, as well as cultural backgrounds, had ensured that mentors (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Fernandez et al., 2015; Jean-Marie, 2013; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Pyke, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Spiller, 2013) and networks of support (Fernandez et al., 2015; Howe-Walsh & Turnball, 2016; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Pyke, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Spiller, 2013) had been readily available for those who

aspired to formal leadership positions (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). The absence of such leadership persisted and was attributed to factors that reflected institutional sexism, racism, and apathy (Alston, 2005).

Race and gender-based assumptions permeated many leadership arenas, including that of school leadership (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Fernandez et al., 2015; Hekman et al., 2017; Knaus, 2014; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Reed, 2012; Reed & Evans, 2008; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014;) and it appeared that female minority leaders had been doubly marginalized in society as well as the workplace by merely being female and of color (Alston, 2005; Fernandez et al., 2015; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Moorosi et al., 2018; Robinson, 2014; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). Accordingly, the literature indicated that minority female leaders experienced dual marginalization through distinct and specific experiences within and throughout the tenure of their professional careers.

According to Campbell-Stephens (2009), Black and global majority people were collectively referred to as “ethnic minorities,” when in fact people of Asian and African descent were the majority on this planet. Moreover, the concept of being classified as “minority” had detrimental and negative connotations for these groups and relegated those so described to the margins of professional debate, research, and policy.

Race and gender inequality were not accidental and has been an entrenched fixture of *the system* (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Robinson, 2014). The literature that resulted from research suggested racism as a perceived variable and barrier to women of color that aspired to be leaders or hold leadership positions (Fuller et al. 2018; Jean-Marie, 2013; Moorosi et al., 2018; Roane & Newcomb, 2013) and had been manifested

most in stereotyping and low expectations for performance (Kruse & Krumm, 2016). Additionally, individuals reported expressed racism through blatant defiance and undermining as a result and indication of subordinates' refusal or unwillingness to receive instruction or direction from a person of color or the female gender (Reed, 2012). Likewise, minority female leaders indicated the strong perception that submitted work, decisions, and efforts received increased critique and scrutiny in comparison to other non-minority, male leaders (Fernandez et al., 2015; Jean-Marie, 2013; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013). Still, another source of concern was that some minority female leaders asserted experiencing repeated rejections for job applications only to later find that they had been the recipients of poor references or had relevant or constructive information omitted which may have been beneficial for the decision-making process of a potential employer. These applicants, for all intents and purposes, were well qualified for the pursued positions, but had been rejected; thus, indicating that discrimination along with ethnic and gender prejudices negatively impacted the career aspirations and the selection and hiring practices endured by minority women leaders (Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Fernandez et al., 2015; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Moore, 2013; Robinson, 2013).

While it was agreed that racism was part of the experience of female minority educators, (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Genao, 2016; Hekman et al., 2014; Hewlet, Luce, & West, 2005; Jean-Marie, 2013; Moore, 2013; Morse-Mendez et al., 2015) Roane and Newcomb (2013) offered a different perspective as the catalyst for the marginalization of minority female leaders. The researchers argued that employers had not capitalized on the skill sets, talents, and leadership abilities of minority females currently employed within

the organization. As a result, minority females who were equipped with rich experiences that would serve as beneficial for the organization had often gone untapped. Essentially, this had deprived the organization of diverse leadership that had resulted in many high-potential employees feeling ignored, diminished, overextended, or burned out (Knaus, 2014; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Reed, 2012; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014). Organizations had not looked closely and carefully at the interests and extracurricular activities of employees and determined how those activities may have been further developed and refined so that those skill sets were beneficial to and advanced the organization.

Likewise, the authors maintained that employees shared partial blame as well in that individuals had purposely and deliberately kept their roles and affiliations with outside organizations hidden and failed to see the connection with outside organizations as legitimate leadership venues (Hewlett, Luce, & West, 2005; Morse-Mendez et al. 2015).

Research revealed that minority female leaders had often expressed a general sense of apprehension and distrust in discussing their private lives or activities for fear of being a target of hidden bias and risking reinforcing negative stereotypes (Elisha & Edwards, 2014; Reed, 2012). Hidden biases had been distinctly detrimental to minorities, and especially so for those who had aspired to the ranks of leadership. The fear of hidden biases had been manifested in minority female leaders by the fear of the perception that coveted positions were secured through affirmative action, rather than merit, being pressured to adopt a style of compliance as it related to the manner in which aspiring leaders chose to speak, expressed themselves through facial expressions and gestures, and matters of appearance. Hidden biases had been particularly debilitating in that they had led minority leaders to *deny their authenticity* in all efforts to successfully matriculate

into the White male model of leadership (Echols, 2006; Fernandez et al., 2015; Hekman et al., 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013) to secure a promotion in leadership and attract promotion and recognition (Mahmood, 2015). Having adopted an androcentric model (Fuller et al., 2018), minority women had been at times strategically placed in positions of status and power and acted as gatekeepers to uphold the values of White male leadership while creating the illusion of social inclusion and diversity. Leaders of this sort were identified as *tokens* (Hekman et al., 2017).

Hewlett et al. (2005) asserted that organizations must actively incorporate practices that encourage companies to discover and reveal the covert talents among constituents, including those of minority females. Strategies that reflected best practices to this end suggested the ability to build a greater awareness of the *invisible lives* of minority professionals within the ranks of the organization. In addition, attempts should have been made to identify and alleviate the outside burdens these professionals carry. Genuine, ongoing, and focused efforts should have been made to build trust among the constituency of the organization by creating innovative policies that fostered an environment that enabled minorities to share issues, challenges, or opportunities without fear of retaliation. Finally, organizations had been charged to complete the job of leadership development in off-hour activities of minorities so that the acquired skills became a part of the aspirant leader's repertoire of an increasing workforce performance and competitive strength (Hewlett, Luce & West, 2005).

The literature suggested that being female was an additional barrier for minority leaders (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Elisha & Edwards, 2014; Fernandez et al., 2015; Fuller et al., 2018; Jean-Marie, 2013; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016; Karamindou &

Bush, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Pyke, 2013; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Spiller, 2013). According to Dimmock and Walker (2006), the power-concentrated/power-dispersed dimension of national/societal culture had a powerful effect on the selection of women as leaders. This dimension had ascribed to the idea that when power is equally and widely distributed through decentralization and institutionalized democracy, inequity had been viewed as undesirable and every effort had been made to reduce it whenever possible. Conversely, in societies where power was concentrated and distributed among a few, inequities had not only been accepted, but legitimized. In many societal cultures, the concentration of power was distributed to only a few and had tended to be patriarchal in nature (Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mahmood, 2015; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014). This had provided insight to the understanding of why women's access to leadership positions may have often been denied in such societies.

Leadership styles of men and women tended to be assessed and described in stereotypical and societal gendered orientations and terminologies. Traditional and enduring socio-cultural values had defined the roles and expected norms of women and men in the home, workplace, and in society (Elisha & Edwards, 2014; Fuller et al., 2018; Mahmood, 2015). As a result, these norms and expectations determined the opportunities that were made available to men and women, including accessibility to leadership positions (Elisha & Edwards, 2014; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017). In many societies, male access had gone unrestricted while that of females had been considerably limited and restricted (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Dimmock & Walker, 2006; Elisha & Edwards, 2014; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Spiller, 2013).

Female leaders that had secured prominent leadership positions had found that there was an increased expectation of nurturing and caring within their practice (Reed & Evans, 2008) for which these leaders had simultaneously been penalized. Nurturing, caring, and collaborative characteristics had traditionally been categorized as feminine. Feminine characteristics had often been associated with *weakness* as opposed to the more desired “masculine” behaviors of competition, assertion, and hierarchy (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Dimmock & Walker, 2006; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mahmood, 2015).

Women leaders reported being far more effective in incorporating varying leadership styles depending on the need presented at the time. The research had also indicated that these leaders had utilized their power differently than their male counterparts (Mahmood, 2016) which allowed for the establishment of comfort with one’s own leadership competency and styles, a maintained sense of fun, and being successfully matriculated as *one of the guys* when necessary. These same leaders also expressed concern over the perception that women leaders with strong personalities were characterized as ‘controlling,’ a description that had not been used to describe male leaders that had operated within the same capacity. Other areas of concern cited by female leaders were a general lack of respect from both subordinates and superiors, not being taken seriously, and being perceived as *weak* (Elisha & Edwards, 2014; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mahmood, 2015; Moorosi et al., 2018), and being pressured to work and think more like men by being less emotional and more analytical. These concerns had indicated and reiterated the negative connotations and perceptions that had persisted toward women in positions of leadership and authority (Lansford et al., 2010; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Roane & Newcomb, 2013).

Organizational hierarchies had contributed to biases that men exerted more influence and exercised more leadership ability than women (Fuller et al., 2018; Hekman et al., 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Lansford et al., 2010; Mahmood, 2015; Moore, 2013). As a result, these hierarchies tended to legitimize male leadership dominance (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013; Lansford et al., 2010; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Walsh & Turnbull, 2016) with men having possessed the decision-making power and authority with regards to strategic direction and the allocation of resources within an organization (Mahmood, 2015). Literature emphasized the power of gender inequality practices that operated to cancel out the effect of gender equity strategies and made systematic discrimination invisible (van den Brink & Benschop, 2012). Therefore, structural and systematic processes existed that generated and reproduced the relative disadvantage of women within academic employment and promotion (Pyke, 2013).

A trend that appeared to occur with minority female leaders was that of appointments to environments of disadvantage and power differentials (Alston, 2005; Arnold, 2013; Brown, 2005; Fernandez et al., 2015; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Knaus, 2014; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Moorosi et al., 2018; Roane & Newcomb, 2013). These professionals were often placed in leadership positions in poorly maintained, poverty stricken, and poorly managed urban school districts with high minority populations (Alston, 2005; Arnold, 2013; Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Fernandez et al., 2015; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Knaus, 2014; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013). The educational institutions within these districts were often underfunded with scarce resources, had significant

numbers of uncertified teachers, and marked student underachievement (Alston, 2005; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Moore, 2013; Roane & Newcomb, 2013). Ironically, it appeared that these same leaders were more likely than other secondary and district level administrators to become clarions for significant educational change in districts that tended to be dominated by non-minorities (Brown, 2005; Foster, 2005; Jean-Marie, 2013; Moore, 2013; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014). Moreover, the duality of the marginalization of minority female leaders detached and ostracized these women from invaluable resources and networks of support that were critical to the success of the implementation of a school district's goals and vision for student achievement. These women were often viewed as *outsiders* (Fuller et al., 2018; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Mahmood, 2015; Pyke, 2013; Roane & Newcomb, 2013) within the organizations that they served. Furthermore, minority female leaders often experienced the *glass ceiling* effect (Hekman et al., 2017; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Moore, 2013; Pyke, 2013; Reed, 2012) that stagnated the ascension towards more prominent positions, exclusion from district power networks, and were often *locked* into stereotypical ethnic and gender-based expectations (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Coleman, 2003; Hekman et al., 2017; Moore, 2013; Pyke, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Rusch, 2004; Spiller, 2013). These circumstances were quite significant in that in an era of increased accountability, these challenges directly affected the performance and tenure of minority female leaders (Brown, 2005, Jean-Marie, 2013; Reed; 2012; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014).

**Deficiencies in the evidence.** Research regarding minority women and their

experiences as educational leaders was limited. With the growing ethnic diversity of schools and respective student populations, a disparity existed in the equivalent growth of the proportion of minority female leaders specifically in primary, secondary, and district level appointments (Alston, 2005; Brown, 2005; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Fernandez et al., 2015; Foster, 2005; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Mirza, 2006; Reed & Evans, 2008; Tillman, 2004; Wrushen, 2008). Determining the number of minority females represented in educational leadership roles presented a challenge in that the information provided by the U.S. Department of Education on this matter was not systematically and rigorously collected (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). With the exception of the efforts of feminist scholars, along with limited information provided by the U.S. Department of Education, and a small number of dissertation studies and self-reports on African American, Hispanic, Asian American, Native American and other categories of women, studies addressing minority female leaders were less documented (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). The available, although limited, research (Alston, 2005; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Dimmock & Walker, 2006; Fernandez et al., 2015; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008) indicated practices that marginalized women and minorities (Alston, 2005; Foster, 2005; Hekman et al., 2017; Hewlett, Luce & West, 2005; Knaus, 2014; Lansford et al., 2010; Mirza, 2006; 2010; Reed & Evans, 2008; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008).

**Audience.** The results of this generic qualitative study of the exploration of the experiences of minority women as school leaders might be relevant to universities and educational organizations that influenced the creation and facilitation of educational

leadership programs to adequately bring increased awareness to the challenges that women of color had encountered as they ascended to leadership roles and provided insights about inequities that would have enabled aspirants to develop strategies to effectively and appropriately overcome barriers and obstacles (Fernandez & Martinez-Garcia, 2015; Jean-Marie, 2013). Furthermore, implications existed for school districts in their need to provide focused recruitment strategies, transparent hiring and promotional practices, mentorships and ongoing professional development to attract competent minority women as educational leaders and to continue to cultivate their leadership capacity (Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017); Fernandez & Martinez-Garcia, 2015; Jean-Marie, 2013; Robinson, 2014).

### **Definition of Terms**

**Androcentric.** Dominated by or emphasizing masculine interests or a masculine point of view.

**Double marginalization.** Discrimination experienced by persons who are both female and a member of a minority group.

**Ethnic.** Of or relating to large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background.

**Eurocentric.** Reflecting a tendency to interpret the world in terms of European or Anglo-American values and experiences.

**Gender.** The behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits associated with one sex.

**Mentor.** A trusted counselor or guide who provides one with professional support and advice throughout a lifetime.

**Minority.** Part of a population differing from others in some characteristics and

often subjected to differential treatment

**Racism.** A belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a race.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of minority female school leaders, particularly regarding family support and cultural background, sense-making of school leadership, leadership styles/traits, and power. The study was conducted to identify cultural experiences, strategies utilized to overcome perceived or real barriers to the ascension to leadership, and common leadership styles or themes that were instrumental in overcoming obstacles and facilitated success in their current roles and careers.

Through purposeful sampling, assistant principals and principals were recruited from various schools, representing kindergarten through 12th grade, from an identified school district in a southeastern state. These participants were serving as female leaders at their respective sites and were members of a minority ethnic group.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Contrary to the rhetoric proclaiming advancements in equal opportunity, enhanced social and political sophistication with consideration for what is *correct*, women, specifically women of color, experienced barriers in the progression of their careers (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Brown, 2005; Bush, Glover, & Sood, 2006; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Fernandez et al., 2015; Fuller et al., 2018; Hewlett et al., 2005; Hekman et al., 2017; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Lansford et al., 2010; Litmanovitz, 2011; Loder, 2005; Mackay & Etienne, 2006; Mahmood, 2015; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Moore, 2013; Moorosi et al., 2018; Murphy, 2002; Pyke, 2013; Reed, 2012; Reed & Evans, 2008; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). What was the most shocking indication of the double marginalization of gender and race was found in the educational sector (Litmanovitz, 2011). Factoring minority females into the statistics further minimized the results. Minority women were underrepresented as leaders in the educational sector (Brown, 2005; Bush et al., 2006; Campbell-Stephens, 2009; Dimmock & Walker, 2006; Fernandez et al., 2015; Fuller et al., 2018; Hekman et al., 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013; Lansford et al., 2010; Litmanovitz, 2011; Loder, 2005; Moore, 2013; Moorosi et al., 2018; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008).

While many women were appointed to educational administrative positions within the last few decades, the participation and inclusion of minority women in the leadership ranks of education remained underrepresented and poorly documented (Bloom

& Erlandson, 2003; Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Fernandez & Martinez-Garcia, 2015; Hekman et al., 2017; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Jean- Marie, 2013; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Moore, 2013; Moorosi et al., 2018; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014). Mendez-Morse (2004) posited that insignificant numbers do not equal inconsequential findings; instead, the few in number deserved additional study to determine similarities and dissimilarities to others. The value and contribution of minority females in educational leadership remained unknown unless these women were studied (Mendez-Morse, 2004; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014).

### **Theoretical Perspective**

This study was grounded in the critical race theory (CRT) epistemology which challenged the constructs of racial power in which Whites were represented as the normative standard in American society and culture (Gooden, 2012; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). The frameworks and methods of CRT lent themselves to the exploration of the deficit-oriented practices of school systems and the impact that those practices had on minority educators (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). Critical race theory illuminated how racism and White privilege coincided to dominate systems and institutions, while rejected the idea that scholarship about race in America should or could be objective or neutral (Gooden, 2012).

A primary tenant of CRT was that racism is normal and deeply ingrained in U.S. society (Gooden, 2012; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). Gooden (2012) asserted that the subtle characteristics of being ordinary or normal increased the difficulty in detecting and addressing White racism in society. Because of this, concepts of colorblindness and

formal definitions of equality, that insisted that all people be treated equally, took precedence over interrogations of White privilege or discussions concerning equalizing outcomes. Gooden (2012) added that concepts of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy must be challenged.

Akin to racism was the notion of convergence which designated that changes against racism occurred only when there is a benefit that converged with the interests of Whites usually in the change of economic conditions (Gooden, 2012; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). Another hallmark presented by CRT was revisionist history (Gooden, 2012). In the analysis of law and society, historicism was challenged with an insistence placed on the reexamination of the law and the recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). These counternarratives provided a voice for marginalized people who had been omitted from the broader or mainstreamed narrative (Gooden, 2012). It was argued that the duality of this emphasis did facilitate the increased recognition that race was a social construction and was not connected to a biological reality, but rather categorized and assigned when needed (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016).

The use of critical race theory had expanded from law and was began being utilized in the social sciences to interrogate these issues. CRT was an appropriate epistemology for a researcher to examine his or her own belief system and view of the world and provided a framework to examine and challenge pervasive societal narratives (Gooden, 2012). CRT maintained a commitment to social justice and viewed the elimination of racism and sexism and the empowerment of individuals who had historically been marginalized as critical and imperative to its mission (Hernandez &

Murakami, 2016).

### **Historical Context**

Men had dominated leadership positions for centuries. As a result, societal values and views of the characteristics of effective leaders often aligned with characteristics attributed to men (Alston, 2005; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Litmanovitz, 2011; Mahmood, 2015; Reed, 2012; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014; Spiller, 2013). This stereotypical perception presented a twofold negative impact for aspiring female leaders. First, those in positions to appoint educational leaders had not associated character traits often associated with and possessed by women with strong leadership ability and therefore had not encouraged them to pursue leadership opportunities (Howe-Walsh & Turnball, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Moss-Racusin, Davidio, Broscoll, Graham, & Handelsman, 2012; Reed, 2012; Spiller, 2013). Secondly, women who were effective leaders had not recognized in themselves their innate potential to lead and as a result had not pursued leadership appointments (Fernandez & Martinez-Garcia, 2015; Hewelett, Luce & West, 2005; Howe-Walsh & Turnball, 2016; Litmanovitz, 2011; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Spiller, 2013).

Men and women possessed distinctly different styles of leadership in their respective professional practices (Chisholm-Burns, et al., 2017; Fuller et al., 2018; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Spiller, 2013). As leaders, men were characterized as competitive, assertive, all of which were considered positive and desirable task-oriented attributes (Eagly & Karau, 1991) and aligned with the hierarchal style of leadership expected in societal norms. Conversely, women were characterized as possessing considerate leadership styles that reflected characteristics of caring (Dimmock & Walker,

2006; Elisha & Edwards, 2014), compassion, and emotion because of a desire to create and maintain relationships which were traditionally characterized as a more nurturing style of leadership (Elisha & Edwards, 2014; Robinson, 2014; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). This style of leadership was also characterized as being people oriented and with women perceived as good social facilitators, but not as effective leaders (Eagly & Karau, 1991). It was noted that while leadership characteristics such as the abilities to control, analyze, and be task-oriented were preferred and ascribed to masculine styles of leadership, when demonstrated by a women, the perception of this leadership style took on a negative connotation, with the female leader described as “soul-less” or competitive, and independent (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Lansford et al., 2010).

Historically, research had incorrectly assumed findings from studies in educational leadership with White male participants to be generalized to the experiences of women and individuals of color in leadership positions (Alston, 2005; Knaus, 2014; Loder, 2005). In doing so, much of the work had paid little attention to the specifics of context within which leadership was exercised (Dimmock & Walker, 2006). A small body of literature existed that demarcated findings within the cultural and gendered contexts studied and avoided the dangers of over-generalizing to other contexts, regardless of the range of diversity (Fernandez et al., 2015; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014). This ethnocentrism meant that the rest of the world outside of the researched areas, which accounted for about 90% of the world population, was relatively ignored in terms of educational leadership (Dimmock & Walker, 2006).

Organizational hierarchies had contributed to the bias that men exerted more

influence and exercised more leadership than women and tended to legitimize the dominance of male leadership (Carli & Eagly, 2001; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Hekman et al., 2017; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Reed, 2012; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014; Spiller, 2013). As a result of the legitimization of the dominance of male leadership, minority women leaders encountered racist and sexist behaviors that created entrenched challenges to the career aspirations of these women, specifically in the form of denial of opportunities for advancement (Busch et al., 2006; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Lansford et al., 2010; Moss-Rascusin et al., 2012; Robinson, 2014; Spiller, 2013). Respondents in studies mentioned that the individuals responsible for appointing aspiring leaders demonstrated discriminatory attitudes that further perpetuated racism and sexism through the unwillingness to deviate from “normal” patterns of appointments that predominantly involved White males (Campbell-Stephens, 2009; Hekman et al., 2017; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Reed, 2012). Covert and overt racism and sexism, coupled with the racial “glass ceilings” (Bush et al., 2006; Chisholm et al., 2017; Coleman, 2011 as cited in Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Hekman et al., 2017; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Moore, 2013; Patton & Jordan, 2017; Pyke, 2013) and negative stereotyping had negative effects on women and women of color in educational leadership (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Knaus, 2014; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Moore, 2019; Patton & Jordan, 2017; Pyke, 2013; Reed, 2012; Reed & Evans, 2008; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014;

Spiller, 2013).

### **Characterization of Ethnic and Minority Female Leaders**

Contemporary society continued to transition and evolve into one that is increasingly diversified as evidenced by the continued *browning* of America and its schools (Alton, 2005; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Dantley, 2005).

Organizations valued leadership and some invested considerably to its cultivation (Hewlett et al., 2005). Effective leaders capable of inspiring increased productivity by facilitating and promoting the organization's values, goals, and visions were invaluable.

While the trend of a more diversified society was suggested, ethnic and minority leaders, especially those who were female, continued to be underrepresented in key leadership roles at the secondary level, in higher education, and in centralized school district offices (Alston, 2005; Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Brown, 2005; Bush et al., 2006; Campbell-Stephens, 2009; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Dimmock & Walker, 2006; Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Fernandez et al., 2015; Foster, 2005; Lansford et al., 2010; Hekman et al., 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013; Litmanovitz 2010; Mackay & Etienne, 2006; Loder, 2005; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Mirza 2006; Moore, 2013; Reed, 2012; Reed & Evans, 2008; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Rusch, 2004; Tillman, 2003; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). Ethnic and "minority" leaders were terms utilized in the statistical sense to identify individuals who in terms of race or ethnicity were not in the majority in their corporations or organizations (Hewlett et al., 2005), but not necessarily their statistical masses as it related to and was indicated in global society (Campbell-Stephens, 2009). Ethnicities and races that were found and mentioned in research in reference to minority groups included Afro Caribbean, Native

American, Indian, Latina, Asian, and African American. Despite challenges and obstacles experienced and endured by ethnic and minority women leaders, a very small and slightly increasing number were being appointed to leadership positions in school districts across the United States, in the United Kingdom, and in the Caribbean (Campbell-Stephens, 2009; Hekman et al., 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013 Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Pyke, 2013).

### **Emergent Leaders and Familial Support**

When describing ethnic and minority women leaders in education, many factors were taken into consideration when considering the idiosyncrasies of personalities and individual experiences. However, common characteristics were identified in the literature that would describe this distinct group of leaders as it pertains to familial influences, educational histories and background, spirituality and sense of confidence, and self-efficacy.

In the review of the literature, ethnic and minority female leaders asserted that strong familial support, encouragement, and motivation very early in their academic histories were paramount in not only achieving educational goals, but also in facilitating the attainment of career aspirations (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Bush, Glover & Sood, 2006; Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Fernandez et al., 2015; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). Ethnic and minority female leaders added that the encouragement, support (Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2017; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014), and motivation from parents had been a powerful, initial catalyst for academic successes in primary levels to higher education that eventually lead to the attainment of advanced degrees and leadership appointments. While attempting to

provide a buffer against racial and gender discrimination, these women affirmed that their parents instilled and nurtured in them a firm belief of self-worth, personal competence, and confidence in the skills and abilities possessed by these women (Mendez-Morse, 2004; Reed, 2012). The parents of these minority women leaders were completely committed to the academic aspirations of these women at a very early age. The magnitude of that commitment was evidenced by the parents' work ethic, belief in the value of education, active support of school activities (Fernandez et al., 2015; Mendez-Morse, 2004), and instilling a strong sense of self-efficacy (Bush et al., 2006; Reed, 2012; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). Parents were also mentioned as being the first role models and support systems for women who were successful in the workplace. The actions and efforts of the parents were described as unified and combined for the common goal of the family (Fernandez et al., 2015; Mendez-Morse, 2004). The parents were also described as the first examples for work ethic for women (Mendez-Morse, 2004). It was through the examples of parents that women learned the value of "working for what they wanted," failure and excuses were not options, and that through education, the opportunities for better jobs and a "happier" life existed (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Loder, 2005).

The development and cultivation of leadership characteristics were attributed to childhood experiences and/or early experiences in ethnic and minority leaders' histories as educators (Fuller et al., 2018). Minority female leaders appeared to possess the distinct characteristic of cultivating leadership skills at an early age (Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014). The catalyst for this early development of leadership skills formed because of increased familial responsibilities of minority female children as

primary caregivers of younger siblings. Consequently, older female children developed the skill sets and instincts to effectively provide for the needs of younger siblings. Providing this level of care for younger siblings inadvertently developed and nurtured proficiency, assertiveness, and the skill sets to effectively organize the varied aspects of their environment (Alston, 2005) without formal training. These emerging leaders had not grown up in environments that allowed total focus on educational aspirations. Instead, as children, these women were expected and required to take on responsibilities for the home to assist the family in functioning as a unit. These women were essentially raised to be effective multitaskers capable of balancing the load of many responsibilities (Roane & Newcomb, 2013).

While the message of the value of education (Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014) was equally strong among ethnic and minority females as indicated in the literature, the level of active involvement in school or its activities varied. Some of the parents were not speakers of English or had limited formal schooling themselves. This created the challenge of language barriers between home and school. For other parents, the necessity of survival and the need to work several jobs to support the family often minimized opportunities for communication between school and home. Although these challenges existed, the parents were still attentive to school life, inquired about daily school activities and supported extracurricular activities and academic efforts during secondary education (Mendez-Morse, 2004). Some of the ethnic minority leaders were children of educators with parents who remained intricately involved in the women's academic careers (Loder, 2005; Roane & Newcomb, 2013). With this group of women, academic successes were

celebrated and expected from primary school to graduate school (Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). Parents of these women were described as those who provided examples for interacting with others, expressed the value of education through established rules that included completing studying and homework before initiating any other activities in the home. Mothers were described as providing examples of female competence and the ability to deport themselves, while fathers were involved in facilitating participation in school activities, providing clear and strong encouragement for school success, and demonstrating a strong and consistent example of work ethic (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Mendez Morse, 2004). Additionally, and significantly, parents were instrumental in preparing young women to not only compete, but to seize opportunities to facilitate success in a world where the double marginalization of race and gender were experienced in abundance (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008).

### **Multiplicity of Roles, Identities, and Spirituality**

While research for minority women leaders was still emerging, what had existed indicated that this distinct class of leaders continued to struggle for visibility (Chisholm et al., 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Pyke, 2013; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014). Many of these women lead lives that included prominent roles as leaders, wives, mothers, and caretakers of aging parents (Howe-Walsh & Turnball, 2016; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Pyke, 2013). The multiple identities of these women with family, culture, and spiritual backgrounds influenced who these women were as leaders (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Mahmood, 2015; Robinson, 2014; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). A prominent characteristic attributed to minority women leaders in education was that of

spiritual grounding that many of these women described as a “calling from God” when referring to their roles as educational leaders (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Foster, 2005; Jean-Marie, 2013; Loder, 2005; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014). The spiritual nature of individuals indicated a necessary element in leadership in that spirituality was the core of an individual’s being and was the place that not only houses the authentic self, but, was also the place where motivation and inspiration lived. Spirituality connected lives to meaning and purpose (Dantley, 2005). It is through this meaning and purpose that individuals connected with one another and dismantled marginalizing conditions while creating strategies that facilitated radical changes to oppressive conditions. Spirituality was a powerful yet often hidden element that was the foundation of the work of ethnic and minority female leaders (Dantley, 2005). Spirituality appeared to empower these leaders. It was through belief in God and unyielding faith, that ethnic and minority female leaders were empowered to strive toward excellence in the mission to serve communities, lead an educational staff, and educate children in the faces of challenges and struggle (Alston, 2005; Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Dantley, 2005; Jean-Marie, 2013; Loder, 2005; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). Dantley (2005) provided an intriguing argument for the critical role that spirituality provided in the survival of female African American leaders. The author posited that spirituality in the African American community had been the foundation upon which projects of resistance had been built that included reconstructing dehumanizing and oppressive rituals committed by those in positions of economic and political power. Dantley (2005) also stated that historically, spiritual leadership among

African Americans had been created, nurtured, and enhanced in the context of struggle and conflict within the United States. It was through this spirituality that Dante (2005) continued to argue that people of color were further equipped with impetus to create, innovate, and transform deprecating conditions in which they were forced to contend. Spirituality provided a means of inner strength to allow for the critical reflection of the rituals and forms of life that were often grounded in racism, classism, and sexism. Instead of adopting a position of potential bondage and embracing emotions and feelings of self-degradation, hopelessness, and bitterness, spirituality empowered people of color and was a source of creativity. Through this creativity, individuals engaged and executed action through reflection, resistance, and reconstruction. This further aided in the ability of individuals to dream, envision, and strategize life as it might be (Dantley, 2005).

Dreaming and visioning were spiritual matters that required courage and great faith. To blend dreaming with an agenda of expected change transitioned to the realm of active or militant faith. The constant struggle with which ethnic and minority leaders contended was that of the capacity to interpret the world and adapt one's being to a multiplicity of circumstances and conditions. This concept had been instrumental to African Americans to further cultivate adaptive and creative skills imperative for survival. This "double consciousness" had provided African Americans, as well as other ethnic and minority leaders, the freedom and capacity to utilize the characteristic twoness for positive adaptation, faith in possibilities, and ultimate reclamation of justice over injustice. This type of reliance on spirituality offered educational leaders an arsenal of strategies to meet the daily challenges that were faced by leaders in contemporary schools (Dantley, 2005).

## **Challenges in Educational Leadership Programs**

While ethnic and minority female leaders were underrepresented in secondary leadership and senior leadership positions in education (Alston, 2005; Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Brown, 2005; Bush, Glover, & Sood, 2006; Campbell-Stephens, 2009; Dimmock & Walker, 2006; Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Foster, 2005; Fuller et al., 2018; Gregory, 2006; Hekman et al., 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013; Litmanovitz, 2011; Loder, 2005; Mackay & Etienne, 2006, Mendez Morse, 2004; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Mirza, 2006; Moore, 2013; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Rusch, 2004; Tillman, 2003), the commitment and dedication to the field remained. Women and minority candidates earned higher degrees and more certifications in education and educational leadership in comparison to non-minority and non-ethnic counterparts (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Fuller et al., 2018; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Lansford et al., 2010; Litmanovitz, 2011; Mackary & Etienne, 2006; Mirza, 2006; Murphy, 2002; Rusch, 2004).

Leadership competency was not only cultivated and nurtured in the childhoods or early careers of aspiring leaders, but also in educational leadership graduate programs. Men and women from diverse backgrounds enrolled in graduate educational leadership programs eagerly anticipating learning opportunities and experiences that equipped, empowered, and facilitated skill sets, increased knowledge, and further developed abilities and competencies to effectively lead in varied and dynamic school cultures. While contemporary societal demographics and cultures were increasingly heterogenic and multifaceted (Echols, 2007; Young & Peterson, 2002), minority female students frequently experienced limited coursework as it related to diversity or complex

community cultures. In addition to limited or non-existent course offerings on diversity (Fernandez et al., 2015; Genao, 2016), there was the perception of a lack of interest and commitment to multiculturalism, cross cultural leadership, and the education of minority children among the faculty of higher education institutions (Fernandez et al., 2015; Genao, 2016; Rusch, 2004). As a result of lack of adequate knowledge of diversity as demonstrated by faculty in educational leadership classrooms, shock, anger, and frustration were often the observed reactions of graduate students. Students had argued that a lack of genuine and meaningful discussions that critiqued law and policies from equity perspectives or the trend of being exposed to an abundance of research that appeared to ignore gender as being problematic, resulted in minority and female students frequently feeling marginalized, unheard, and erased from discourse (Genao, 2016; Kearney & Harrington, 2013; Rusch, 2004). As a result, doubly marginalized female graduate students from non-majority ethnic groups reported completing doctoral studies amid codes of silence, lies, and secrets that at times required these students to de-culturalize, defeminize, and ultimately desensitize in order to successfully complete graduate studies and to successfully attain more powerful administrative positions (Rapp, 2001).

Aspiring leaders claimed being ill equipped with the necessary skills to competently navigate district and campus politics and effectively communicate and cope with subordinates who challenged the leadership abilities of these leaders. These aspirants acknowledged the need for assistance in the development of awareness and skills to effectively navigate challenging situations, difficult colleagues, and subordinates (Fernandez & Martinez-Garcia, 2015). Minority female leaders also stated that a lack of

knowledge of the school district's political structures also proved detrimental and disruptive to the careers of these leaders (Fernandez et al., 2015). In addition, Fernandez and Martinez-Garcia (2015) argued that the lack of social justice preparation in educational leadership programming hindered the leadership growth of (potential) leaders in a diverse world and presented educational leadership from the perspective of White male privilege which negated issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and social status.

In reference to the democratic value of social justice, Dewey (1916) stated that democracy is more than a theory or form of government. Dewey (1916) asserted that democracy is primarily a mode of associated living, of co-joint communicated experience, and should involve more diverse conversations and less exclusive interests resulting in the increased capacity to build shared concern and personal capacities. It is argued that teaching practices must include diverse conversations about the real meaning of leadership (Foster, 1986; Robinson, 2014) and furthermore, discourse must also work diligently to expose and eradicate the methods and practices which myths, rituals, stereotypes, and symbols fostered and facilitated inequity and injustice (Foster, 1986; Hekman et al., 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013; Marshall, 2000; Shields, Larocque, & Oberg, 2002). Diverse discourse fostered praxis, a model of learning behavior that transferred to action in schools. A conscience commitment to praxis resulted in linkages to democratic protocol and practices implemented in university classrooms and transferred to democratic behaviors in school communities (Foster, 1986; Genao, 2016; Hooks, 1994; Jean-Marie, 2013; Reed, 2012; Robinson, 2014; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014). In essence, praxis in an educational administration department, program, or classroom, collectively examined and determined how words and actions empowered or oppressed all or

sustained privilege for one gender or one race in educational settings (Hooks, 1994; Knaus, 2014).

Minority female leaders were entering school leadership positions, but, were reportedly unprepared for the dynamics of their appointed positions as they related to the multiplicity of ethnic and gender viewpoints and their impact on schooling (Genao, 2013; Karkouti, 2016; Reed, 2012). These topics were rarely included in programmatic discourse or professional development provided to aspiring or novice administrators. Instead, leadership preparation programs were designed to construct knowledge and the understanding of leadership from an embedded privileged perspective which largely ignored issues of status, gender, and race. This resulted in a skewed understanding of leadership that discouraged diversity and equity (Campbell-Stephens, 2009; Genao, 2016; Poplin, Gosetti & Rusch, 1995; Rusch, 2004).

Institutions of higher learning were instrumental in the preparation of aspiring leaders, but an interdependence between practitioners, professional organizations, government agencies, and other stakeholders existed in the development of educational leaders (Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Kearney & Herrington, 2013; Spiller, 2013; Young & Peterson, 2002). The business and practices of preparing contemporary educational leaders must be analyzed and begin with a redefinition of educational leadership (Young & Peterson, 2002). Transformation and substantive changes should include the establishment of a national policy board related to school leadership, utilizing professional schools as models for administrator preparation programs and increasing the quality and quantity of administrator preparation programs. Initiatives should have also included increased efforts in recruitment (Kruse & Krumm, 2016), the placement of

ethnic minorities and women in leadership positions, the establishment of partners with school districts in preparing educational leaders (Kruse & Krumm, 2016), an increase in professional development of practicing school leaders, and the reformation of licensure and certification standards (Young & Peterson, 2002).

While the nation and K-12 education have become increasingly diverse, the field of educational administration leadership has remained under-diversified, with a clear underrepresentation of women and people of color (Alston, 2005; Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Brown, 2005; Bush, Glover, & Sood, 2006; Campbell-Stephens, 2009; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Dimmock & Walker, 2006; Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Foster, 2005; Gregory, 2006; Howe-Walsh & Turnball, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Karaminidou & Bush, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Litmanovitz, 2011; Loder, 2005; Mackay & Etienne, 2006; Mendez Morse, 2004; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Mirza, 2006; Pyke, 2013; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Rusch, 2004; Spiller, 2013; Tillman, 2003), which should be linked to the lack of diversity in educational administration preparation programs (Genao, 2016; Tillman, 2003). Although individuals enrolled in graduate leadership programs originated from diverse and multicultural backgrounds and communities, as students, these individuals frequently reported experiencing minimal coursework related to diversity or complex community structures. In addition, these students reported being under the tutelage of faculty who were less than interested or had not appeared to be committed to multiculturalism, cross cultural leadership, or the education of minority children (Rusch, 2004). In educational leadership programs, cultural diversity and the study of power differentials (Brown, 2005; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Karkouti, 2016) between majority

and minority group members as a content category of study, was one of the lowest ranked in leadership preparation programs, if it was included at all (Brown, 2005; Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Rusch, 2004). Minority female aspirants enrolled in educational leadership programs recounted programmatic discourse that perpetuated theories of educational leadership without any genuine discussions that critiqued law and policy for equity perspectives. Instead, research has ignored gender and race as problematic, and that double marginalization was nonexistent. This further reinforced the negative feelings of marginalization, of being unheard and erased from discourse by female and minority students (Rusch, 2004). According to Campbell-Stephens (2009) little has been written concerning the theories of educational leadership and the dynamics created when western processes and models met Black or global majority cultures to form leaders. These leadership competencies, practices, and behaviors were described as culturally neutral universal truths (Brown, 2005; Campbell-Stephens, 2009; Rusch, 2004) without considering the contextual nature of leadership on the disparities of political and social capital between racial groups and the impact on education (Brown, 2005). While minority and female leaders agreed that all successful leaders possessed a similar repertoire of leadership practices, it should be noted that as fundamental and equally valuable was that the leaders contributed as cultural human beings (Campbell-Stephens, 2009; Rusch 2004).

The training and preparation programs for school leadership, internationally, appeared to refuse to acknowledge the racialized and culturally diverse settings in which current and future leaders had and would practice (Campbell-Stephens, 2009; Genao, 2016; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017). The rhetoric for reform in educational leadership and its preparation programs appeared more prevalent than any enduring change (Usdan,

2002). Usdan argued that the chasm that existed between the academy and educational leadership practitioners and aspirants were too often predicated on convenience of offerings as well as the ease with which they could be completed. Therefore, as it relates to programming, incentives for change had been outweighed by the disincentives and advantages for maintaining the status quo (Glasman, Cibulka, & Ashby, 2002).

Inadequate and ineffective educational leadership programs were detrimental to aspiring and practicing leaders in that they handicapped the abilities of individuals in the ability to lead at full capacity to benefit all key stakeholders within their respective academic communities in the 21st century (Jean-Marie, 2013; Kearney & Herrington, 2013; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Spiller, 2013). Aspiring leaders may have been insufficiently prepared to work effectively in diverse communities in that the preparation programs in which they were trained often ignored the interconnected nature of oppression (Alston, 2005; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). The development of racially underrepresented leaders was critical in that minority female leaders possessed the capabilities to promote beneficial changes in organizations, serve as role models, and link institutions to communities that represent diverse clients (Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Jean-Marie, 2013; Knaus, 2014; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Moore, 2013; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Reed, 2012; Robinson, 2014; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014). As a result of the inadequate and insufficient course offerings, minority female leaders argued being at a deficit to effectively operate in conditions with strong implications of situational and contextual variables that determined the appropriate application of professional skills (Cistone & Stevenson, 2000; Jean-Marie, 2013; Reed, 2012; Spiller, 2013).

## **Androcentric Work Culture and Practices**

Academic scholars had the power and privilege to reproduce and reify the discussion of choice in classrooms and in research. What academics had done in classrooms transferred to words and actions in schools (Foster, 1986; Mabokela & Madsen, 2003). Within educational leadership programs, students were exposed to research on leadership and effectiveness from a Eurocentric and male norm (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Fernandez et al., 2015; Genao, 2016; Hekman et al., 2017; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Spiller, 2013; Walsh & Turnball, 2016). Women were not investigated as populations, but as topics of study (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Roane & Newcomb, 2013). One of the many challenges experienced by minority women leaders and aspirants was that of having career progressions stalled by stereotypes and negative perceptions that existed for minority women in leadership roles (Alston, 2005; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mendez-et al., 2015; Moore, 2013; Roane & Newcomb, 2013).

Howard (2000) expounded on three expressions of “Whiteness” that predominated within the ranks of White educators and White educational leaders and the distinct impact that each of the orientations may have had on fellow educators, aspiring leaders, active leaders, parents, and students. Howard (2000) asserted that the first orientation is that of *fundamental White orientation* which viewed the world through a single lens that was always right and was always White. Secondly, there were Whites who adhered to an integrationist White orientation that acknowledged and tolerated

differences, but, had not fully accepted the implications of tolerance for their personal actions. *Integrationist Whites* often prided themselves for their level of tolerance, but often displayed behaviors that were paternalistic and condescending to minority administrators, educators, parents, and students. The integrationist Whites characteristically maintained a sense of environmental control by avoiding unique confrontation and conflict (Moore, 2013), and seldom sought to discover and understand unique racial perspectives. Howard's third and final category of White expression in the academic sector was that of *transformationist White orientation*. This paradoxical identity allowed Whites to acknowledge their inevitable privilege and racism while simultaneously working to dismantle the legacy of White dominance. Of the three orientations of Whiteness, it appeared that the attitudes and resulting behaviors of the fundamental and integrationist White orientations appeared most attuned to the challenges experienced by minority female leaders (Howard, 2000).

In addition to the culture of White orientation that existed in academia, enduring and traditional socio-cultural values defined the roles and expected norms of women and men in the home, workplace, and society (Chisholm et al., 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013; Hekman et al., 2013; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Moore, 2013; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Spiller, 2013). As a result, these norms directly affected the opportunities of men and women, respectively, to access leadership positions. In many societies, women's access was restricted, while that of men was unrestricted. This access to leadership was largely dependent on cultural values about gender roles (Dimmock & Walker, 2006; Elisha & Edwards, 2014; Jean-Marie, 2013; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Mahmood, 2015; Roane

& Newcomb, 2013).

Studies indicated that minority female educational leaders experienced a deep sense of isolation (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Howe-Walsh & Turnball, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Knaus, 2014; Mackay & Etienne, 2006; Mirza, 2006; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Pyke, 2013) and lack of professional acceptance and acknowledgement. The lack of belonging, lack of respect for their positions, and lack of trust were significant (Jean-Marie, 2013; Kearney & Herrington, 2013; Mackay & Etienne, 2006; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). Respondents also voiced struggles with comparisons between their adopted leadership style and those of predecessors and the generalized perception of how education leaders should look and act (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008).

Minority female leaders were often excluded from the districts' power networks (Bush et al., 2006; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Coleman & Campbell, 2010; Mackay & Etienne, 2006; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Reed & Evans, 2000) instrumental in accelerating the careers of aspiring leaders. Acceptance into formal and informal networks of an organization was vital. Informal networks provided social support and knowledge of what was going on within the organization (Jean-Marie, 2013; Kruse & Krumm, 2016). In addition, learning that occurred and was obtained through organizational networks significantly added to an individual's public and professional value while it simultaneously and positively impacted the individual's self-esteem and employability (Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mackay & Etienne, 2006; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). Developmental relationships at work could provide career guidance, exposure to senior management, and assisted in getting challenging projects and support that may

have enhanced the realization of career goals. Women and ethnic minority leaders and aspirants were often not included in important networks and were instead positioned away from significant individuals capable of facilitating career advancement for individuals (Jean-Marie, 2013; Mackay & Etienne, 2006; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015).

Questionable hiring practices were cited in research (Grove, 2013; Hekman et al., 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013) as a distinct challenge for minority female leaders in their endeavors to build careers and attain promotion in educational leadership. There appeared to be an unwillingness to deviate from normal patterns of appointments in advancing the careers of White males (Campbell-Stephens, 2009; Howe-Walsh & Turnball, 2016; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Moore, 2013; Robinson, 2014).

Minority women submitted numerous applications and were denied prior to receiving appointments, if selected at all (Jean-Marie, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014). Other minority women applicants later found that references had submitted negative and unfavorable responses or purposely omitted relative and constructive characteristics and skill sets possessed by the applicants that would have been favorable and desired by employers (Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010). If minority women were appointed to leadership positions, peers and subordinates often perceived the promotions as *quota hires* or *tokens* within the organization (Bush et al., 2006; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Hekman et al., 2017; Hewlett et al., 2005; Lansford et al., 2010; Mackay & Etienne, 2006; McDowell, 2009; Moore, 2013; Spiller, 2013). These women asserted encountering barriers that severely hindered the ability to lead effectively in that they were perceived as reaping the benefits of loftier positions as a result of reverse discriminatory practices rather than merit (Coleman & Campbell-

Stephens, 2010; Spiller, 2013).

Despite the persistent desire for higher education, the tendency to be educated at higher levels (Kruse & Krumm, 2016), the attainment of post graduate degrees (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013; Kruse & Krumm, 2016), willingness to facilitate social transformation (Patton & Jordan, 2017; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014), arming oneself with strong community connections (Jean-Marie, 2013; Mirza, 2006; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Watson & Rivera-McCutchen, 2016), and equipping oneself with a work ethic that requires harder work for less pay and status than their majority counterparts was common among minority female leaders in schools (Alston, 2005; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Hekman et al., 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013; Knaus, 2014; Lansford et al., 2010; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014). Despite this, the pervasive perception existed that minority women leaders were less intellectual and lacked the competence to lead effectively (Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Foster, 2005; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Roane & Newcomb, 2013). Minority female leaders were perceived as less intelligent with lowered performance expectation (Hekman et al., 2017; Knaus, 2014; Mirza, 2006; Roane & Newcomb, 2013). Ironically, these same individuals tended to be educated at higher levels and worked harder for less pay in positions of lower status than their majority counterparts (Alston, 2005; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Foster, 2005; Jean-Marie, 2013; Knaus, 2014; Lansford et al., 2010). The trend of underrepresentation (Brown, 2005; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Dimmock & Walker, 2006; Foster, 2005; Glover & Sood, 2006; Hekman et al., 2017; Howe-Walsh & Turnball, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Knaus, 2014; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Lansford et al., 2010; Litmanovitz, 2011; Loder,

2005; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Mirza, 2006; Pyke, 2013; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014; Tillman, 2003; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008) and underemployment (Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Moore, 2013; Pyke, 2013; Reed, 2012) in a racially divided and gender segmented labor market, including that of educational leadership, remained.

The overt and covert attitudes and behaviors of racism and sexism demonstrated by superiors and subordinates in the workplace appeared to be the catalyst in the entrenchment of an organizational climate that further undermined the positions of authority to which minority women had been appointed (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Hekman et al., 2017; Howe-Walsh & Turnball; 2016; Jean-Marie; 2013; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Knaus, 2014; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Reed, 2012). Racialized and gendered stereotypical role expectations, above and beyond those expected of other administrators, presented a distinct challenge to the careers of minority women (Bush et al., 2006; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013; Knaus, 2014; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Patton & Jordan, 2017; Reed, 2012; Reed & Evans, 2008; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). In addition to excelling and advancing in their careers, minority women leaders balanced “home life” as well (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Fuller et al., 2018; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Pyke, 2013; Roane & Newcomb, 2013); an additional expectation that is not commonly attributed to men. Negative stigmas may be attributed to female leaders that appeared overly dedicated to their respective career and appeared less dedicated to *taking care of home*. Women continued to work long hours inside and outside the home (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017), made extreme sacrifices for

their children and family, and often endured less supportive or non-existing life partners (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Pyke, 2013). In addition, many of these women have had more dependents by having children and elderly parents living at home that required their attention (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Pyke, 2013; Robinson, 2014). Women constantly faced role conflict as a result of making decisions that directly impacted family members (Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mahmood, 2015; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Spiller, 2013). The effect on family life impacted the decisions of minority female leaders and acted as a powerful restraint (Hewlett et al., 2005; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Murphy, 2002; Pyke, 2013). Family and home expectations were factors cited that limited the geographical mobility of these female leaders, that resulted in decreased opportunities for promotion (Bush et al., 2006; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Hewlett et al., 2005; Spiller, 2013).

Minorities and women leaders were subjected to a phenomenon known as surveillance, which meant having been accountable and had more attention than what was required or necessary, directed on a targeted individual more than others (Chisholm et al., 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013; Mendez-Morse, et al., 2015; Mirza, 2006; Roane & Newcomb, 2013). Discrimination and segregation were designed to exclude specific groups of people outside the centers of power. Surveillance aimed to control targeted individuals, who were members of the excluded group(s), that had gained access to the centers of power and entered spaces of the public and private spheres (Mirza, 2006). Minority women, particularly those of African American descent, were watched in desegregated work environments that ensured that they remained “unraced” and

assimilated (Hekman et al., 2017; Mirza, 2006). Being perceived as assimilated was vitally important in that standing out has invoked deep feelings of need, rejection, and anxiety within the majority groups (Hekman et al., 2017; Mirza, 2006). Hekman et al. (2017) further asserted that in the work environment, the demonstration of diversity-valuing behavior was detrimental to the career aspirations of ethnic and minority women. Engaging in behavior that constituted valuing diversity resulted in these women being penalized due to traditional negative race and gender stereotypes. Hekman et al. (2017) found that ethnic and minority women were perceived as incompetent and received poorer performance evaluations that inhibited ascension to leadership or few were placed in positions of status and power and utilized as tokens, took on White androcentric values while they acted as gatekeepers to prevent further dilution of those values by denying the access to promotion of other ethnic and minority women and simultaneously created the appearance of inclusion and diversity. Ethnic and minority women may have been highly aware of the personal danger that diversity valuing behavior posed to their careers (Hekman et al., 2017). Therefore, to be unassimilated or to “stand out” invited a certain type of surveillance that appeared benign and was often disguised as kind and supportive attention, was often found to be very distressing to minority women (Reed, 2012). White administrators had more autonomy than minority administrators. The persistent surveillance bred feelings of being undervalued, undermined, and used among minority leaders (Mackay & Etienne, 2006; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Reed, 2012). Minority women leaders were required to learn how to effectively negotiate their identities and deny their heritage with those of another race or sex in order to successfully navigate their respective careers (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; McDowell, 2009; Moore, 2013).

Many minority leaders were of the belief that they were required to make adjustments to their personal appearance, minimize social distance, patterns of thinking and general communication, behavioral styles, and even facial expressions to obtain leadership positions and that leadership success should not correlate with assimilation and negation of identity (Echols, 2006; Hekman et al., 2017; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; McDowell, 2009; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Reed, 2012). “Style compliance” issues among minority women leaders were destructive and debilitating in that they lead minority professionals to deny their authenticity in effort to fit into the prevailing White male model (Hekman et al., 2017, Hernandez & Marakami, 2016; Reed, 2012, Roane & Newcomb, 2013). The resulting effect of style compliance was so severe that one fifth of professional minority women left their occupations (Hewlett, Luce, & West, 2005). Instead, it was vital for individuals to acknowledge and evaluate personal stereotypes, biases, and beliefs concerning how leaders should look, behave, and speak (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; McDowell, 2009).

Many minority female educational leaders, especially African Americans, were often employed as leaders in large, urban school districts that were underfunded, had scarce resources, significant numbers of uncertified teachers, and student underachievement (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Brown, 2005; Jean-Marie, 2013; Knaus, 2014; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Patton & Jordan, 2017; Roane & Newcomb, 2013). The academic environments were often difficult and dangerous assignments (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014) in poorly maintained and managed school districts with high minority populations (Alston, 2005; Arnold & Brooks; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Roane & Newcomb, 2013). School boards and

school districts tended to offer minority female leaders administrative appointments on campuses with student populations that included high numbers of minority students, to lead and salvage their own people (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Moore, 2013). Often when these individuals accepted the challenge of these appointments, they were perceived as *messiahs* or eventually *scapegoats* (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). These leaders were expected to become clarions for significant educational change in districts that were dominated by White leadership (Foster, 2005). Default situations were also offered to minority women in circumstances that involved failed leadership in inner city schools by men. Having no other options, these women were appointed. Very often, these were the only situations in which minority women were appointed to leadership positions (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003).

Hernandez and Murakami (2016) established that nationally, female and minority school leaders of color were consistently appointed to highly diverse schools which may have been problematic in that these educators became *pigeonholed* in working in settings that were high minority, with low socio-economic student populations, and were linguistically diverse. Such assignments systematically placed Latina and other minority female educational leaders in the most difficult academic settings, which resulted in a setup for failure. While minority female leaders have educated culturally, economically, and linguistically diverse students with success, consistent placement in high poverty and underserved schools, the potential of underutilization of the skill sets of these leaders, and the restriction of promotion beyond the school level became strong possibilities. This suggested a firmly established hegemonic system as it related to the appointments of minority female leaders in that those in positions of power chose to pass the

responsibility of educating diverse students to someone other than themselves (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). Consequently, it suggested that those in positions of power were charged with the task of addressing the challenges of evolving student demographics by meeting the interests of White district administrators without having to directly address the challenge or being required to work with such schools (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016).

Minority women spent years investing in higher education (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Jean-Marie, 2013; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Reed, 2012; Robinson, 2014; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014), carefully and gradually building and strengthening reputations to gain respect, which appeared to be a sure thing for their male, White counterparts (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). Additional obstacles that minority female leaders encountered were a lack of professional support and validation (Bush et al., 2006; Jean-Marie, 2013; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Murphy, 2002; Patton & Jordan, 2017; Walsh & Turnball, 2016), racism and sexism from majority and minority constituents (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Hekman et al., 2017; Howe-Walsh & Turnball, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Karamanidou, 2017; Knaus, 2014; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mendez-Morse, 2015; Moore, 2013; Pyke, 2013; Reed, 2012; Reed & Evans, 2008; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Spiller, 2013), and more reported incidents of sexual harassment and discrimination, that increased the likelihood of early exits from the profession due to discrimination and stress (Mirza, 2006; Pyke, 2013; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014). The overt and covert attitudes and behaviors of racism and sexism demonstrated by superiors and subordinates in the workplace appeared to serve as catalysts that reinforced an organizational climate that

further undermined the positions of authority to which minority female leaders were appointed. The experience of numerous debilitating barriers and challenges stalled or ended the careers and aspirations of many of these women (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Hekman et al., 2017; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Karkouti, 2016; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Mirza, 2006; Moore, 2013; Pyke, 2013; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014).

All organizations valued leadership, and some invested substantially in its cultivation. However, many employers had not closely observed, recognized, and investigated the substantive lives of minority women outside of the organization (Hewlett et al., 2005). The resulting leadership skills possessed by these women could have been transferred into the corporate environment for further development. The lives of minority professionals were rich with leadership experiences; and in many cases, were unleveraged by employers. According to Hewlett et al. (2005), many minorities and women purposely concealed outside pursuits from colleagues and superiors. This was a particularly destructive dynamic for potential leaders in that companies could not leverage what was unseen and purposely concealed. These authors asserted that minority professionals accumulated an unusually rich measure of cultural and social capital as well as relationship capital outside of the workplace (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Moore, 2013). Cultural capital was vital for anyone who desired to exert influence in a neighborhood, company, or nation (Hewlett et al., 2005; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Moore, 2013; Robinson, 2014).

Many highly educated African American, female professionals articulated a strong belief and reliance in faith, were active leaders in their respective religious

communities, or were actively involved in social outreach (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Jean-Marie, 2013; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014; Watson & Rivera-McCutchen, 2016). These women frequently volunteered and were evident in their respective communities (Robinson, 2014), schools, hospitals, libraries, shelters, and served as mentors, tutors, and “big sisters.” This substantial community involvement developed strategic and interpersonal skills, honed core values, and edified organizational and communication capabilities. Those skills were highly favorable and transferable in the workplace (Hewlett et al., 2005).

Ironically, minority women purposely concealed the wealth of knowledge and experience that they possessed. These women had not perceived outside affiliations as legitimate leadership development venues. Many had not shared involvement with outside organizations because the organizations may have been linked to religion or had religious affiliations which was a significant factor in the non-work lives of many minority women (Jean-Marie, 2013; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Spiller, 2013). Professional minority women may not have trusted employers and feared that giving employers insight to their private lives would have reinforced negative stereotypes and provided ammunition to employers that would have been used against them. The reluctance and distrust of discussing the minority women’s private lives were deeply rooted in the minority women’s experiences of *hidden bias* in corporate cultures (Hewlett et al., 2005; Mackay & Etienne, 2006).

### **University Sponsored Mentorships**

It was the responsibility of K-12 leaders, men and women worldwide, along with universities and bodies that facilitated the preparation of school leaders to maximize

opportunities for practicing and prospective leaders (Genao, 2016; Kearney & Herrington, 2013; Spiller, 2013) so that the capabilities of a larger and more diverse population of educational leaders could have been fully realized (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). Focused preparational efforts for aspiring leaders should have included strategic recruitment plans targeting diversification of new administrators, created and sustained quality mentors through formalized networks and programs, and provided vital networking support that afforded aspiring leaders opportunities to establish relationships and had direct links to decision making personnel within school districts (Fernandez et al., 2015). Ironically, there appeared to have been a disappearing pipeline (Brown, 2005; Jean-Marie, 2013; Knaus, 2014; Litmanovitz, 2011; Mackay & Etienne, 2006; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Rusch & Marshall, 2006; Spiller, 2013; Tillman, 2003; Usdan, 2002) of prospective minority female administrators at the building and district levels as well as a lack of mentors (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Brown, 2005; Bush et al., 2006; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Jean-Marie, 2013; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mackay & Etienne, 2006; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Reed, 2012; Reed & Evans, 2008; Spiller, 2013; Tillman, 2003; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008) to facilitate career development and progression.

The recruitment and selection of talented individuals from all racial and ethnic groups to improve the effectiveness of schooling as well as to expose educators to diverse perspectives was imperative. The initiatives to increase minorities and women in educational administration programs should have included focused efforts and strategies in recruitment (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Fernandez et al., 2015; Howe-Walsh & Turnball, 2016; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Moore, 2013), mentoring (Chisholm-Burns et

al., 2017; Fernandez et al., 2015; Jean-Marie, 2013; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Robinson, 2014; Spiller, 2013) support (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Roane & Newcomb, 2013), retention of minorities that demonstrated the interest, ability, qualification for masters and doctoral students in educational administration, and means for financial assistance. Curriculum should have been culturally relevant and incorporated the perspectives and represented the contemporary racial and ethnic diversity that existed in post graduate classrooms as well as in K-12 education (Tillman, 2003). While traditional theories shaped the discipline of educational leadership, preparation programs should have ensured that students were not taught from a single theoretical perspective at the expense of alternative ways of conceptualizing educational administration (Genao, 2016; Kearney & Herrington, 2013; Tillman, 2003).

Careful consideration should have been given in the selection of mentors for graduate and doctoral students in educational leadership programs (Genao, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Kearney & Herrington, 2013; Spiller, 2013). Selected mentors should have been willing to serve and demonstrate commitment to the mentee's professional growth and development. Mentors should have possessed the capacity and capability of guiding mentees toward promotion and tenure. Mentors should have provided the aspirant support, advice, and knowledge at no personal gain (Fernandez et al., 2015). Personality match, as well as personal and cultural interests should have been factors of consideration in establishing a successful and professional relationship. Mentoring relationships should have been evaluated and the most effective approaches that facilitate long term professional growth and development of faculty of color should have been determined

with a list of functions that were specific to the needs of the mentee (Tillman, 2003). The required functions should have focused and emphasized facilitating the mentee in meeting the requirements for promotion and tenure (Jean-Marie, 2013; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Spiller, 2013). Tillman (2003) argued that it was critical that the mentor be of the same race or ethnicity as the mentee. Mentors with similar personal and cultural backgrounds were instrumental in providing support in coping with feelings of professional and social isolation. The time had come for universities to engage in proactive initiatives and tangible actions that resulted in the increase of racial and ethnic diversity in educational administration (Tillman, 2003).

According to Tillman (2003), recruitment by deans, department chairs, and faculty of potential candidates of color should have assisted school districts in identifying potential leadership candidates. University faculty played a critical role in assisting school districts in building a critical mass of people of color who aspired to administrative positions. Collaboration of this nature was consistent with the goals and objectives of administrative preparation programs. Educational leadership programs were instrumental in providing doctoral students opportunities to serve as graduate assistants, research assistants, and teaching assistants. Tillman (2003) posited that firsthand experiences in faculty research, teaching, preparing syllabi, and interacting with other students were critically important. Additional experiences such as providing doctoral students of color with opportunities to attend and participate in professional conferences, graduate seminars, (Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016), research and publishing with more experienced candidates possessing theoretical knowledge and skills as well as unique cultural and practical knowledge and skills were deemed critical in the

professional development of minority leaders. Skills and knowledge of this caliber were invaluable for aspiring professionals with the desire to become leaders in today's racially and ethnically diverse K-12 schools (Tillman, 2003).

### **School District Sponsored Mentorships**

Many minority female educational leaders lacked sponsorship or mentors (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Pyke, 2013) in predominantly minority student campuses or districts (Jean-Marie, 2013; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015) and contended with the challenges of double marginality and the burden of ethnic or racial and gender stereotyping (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Moore, 2013; Pyke, 2013; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014). A consistent recommendation for those aspiring to leadership positions was the establishment of mentoring relationships (Mendez-Morse, 2004; Robinson, 2014; Spiller, 2013). Studies that had included minority women administrators revealed that female administrators experienced challenges in limited recruitment (Howe-Walsh & Turnball, 2016) and mentorships (Howe-Walsh & Turnball, 2016; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mendez-Morse, 2004). Traditionally, mentoring consisted of a person in a position of power that was able to teach, encourage, and facilitate the advancement of the mentee. A mentoring relationship was long term and included targeted and specific lessons to propel advancement and often included introductions to fellow senior members. The nature of the relationship may have been formal and sanctioned by the organization or informal and formed by mutual, causal connection and was usually initiated by the mentor (Mendez-Morse, 2004; Reed, 2012; Spiller, 2013; Tillman, 2003). Traditional mentoring situations involved a mentor selecting and grooming a mentee who was similar in gender

and race (Spiller, 2013). Mentors played a crucial role in promoting others to leadership positions (Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Spiller, 2013). Mentoring was a vitally important practice for integrating a novice into an organization as well as socializing the mentee to the specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions appropriate to a new role within an organization (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Spiller, 2013). Mentors acted as sponsors and provided support to the mentee to remove organizational barriers, assist the mentee in negotiating *the system*, and provide opportunities for upward mobility (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Robinson, 2014; Spiller, 2013).

The dominant culture of educational administration was androcentric (Hekman et al., 2017; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Pyke, 2013), meaning informed by White, male norms, because administrators were primarily White males and because traditional mentoring had been practiced and associated with White males, there was a high likelihood that the mentees of these administrators were also White males (Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000). The selection of the White male mentees may have been unintentional (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017), but this typical way of selecting mentees resulted in individuals who were of a different gender, race, or ethnicity from those in senior positions, and reduced chances of mentees being noticed as potential educational leaders. While this tradition had not meant exclusive selection and recruiting of White males, it had meant that those who were unlikely to support the dominant discourse were rarely chosen (Gardiner et al., 2000; Grogan, 1999). As a result, those who had not looked like the mentors or who had not thought like the mentors would not be selected. The contributions of these ignored mentees, potential educational leaders, would have

been forfeited (Mendez-Morse, 2004; Spiller, 2013).

### **Factors of Success**

Amid great challenges and barriers, minority women were meeting the challenges of educational leadership and flourished in their respective appointments (Alston, 2005; Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Jean-Marie, 2013; Loder, 2005; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Moore, 2013; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014). Spiritually, self-efficacy, chosen leadership styles, and the construction of mentors were common themes in the literature that appeared to facilitate success among this distinct group of educational leaders (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014).

African American women in educational leadership asserted that having a spiritual foundation and religious faith were cornerstones and key elements to success as leaders (Alston, 2005; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Coleman & Campbell Stephens, 2010; Dantley, 2005; Loder, 2005; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014). These women indicated a belief in God and viewed their religious faith as providing a clear and moral purpose for their lives (Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014). These women also described their leadership appointments as *a calling from God* (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Loder, 2005; Reed & Evans; 2008). Many minority women educators and educational leaders, particularly those of African American descent, had been described as possessing an organic link between the women's spirituality, community, activism and the daily efforts to utilize religious convictions to forge individual survival (Mattis, 1997). Spirituality and religiosity helped minority women, particularly those of African American descent, cope

with the stresses of life and make sense out of adverse circumstances that arose due to marginalized status of these leaders in society (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Jean-Marie, 2013; Mattis, 1997; Neighbors, Jackson, Bowman, & Gurwin, 1983; Roane & Newcomb, Robinson, 2014; 2013; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014; Turner & Bagley, 2000). Spirituality was the internal mechanism that guided human beings to construct meaning for their lives, establish purpose, enter connections or relationships with others, and serve as the facility for individuals to create through inspired imagination (Dantley, 2003).

Minority women leaders possessed unwavering self-efficacy which was attributed to the successful careers of these leaders (Alston, 2005; Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Lansford; 2010; Litmanovitz, 2011; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Murphy, 2002; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014). Minority women in educational leadership appointments demonstrated a remarkable sense of self-worth despite challenging circumstances. Myers (2000) argued that the more self-worth individuals felt, the most effectively they were able to cope.

Through this power of self-definition, minority female intellectuals had explored this private hidden space of consciousness that facilitated coping with, and in many cases transcended the confines of gender, class, and race oppression (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Murphy, 2002; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014). These women appeared fortified by their own individual personal strengths which were cultivated by living lives of quality, resistance, commitment, and spirituality (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Lansford et al., 2010; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Reed,

2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014). Minority women in leadership demonstrated individual agency and confidence in their own competence in the ability to build career success (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens; 2010; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014). Many of these leaders were characterized as those who embodied self-will, determination, spiritual connection and awareness, strong work ethic, persistence, lofty educational pursuits, and talent (Alston, 2005; Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Jean-Marie, 2013; Litmanovitz, 2011; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson). Self-efficacy involved minority women leaders' affirmed personal values and living them to ensure that there was no discontinuity between personal philosophies and those that were adapted and implemented in professional practice (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Campbell-Stephens, 2009; Robinson, 2014; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014).

The third factor that appeared to be critical in the establishment of successful careers for minority female leaders was the ability to create mentors and establish vital networks despite limited opportunities and accessibility to both (Jean-Marie, 2013; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). Mackay and Etienne (2006) posited that ethnic and minority leaders were often not included in important networks and were positioned away from those who were able to develop their careers (Jean-Marie, 2013; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Moore, 2013; Roane & Newcomb, 2013). As a result, minority leaders and women were more likely to experience difficulties finding mentors to assist with the development of their careers. Minorities tended to have a broader support network located outside of the organizations of employment. It was feasible to suggest that the lack of support internally within an organization may have been motivation for individuals to look

outside (Mackay & Etienne, 2006).

Mendez-Morse (2004) and Mendez-Morse et al. (2015) challenged that a role model or mentor was significant to the careers of Latina educational leaders. They further asserted that a role model was defined as an individual who possessed traits that were desirable and were emulated by another person; a mentor was defined as someone who actively helped, supported, or taught another individual to do a job so that the individual would succeed. Research findings indicated that for Latina educational leaders, significant role models and mentors, primarily from nonprofessional areas of these women's lives, mitigated the absence of a formal, traditional mentoring relationship (Mendez, 2004; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). It appeared that the experiences of the minority female school leaders demonstrated that these women assembled or constructed a mentor from varied sources that collectively met their specific needs and priorities (Mendez-Morse, 2004). These leaders were able to construct mentors by putting together the separate talents of various individuals in a manner that facilitated personal and professional growth. These women created a mentor as a result of systematic thought; if it was believed that an individual possessed desirable traits or characteristics that could be used to better meet the needs of students, these leaders would connect with that person (Mendez-Morse, 2004; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015). These minority women leaders assembled specific skills, abilities, and supportive dispositions from various persons in different areas that collectively and unconsciously performed the role of a mentor.

Minority women were accepting the challenges of serving as education leaders in school districts across the nation. While facing a plethora of barriers as a result of the interconnectedness of racism and sexism, these leaders endeavored to transcend those

challenges and barriers and led successfully through the application of faith, self-efficacy, and the construction of mentors to facilitate the development and advancement of their careers.

### **Literature Limitations and Intention of the Study**

The study of minority female leaders, especially those of African American descent, were *visibly absent* from academic research and literature (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Fernandez & Martinez-Garcia, 2015; Jean-Marie, 2013; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Moorosi et al., 2018; Roane & Newcomb, 2013). These researchers argued that information referring to African American women in leadership and management was inclusive within larger gender research on women in corporate, public, or educational administrative studies, or the utilization of nonminority, male models as the norm for leadership research.

Adding to the conceptual framework and theory concerning the absence of documentation and research of minority female leaders in education, Mackay and Etienne (2006) challenged that ethnic minority educators' and leaders' understandings of their lives had largely been unrecorded and arguably repressed by research agendas which assumed that intending and practicing educators and educational leaders were White and male. Moreover, epistemological research about minority women, particularly African American women, conducted by women of color was regarded as unremarkable or dubious by mainstream society and was unlikely to be published by professional journals (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Rusch, 2004). As a result, related conclusions were largely ignored or dismissed, rarely being integrated into administrative leadership theory (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003).

The purpose of this review of literature was to deconstruct and discuss the dominant themes in the literature that were indicators of trends and practices that negatively impacted and minimized the career aspirations of minority leaders in educational leadership. A core focus of this work was to also identify the strategies, resources, and opportunities utilized by minority female leaders that enhanced and facilitated growth and promotion in their respective careers amid the barriers and challenges.

### **Research Questions**

Three research questions which follow were addressed in this study.

1. What are the experiences of minority female leaders in educational leadership?
2. What are the pathways to leadership for minority women in the fields of primary and secondary education?
3. What are perceived barriers that minority women experience when seeking leadership positions in education and what are their strategies for success?

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

A generic qualitative study was conducted to examine the perspectives and experiences of being a principal or assistant principal as well as family support and cultural background, sense-making of school leadership, leadership styles/traits, and power among nine minority female principals and assistant principals in a southeastern state. The generic qualitative study was an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon that focused on the external experiences related to perception, opinions, and reflective consciousness (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). A generic qualitative approach was appropriate since the goal was to study, describe, and compare different experiences that provided insight into an issue or phenomenon (Creswell, 2008). For the purposes of this study, the researcher examined the experiences of minority women who had become leaders within educational leadership.

Participating minority principals and assistant principals from various school sites, which included kindergarten through high school, were selected based on position, race, and gender. An interview protocol guide was used to guide each interview. The data from the interviews were gathered, organized, and analyzed for common themes across interview categories which included (a) experiences of being an educational leader, (b) making sense of the leadership role, (c) cultural background and family support, (d) leadership style/traits, and (e) power.

#### **Aim of the Study**

The purpose of this generic qualitative research study was to explore the experiences of minority women who pursued and secured a leadership position within educational leadership. The purpose of this study was to add to the existing scientific

knowledge in the field of leadership for minority females. Additionally, a secondary purpose of this study was to provide educational insights for the wider audience in the field of educational leadership in terms of the experiences of minority women as educational leaders.

### **Qualitative Research Approach**

Creswell (2008) asserted that multiple instrumental case studies served the purpose of illuminating an issue by studying several cases that provided insight into a specific issue or theme. Additionally, qualitative research was concerned with the nature, explanation, and understanding of phenomena (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2009) and was a strategy to gather information about the experiences, perspectives, and beliefs of the participants in a study as they related to specific research questions or phenomena. In the utilization of interviews as a method of gathering data in qualitative research, well-designed questions and a consistent approach were imperative to ensure and maintain rigor or trustworthiness which determined the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the study. Similarly, utilizing the generic qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth observation into authentic, true-to-life perspectives and permitted focus on complex social issues (Percy et al., 2015). Likewise, the utilization of the generic qualitative method expanded knowledge for a selected group of individuals, organizations, or related phenomena. The researcher sought to develop an in-depth understanding by collecting data from multiple participants which was described and compared to provide insight into the phenomena (Creswell, 2008).

The generic qualitative approach was the best fit for this study compared to other qualitative approaches since the writer sought to understand the participants' reflective

experiences. As suggested by Percy et al. (2015), generic qualitative research was an ideal qualitative approach since the aim of the study was to focus on perceptions, opinions, or attitudes related to experience. That is, the reflective consciousness of those who experienced the phenomena were valuable. Since this writer sampled reflective experiences of participants regarding their roles as leaders in education, a generic qualitative study using thematic analysis was appropriate.

Phenomenology was originally considered for this investigation. However, recognizing that this approach focused on pre-reflective consciousness, it would not have been appropriate for this study since the desire to learn about the reflective consciousness of minority females relative to their specific experiences would not align to phenomenology. A grounded theory approach was also considered, but, was deemed inappropriate since this writer would not examine a cognitive process over time. Finally, an ethnographic approach would not be suitable for examining the phenomenon in this study since the focus was not on understanding a specific culture.

### **Participants**

This study consisted of seven minority women principals and two who were assistant principals in primary to senior high schools within a southeastern state. Purposeful sampling (Jean-Marie, 2013; Reed, 2012; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008) was utilized in the selection of participants who served as leaders in various public schools that serve kindergarten through 12th grade. The inclusion criteria for this study required participants who were minority female educational leaders in a southeastern state for eligibility to participate. These specific criteria were what the researcher needed to help answer the central research questions in this qualitative study.

This researcher secured the identification and email addresses of minority female principals or assistant principals from human resources departments in school districts in the target state after seeking institutional approval from both the school districts and the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), which provided oversight for this investigation to ensure ethical compliance with studying human subjects. Once approved, individual email invitations seeking participation in the study were sent to minority leaders within the approved school district(s). The email included the invitation to participate and provided the researcher's contact information for participants to express an interest in participating in the study. Prospective participants were screened to ensure they met the inclusion criteria to participate in this study.

After ensuring that prospective participants met the inclusion criteria, a time for an interview was arranged on a mutually agreed upon location, date, and time. Each participant was interviewed regarding their experiences of being a principal or assistant principal, family support and cultural background, sense-making of school leadership, leadership styles/traits, and power. Interviews with respondents continued until saturation was achieved. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect identity and place of employment.

Purposeful sampling (2014; Jean-Marie, 2013; Reed, 2012; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008) was utilized in the selection of school leaders who met the inclusion criteria for this study. The generic qualitative research approach was implemented using a semi-structured interview protocol adopted from Wrushen and Sherman (2008) to record the experiences and perceptions of female minority leaders. The data resulted from the responses of these leaders were organized by recurring themes and sub themes using

thematic analysis with constant comparison.

### **Data Collection Tools**

The data collection tool that was utilized with the selected subjects was an interview guide that was previously implemented in a study by Wrushen and Sherman (2008). This interview instrument was utilized in their study to explore the experiences of minority female leaders and examine the differences and commonalities of women leaders from different ethnic backgrounds. See the appendix for an overview of the full interview protocol. The interview guide was organized to address the following categories related to minority women leaders' experiences: (a) family support and cultural background, (b) sense-making of school leadership, (c) leadership styles/traits, and (d) power.

### **Procedures**

This researcher sought IRB approval which granted the researcher permission to identify minority female leaders appointed in local school districts as participants for the study. Written consent was obtained from all participants and the study was implemented in compliance with the application process and procedures for Nova Southeastern University's IRB. The researcher obtained permission from all principals and assistant principals chosen as participants and all school sites.

From the list of principals and assistant principals provided from the school district, a letter of introduction and invitation to participate in the study were emailed to each leader who met the inclusion criteria for the study. Each participant met the specified criteria: (a) were female, (b) were a member of a racial group that is non-White, (c) were currently appointed as an assistant principal or principal, (d) were employed by a

public school district in the target state. The letters included an explanation of the study, the researcher's intent and purpose for the study, the rationale for the necessity of feedback from the participants, as well as the researcher's role as it pertained to researcher biases, reliability, and confidentiality. From the received responses, the researcher selected nine as participants for the study.

Prior to the beginning of each interview, written consent and confirmation of participation was obtained from each of the principals and assistant principals. Interviews, utilizing open-ended questions, were scheduled at a specified date and time for each participant at a neutral location, if prospective participants lived within a reasonable geographic location from the researcher. If necessary, the researcher utilized telephonic interviews for those who lived a farther distance from the researcher. Individual semi-structured interviews were utilized. Individual interviews were invaluable in that they provided information about the social milieu in which people existed and included personal attitudes, perspectives, and experiences that were integral in qualitative research (Ryan et al., 2009). In creating an atmosphere that fostered maximum transference of this information from participant to researcher, it was imperative to include interviews with open-ended questions to facilitate in-depth responses from participants, be conscious and respectful of the participant's time, to schedule interviews in a setting comfortable for the participant with minimal distractions, conduct interviews with maximum attentiveness and genuine care, and make sure that the discussion remained focused on the targeted areas of study (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

The interview guide was used for the purpose of collecting responses to the questions contained in the interview guide. Responses were coded to protect anonymity

of the participants and their work locations. Each participant was interviewed face-to-face, individually, and was provided the opportunity to respond to all questions in the interview guide. Each interview session was scheduled to last up to 90 minutes and the nine interviews were completed within one month. The responses to all the questions that pertained to the research questions were analyzed and categorized by themes and sub-themes.

### **Data Analysis**

Each participant was interviewed utilizing an interview protocol which allowed for the freedom of expression through semi-structured, open-ended questions regarding how the participants experienced their roles as assistant principals and principals, barriers encountered, and strategies utilized that promoted success. The qualitative data collected from the participants' responses from the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed via a transcription service. The researcher conducted member checking (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Jean-Marie, 2013; Ryan et al., 2009) by providing the participants copies of transcripts for the purposes of verifying transcribed content to ensure it had been accurately recorded, which further validated the data interpretation by the researcher. The transcriptions and any other documents from each data collection point were analyzed by utilizing the constant comparative method to determine relevancy to the researcher's questions and to determine existing patterns, themes, and sub-themes. Identified patterns, themes, and sub-themes resulting from the data collected were reported and analyzed for the necessary support to legitimize the three research questions. Conrad (1982) posited that the constant comparative method was inclusive of "data collection, coding, and analysis with theoretical sampling in order to generate theory that

was integrated, close to the data, and expressed in a form clear enough for further testing” (p. 256).

In the utilization of the constant comparative method, the researcher employed the following steps as explained by Percy et al. (2015).

1. The researcher reviewed and became familiar with the collected data from the first participant (interviews, journals, field notes, records, and documents). Upon review, intuitively highlighted any sentences, phrases, or paragraphs that appeared meaningful.

2. The highlighted data were reviewed and compared to the research question to determine if the highlighted data were related to the question.

3. Eliminated all highlighted data that were not related to the research questions. Unrelated data were stored and filed separately; the researcher reevaluated these data later.

4. Provided a code or name for each set of data.

5. Clustered the sets of data that in some way were connected or related and established patterns.

6. Completed this process for the first participant’s data. The researcher coded and clustered the data of the first participant and as each participant’s data were analyzed, they were compared to the previously analyzed data. For the entirety of this process, each participant’s data were reviewed and analyzed and the researcher continued to compare and contrast the data that were analyzed with the data that had been previously analyzed in the study. Constant comparison emerged through this process.

7. During this process, data that corresponded to a specific pattern were identified and placed with the corresponding pattern and direct quotes were taken from the data

(transcribed interviews, field notes, documents, etc.) to clarify or explain developing patterns.

8. Throughout the process, the established patterns were studied and determined the emergence of overarching themes. This process involved combining and clustering all related patterns and themes.

9. Patterns and themes may have shifted and changed throughout the entire process of analysis as previously completed analyses were compared with new data.

10. After the analysis of all data, themes were arranged to correspond with supporting patterns. The patterns were used to bring clarity to the themes.

11. For each theme, the researcher wrote a detailed analysis that described the scope and substance of each theme.

12. Each identified pattern was described with supporting quotes from the data.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher provided a full explanation to the participants as to the intent and purpose of the study and obtained written and informed consent of all subjects who willingly participated in the study (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Ryan et al., 2009). Written informed consent was obtained prior to the commencement of each interview with each participant (Ryan et al., 2009). Participants were informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time, regardless of reason. The participants' identity and collected data were protected and anonymity ensured through the coding of participant pseudonyms and all data were stored securely and on password protected computers (Ryan et al., 2009). The researcher provided full disclosure of the results of the research to all participants and relevant stakeholders. Participants were informed how the

researcher proceeded and what was to be expected after the interview (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

### **Trustworthiness**

The accuracy of data collected from an interview was heavily dependent on how structured the interview was; therefore, it was imperative that the researcher adopt a consistent approach and well-designed questions to achieve rigor and trustworthiness (Ryan et al., 2009). The researcher was aware of and also ensured that interviews were standardized in the manner of implementation, how participants were selected, and how or if the interviewer influenced the interviewing process to minimize the risk of bias and enhance the rigor of the data (Ryan et al., 2009). This researcher maintained accurate evidence and documentation of individual interviews and demonstrated that the evidence collected aligned to the inquiry of the research questions. Moreover, to support the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher included detailed, step-by-step procedures for all aspects of the study to ensure transparency. This transparency increased the potential of other researchers to replicate the procedures of this study and obtain objective results, thereby increasing the dependability and credibility of the results of this study.

### **Potential Research Bias**

This researcher was interested in understanding the experiences of minority women appointed as principals or assistant principals and how those experiences had impacted their careers. The researcher was intent on learning of specific barriers that were encountered by the participants and strategies that were utilized to overcome barriers. Bias may have been potentially introduced through the use of inadequate questioning; in addition, the behavior specific roles demonstrated by the interviewer and

interviewee and the effect they may have had on the interview process were considered (Ryan et al., 2009). The utilization of detailed terms that were accurate, concise, and bias-free within the field of the researcher's focus were used (Creswell, 2013). For this study, the researcher properly collected, recorded, and stored all participants' responses to the interviews. In addition, the researcher recorded field notes and journaled personal feelings and perceptions throughout the data collection and analysis process as a means of guarding against biases and pre-understandings of phenomenon discovered during the study. The perceptions of barriers and strategies for success for the minority female assistant principals and principals were the central focus areas of this study.

### **Limitations**

There were possible limitations that may be present in this study. First, the limited number of subjects may not fully represent the experiences of all female minority educators appointed as principals and assistant principals. Further, participants in the study represented a small number of minority female leaders in a region and not across the United States where experiences may vary. Finally, even after assurances of confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed, participants may still be hesitant to provide transparent responses to certain items as a means of self-preservation.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of minority women who pursued and secured leadership positions in educational leadership. This chapter analysis was based on constant comparison thematic analysis for the generic qualitative research approach. An overview of the process for recruiting participants for this study was provided by the researcher. The participants of this study included minority female principals and assistant principals assigned to elementary or middle schools in a southeastern state. Their years of experience as educational leaders varied and most served in site-based teacher leader positions prior to their appointments as assistant principals or principals.

The analysis and findings from nine site based educational leaders who were interviewed are included in this chapter. Seven of the interviews were conducted at the participants' schools. The remaining two participants requested interviews by phone, which was an IRB approved procedure. The research design was qualitative and provided opportunities for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon. Data were collected using open ended semi-structured interview questions organized to address the following categories related to their experiences: (a) family support and cultural background, (b) sense-making of school leadership, (c) leadership styles/traits, and (d) power. The interview protocol questions were aligned to the following three research questions.

1. What are the experiences of minority female leaders in educational leadership?
2. What are the pathways to leadership for minority women in the fields of primary and secondary education?

3. What are reported barriers that minority women experience when seeking leadership positions in education, and what are their strategies for success?

### **Qualitative Results**

The data collected included interview responses to 15 questions regarding how minority female educational leaders experienced their ascension to leadership as well as their roles as principals and assistant principals. Nine minority female educational leaders agreed to participate in the interviews and provided full responses to all 15 questions. Interviews were recorded with a voice recording application and Microsoft Word (utilizing the dictation function). The researcher reviewed the transcribed interviews from Microsoft Word application and compared them for accuracy using the voice recordings. Transcripts were then sent to the participants to review for accuracy and to add any new information, if needed, as a form of member checking. This member checking helped promote trustworthiness of the data. To ensure anonymity of participant information, the following pseudonyms apply to respective participants and are used throughout where MFL represents minority female leader: MFL1, MFL2, MFL3, MFL4, MFL5, MFL6, MFL7, MFL8, and MFL9. Basic participant demographic information follows.

### **Participants**

Participants in this study met the eligibility requirements by (a) being a minority, (b) being female, and (c) currently serving as an assistant principal or principal in a school district in the southeastern United States where the study took place. After receiving IRB approval from both the sponsoring institution and the school district, the school district provided lists of prospective candidates. The researcher emailed prospective participants invitation letters requesting their participation in the study.

Interested prospective participants responded in person, via email, and by phone and the researcher screened each for her eligibility to participate in the study. A total of nine participants met the eligibility to participate. Of the nine, seven participants interviewed in person and two interviewed via telephone. The participants varied in years of experience as assistant principals and principals. All participants shared a variety of experiences related to the phenomenon of study.

### **Participants' Background**

**Participant 1 (MFL1).** This participant is a female, African American of Caribbean descent principal at a Title 1 elementary school. This is this principal's fourth year as principal. This participant previously served as a site based and district instructional coach and an assistant principal.

**Participant 2 (MFL2).** This participant is an African American female appointed as principal at a Title 1 elementary school. This leader previously served as an assistant principal for a couple of years.

**Participant 3 (MFL3).** This participant is an African American female principal at a Title 1 middle school. This participant has served as a principal for elementary and high school for five years. This participant previously served as a coach for sports in a middle school and as a high school dean and later assistant principal for two years.

**Participant 4 (MFL4).** This participant is an African American female, of Caribbean descent, principal at a Title 1 elementary school. This participant has been principal of her current school for three years. This leader previously served as a dean and an assistant principal in alternative and exceptional student education settings.

**Participant 5 (MFL5).** This participant is an African American female assistant

principal at a Title 1 elementary school. This leader has served as an assistant principal for three years. This leader previously served as an instructional coach, curriculum resource teacher, and as a multi-tiered systems and instructional support coach at site and district levels.

**Participant 6 (MFL6).** This participant is an African American female principal at a Title 1 middle school. This leader previously served as a guidance counselor and assistant principal.

**Participant 7 (MFL7).** This participant is an African American female assistant principal at a Title 1 multi-grade level school. This participant previously served as an assistant principal for four years. This leader has also previously served as a math and STEM coach.

**Participant 8 (MFL8).** This participant is a female, of Hispanic and African American descent, principal at a Title 1 elementary school. This participant previously served as an assistant principal and principal for 13 years. She previously served as an elementary and middle school principal.

**Participant 9 (MFL9).** This participant is an African American female principal at a non-Title 1 school. This leader previously served as a resource teacher and an assistant principal for an unspecified amount of time.

### **Participant Interview Protocol and Data Results**

The data collection tool that was utilized with the selected respondents was a 15-question interview protocol that was previously implemented in a study by Wrushen and Sherman (2008). This instrument was utilized to explore the experiences of minority female leaders in educational leadership. The interview questions were organized in the

categories of family support and cultural background, sense-making of school leadership, leadership traits, and power. The participants' responses were collected, reviewed, and transcribed by the researcher over a 13-week period.

Prior to each interview, written consent was secured, as required by IRB. Additionally, the participants were permitted to pose questions about the data collection process and any additional questions to ensure clarity concerning their participation. The researcher reiterated verbally to each participant that they could choose to withdraw from the interview at any time, without question. Once the interviews concluded and the researcher provided participants an opportunity to review the transcribed interviews, the data analysis process began. The duration of each interview was 30 to 90 minutes.

### **Sequential Analysis Steps**

To examine the experiences of minority women who pursued and secured a leadership position within educational leadership, the researcher applied the following data analysis procedures for a generic qualitative approach (Percy et al., 2015).

1. The researcher reviewed and became familiar with the collected data from the first participant (interview protocol, audio recordings, any notes gathered by the researcher during the interview process). The collected data were reviewed, and sentences, phrases, or paragraphs were highlighted that appeared meaningful.

2. The highlighted data were reviewed and compared to the research questions to determine if the highlighted data were related to the question.

3. All highlighted data that were not related to the research questions were eliminated. Unrelated data were stored and filed separately; the researcher could reevaluate these data later.

4. Each set of data was provided a name.

5. The researcher clustered data that were in some way connected or related and established patterns.

6. This process was completed for the first participant. The researcher coded and clustered the data of the first participant. Thereafter, the data of each participant was analyzed and compared to the previous data. For the entirety of this process, each participant's data were reviewed and analyzed, where the researcher continually compared and contrasted the data being analyzed with the data that had been previously analyzed in the study. Constant comparison emerged through this process.

7. During this process, data that corresponded to a specific pattern were identified and placed with the corresponding pattern and direct quotes were taken from the data (transcribed interviews) that clarified or explained developing patterns.

8. Throughout the process, the established patterns were studied, and the emergence of overarching themes was determined. This process involved combining and clustering all related patterns and themes.

9. Patterns and themes were monitored to determine if any had shifted throughout the entire process of analysis as previously completed analyses were compared to new data.

10. After the analysis of all data, themes were arranged to correspond with supporting patterns. The patterns were used to bring clarity to the themes.

11. For each theme, the researcher wrote a detailed analysis describing the scope and substance of each theme.

12. Each identified pattern was described and clarified by supporting quotes from

the data.

### **Presentation of Results**

Using the constant comparison thematic analysis steps outlined previously, the researcher analyzed the rich participant data by research question. The participant analysis that follows is broken down by each research question and the patterns that emerged for each participant, inclusive of direct quotes from the participants to support each pattern. Once all patterns for each participant are illuminated for each research question, the themes that emerged from the patterns for each participant are outlined. It is the themes for each research question that serve as the overarching answer to the respective questions from a comparison of all the participant data.

#### **Research Question 1**

What are the experiences of minority female leaders in educational leadership? To answer this research question, interview questions #1, #4, and #5 from the category “Family support and cultural background,” as well as questions #2 and #3 from the category, “Sense-making of your school leadership” were used. The following six patterns emerged: (a) importance of education, (b) strong religious beliefs, (c) work ethic, morals, and values, (d) diversity and cultural sensitivity, (e) impact of hidden biases, and (f) creating school culture. The responses of each participant will first be analyzed with these patterns in mind. The two resulting themes for this research questions follow: (a) personal faith and upbringing guide leadership and (b) establishing roles and school culture.

#### **MFL1 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Importance of education.** This pattern referred to the facilitation of

quality learning throughout life among people of any age group, cast, creed, religion, or region. It is the process of having achieved knowledge, values, skills, beliefs, and moral habits. “Work ethic and education were instilled in me and my five siblings at an early age” (MFL1).

**Pattern 2. Strong religious beliefs.** Strong religious beliefs referred to a belief in and reliance on God. Furthermore, this belief in God provided strength, guidance, resilience, wisdom, and a moral compass to execute leadership roles and tasks with responsibility and integrity.

So, that was a difficult time for me and the following year, where I thought I would be in a position and I was not and still working through the year. But again, I believe in God and my faith got me through that because that’s exactly where I was supposed to be and what I was supposed to do. (MFL1)

**Pattern 3. Work ethic, morals, and values.** Work ethic referred to the principle that hard work is intrinsically virtuous or worthy of reward. Morals and values referred to the behavioral aspects of a person. Morals were formed from early values. Morals were a system of beliefs that were taught for deciding good or bad, whereas values were personal beliefs that were intrinsically motivated. “In my culture, people are very hardworking, but for some reason, not perceived that way... We take pride in our work, it’s important” (MFL1). MFL1 also added:

I’m really, really big on work ethic and effort. I think, you know, culturally, people from my island are that way, although it’s not always perceived that way. It’s a big deal for us to be to work on time, to do our job right, and be recognized for a job well done. (MFL1)

**Pattern 4. Diversity and cultural sensitivity.** Cultural sensitivity was referred to as the understanding of racial, social, and cultural differences without judgement. Cultural factors considered include different standards, communication styles, and behaviors. Diversity referred to the understanding that individuals are unique and individual differences were recognized. These differences included dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, or other ideologies.

I think of myself as really diverse and I've had a lot of different experiences interacting with different types of people. Having all of these experiences has really allowed me to be able to get along with and communicate with a lot of different people when I need or want something. I grew up in a place where everyone was Black and I grew up with an affluent background. Coming into a Title I school, my mindset has always been, we're not doing anything different than the schools on the Eastside are doing. I make a really big deal about 'our school is like your school.' The kids look different, but we're the same. I want my kids to have different experiences and I push little things more than my counterparts. (MFL1)

**Pattern 5. Impact of hidden biases.** Hidden biases referred to behavior exhibited by some minority female leaders that alluded to the perception of self-isolation from nonminority leaders in certain settings. Doing so, maintained a sense of solidarity among other minority female leaders. Some leaders sensed that this was an expected and unspoken norm to be followed in specific environments.

I know sometimes professionally, no one will admit to it, sometimes when all the

administrators are together, there are pockets of people. All the Black women are way over here, and way over there, is a different group that's not Black at all. Me, personally, I'm going to sit where I wanna sit and with whom I'm comfortable with and who I have the most things in common with. I think my experiences culturally and so forth and so on, is the main foundation for this type of thinking. (MFL1)

**Patterns 6. Creating school culture.** Creating school culture referred to the way administrators and staff work together to establish shared beliefs, values, and assumptions. This fosters a collective culture of support from both administration and staff. This builds relationships where staff may be willing to work harder because they feel administration cares for them. "I'm big on relationships. I think it's important to build relationships with people" (MF1). She also added, "Doing little favors or whatever, makes a direct impact on academics because my teachers work a little harder which then translates to the kids getting what they need, which translates to when the scores came out over the summer" (MFL1).

### **MFL2 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Importance of education.** Education is critical in being a good leader. Understanding where people come from and how they got there is an important part of the process. "I did not tell a lot of people this, but I did not learn to read until I was in third grade" (MFL2).

**Pattern 3. Work ethic, morals, and values.** Being raised with purpose is critical to instill a lot of the principles that successful leaders go by today that helps to keep them grounded. According to MFL2, "We had very strong morals, a sense of purpose, we had

hope and you just keep trying. We were raised to be strong and determined. We were taught to be independent and to do everything and fix stuff.”

**Pattern 4. Diversity and cultural sensitivity.** As a leader, it is important to be cognizant and aware of stakeholders. That includes making sure that there is appropriate representation of culture in the staff. It makes leaders more conscious of their hiring practices and to make sure that students see a representation of who they are within the people that are surrounding them. “Diversity is powerful; I think it helped strengthen me. I think being aware of different cultures and practices within different cultures, really helps you as a leader to be able to service your families” (MFL2).

**Pattern 5. Impact of hidden biases.** Hidden biases referred to perceived or real pressure to adopt styles of compliance as it pertains to how minority female leaders chose to speak, express themselves through facial expressions, gestures, and matters of appearance. Hidden biases have been perceived as destructive in that they have led leaders to deny their authentic selves to matriculate into the White male model of leadership. According to MFL2,

In a corporate type atmosphere where a leader is in the minority within their field, they naturally need to code switch...they need to know how to maneuver and talk and socialize and network when they are the minority. It’s like, in order to be successful, you have to have those skills to operate in both types of environments. (MFL2)

**Pattern 6. Creating school culture.** Student achievement is the main goal school leaders strive to achieve. To make that happen, leaders need a faculty who care for students and their families. It takes a lot of planning and a strong team to make this

experience successful and it is important to value the ideas and feedback of the staff.

“We have sharing sessions where we talk and brainstorm and then come up with strategies and ideas together, which definitely gets more buy in. I believe in servant leadership. I appreciate the teacher’s dedication to the kids” (MFL2). It takes a team to ensure that student achievement and learning increase. “I think the more they see that I am their biggest cheerleader, they’re cheerleaders for the kids” (MFL2). A leader simply showing that she cares has a tremendous impact in building organizational culture, which benefits everyone, especially students.

### **MFL3 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Importance of education.** Coming from a family where education is encouraged and regarded in high esteem is important for instilling a sense of purpose in a future leader, particularly one who will work in education. “We’re a very tight knit family and we had that education mindset. It’s always been instilled in me to work with kids. I got a lot of my educational background from members of my family” (MFL3).

**Pattern 3. Work ethic, morals, and values.** Leadership is built on a foundation of morals and ethics. In a sense, it is a *failure is not an option* mentality. “Growing up in a neighborhood similar to the neighborhood in which my kids live right now kinda helps show my kids here that you don’t have to be a product of your environment” (MFL3). If a leader has that inner drive and determination based on the values with which he or she was raised, it helps foster an environment that anyone can be successful.

**Pattern 4. Diversity and cultural sensitivity.** Educational leaders must be able to interpret data as well as possess knowledge of the needs of their student populations to provide curriculum, services, and staff to provide for the academic needs of all students.

“I had a way of attracting the more challenging kids and working in school transformation kind of helped me reach the students that I worked with, Title I, which were usually minority students from impoverished backgrounds and learning disabilities” (MFL3). It is important to be data driven and goal oriented and not allow perceived obstacles to persist. If there is a barrier, school leaders need to determine next steps to ensure that students are learning and achieving at the same level as at any other school. “Socio-economic background, race, color, none of that is an excuse not to learn or not to teach. I’m just not going to give up. I’ve always just had that ‘failure is not an option’ mentality” (MFL3).

**Pattern 5. Impact of hidden biases.** The experience of leadership is not the same for everyone. “I’ve always had to work hard for what I have, growing up and even now in life” (MFL3). She continued, “I have to work harder than my White counterparts in this position. I can’t do what my White counterparts can do. I have to work harder, no matter what.” For example, if the minority female leader needs to hold people accountable and they have not been held accountable before, she may be labeled as hostile. Even if she has had major achievements overall, one negative data point might stand out above the successes. “Because I’m a Black female, they’re gonna look at that one bad year that you had. It just kinda negates everything. I have to always be on guard, you know” (MFL3).

**Pattern 6. Creating school culture.** It is important to set expectations, structures, and guidelines that you expect others to follow. As a leader, it is critical to keep an open mind. When delivering messages and when speaking to teachers, it is not as important what is said, but how it is said. “I believe in creating an environment that is supportive of my students, staff, and parents, but I don’t believe in letting nonsense

happen” (MFL3). In addition, MFL3 feels that “you have to be understanding and be able build and maintain relationships with... students and their families, staff, and the community.” A leader’s role changes day-to-day and often minute to minute. For example, an educational leader is a support system for students and their families, and to staff. A leader is a disciplinarian to students and sometimes, staff. And, a leader is a mentor to students and staff. “I create an environment where for some students, they receive the most structure in their lives. The stress and accountability levels are high for me as a leader” (MFL3).

#### **MFL4 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Importance of education.** Education is extremely important for the success of a leader. “Both my parents were educators. My Mom was like ‘You should be a teacher’” (MFL4).

**Pattern 2. Strong religious beliefs.** Grounded in strong religious beliefs and convictions, these leaders were able to make decisions and stand in the strength of who they were created authentically to be. “I was growing spiritually, and I felt like I would tell my clients, ‘Ok, you need to just find Jesus’” (MFL4). MFL4 added:

I see it in some of my colleagues, except for those who’ve really come into the know of who they are in Christ. He so designed you to be female and minority, right? Once you recognize that He created you in this being for a purpose, you’re like, ‘Ok, let’s go forward.’

**Pattern 3. Work ethic, morals, and values.** Minority women leaders of Caribbean descent expressed disbelief and anger as a result of the marginalization that they experienced as they matriculated into American culture. The culture shock was in

part due to seeing minority women in prominent and distinguished positions in their homelands, yet, being ostracized for those same characteristics in Western culture. “I am of Caribbean descent and I grew up on an island where I was not a minority” (MFL4). She added, “I did not grow into that understanding, of being a minority, until I transitioned to coming to America. I had not lived that in my formative years, it wasn’t something that was even spoken about.” For MFL4, all her presidents were Black and many were women in leadership. She did not have the experience of being a minority. “I wasn’t raised to feel less than. I came into a place where the people who looked like me had experiences that were different from mine” (MFL4).

**Pattern 4. Diversity and cultural sensitivity.** It is critical for leaders to have more than tolerance for the diversified cultures represented in their schools. School leaders must also develop and continue to expand their knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of those cultures as well and engage in activities that personally connect them to those cultures. Doing so may better enable them to effectively and objectively plan for instructional initiatives to reach the needs of all students. “I think that it is good for anyone, especially minorities to see what else is beyond the Western culture. You need to see people like you in positions of power” (MFL4). She also felt that “if you’ve never experienced being a minority, especially in your formative years, you don’t know what it means” (MFL4).

**Pattern 5. Impact of hidden biases.** Minority female educational leaders often feel pressured to adopt styles of compliance in regards as it relates to how they choose to express themselves in how they choose to speak, gestures, facial expressions, and appearance. “I have tried many different things. I tried talking like some folks and acting

like some folks to be accepted” (MFL4). It was not until a colleague told her that the only thing others see when she walks into a room is Black that she started to question the way she talked and carried herself. “I unintentionally developed a lingo and my sister called attention to it one day and she said, ‘What are you doing? You don’t talk like that!’ I didn’t realize that I had developed this lingo to belong, you know” (MFL4).

She felt that many of the families she interacted with thought she was better than them. “I realized it was the way I spoke, the way I carried myself” (MFL4). She added that, “it felt lonely.”

**Pattern 6. Creating school culture.** Creating school culture involves creating systems and initiatives that promotes student achievement and success. The primary focus is to maintain consistency with those students and to build and maintain relationships with all key stakeholders. “You gotta care about kids. If it gets to the place where you care more about the score and the school’s grade, I just can’t” (MFL4). She does her best every day and believes it is about what is being done for the kids every day to make them see a future for themselves, something that propels them towards the future. “I am a reflective person, and I continually ask myself, ‘Am I doing what I need to do for my students and their families? Am I doing what I need to do for teachers?’” (MFL4).

### **MFL5 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Importance of education.** Dedication to higher learning is valued by these educational leaders. Many commit to the educational process to the point of earning more advanced degrees and certifications than their counterparts and family members. “I graduated with my doctorate degree. I am the first educational doctor in my family. I

have the most educational experiences in my immediate family as well. I really value education” (MFL5).

**Pattern 3. Work ethic, morals, and values.** A strong sense of determination and drive are possessed by educational leaders. Their passion for students being and performing at their highest level academically served as the catalyst and source of inspiration to lead teachers and students to success and to maximize the educational experience. “The thing that drives me is my passion and determination for seeing students succeed in becoming the best they can possibly be” (MFL5). MFL added,

I know it sounds cliché; they say always do what’s best for kids. While it’s nice to have your teachers like you and all of that, and for the most part, I have a good rapport with my teachers, but like I always tell them, at the end of the day, I’m not really here for them, I’m here for these kids. I’ve always wanted to do what’s best for children, always. So, that’s kind of been my driving force, is just remembering the reason why I not only went into education, but also became a school leader because I want students, especially minority students, to get and receive the best education they possibly can.

**Pattern 4. Diversity and cultural sensitivity.** Being able to facilitate success by sharing experiences that shaped the future of other female educational leadership aspirants, minority, and non-minority, was deemed as desirable and powerful. “I think for me, as a Black female leader, for the most part, I’ve found that I surround myself around other positive strong Black female leaders when I’m able.” She feels that using her own experiences enables her to help other minority and non-minority women who are pursuing leadership opportunities in education. “Just being able to take my experiences

and then using those experiences to help shape someone else's future. I think that's pretty powerful" (MFL5).

**Pattern 5. Impact of hidden biases.** MFL5 acknowledged that sometimes, especially as a Black female leader, some may look at her and other minority leaders as too outspoken. "We know what we want, typically, and sometimes that persistence, and I like to call it 'the passion,' you know, the way that we sometimes express ourselves" (MFL5). She feels that others do not necessarily know how to handle such expressiveness. "Sometimes, it could be quite uncomfortable because you're always looked at in the room as that, you know, 'that's the angry person'" (MFL5).

**Pattern 6. Creating school culture.** Effective school leaders create a standard and maintain positive school culture by providing support to students and their families and to teachers. Emotional support for students and staff, the provision of resources, and learning opportunities to better equip parents from administrative staff are essential in setting the climate on school campus. According to MFL5:

I build relationships. I deal with angry and upset parents. Of course, I deal with students on the disciplinary side, as well as non-disciplinary, you know, just encouraging them. I have to deal with teachers. I'm also the lead administrator on our new teacher program, so I work very closely with all of our new teachers and helping them not only get them aboard at our school district and make sure they have the resources they need in order to be successful. I support teachers by doing classroom walkthroughs, help lead PLCs, and provide professional development.

### **MFL6 Analysis**

**Pattern 2. Strong religious beliefs.** The adoption of Christian beliefs began in

childhood for these leaders and remained fixed into adulthood. “As a young child, there were a lot of things instilled in me as far as my Christianity...” (MFL6).

**Pattern 3. Work ethic, morals, and values.** Strong religious beliefs and values that were learned in childhood were often maintained into adulthood and were manifested in the behavior of these leaders. “...Strong family structure, I think that plays a major part in my overall leadership skills” (MFL6).

**Pattern 4. Diversity and cultural sensitivity.** While race and gender are dominant factors in education when reconciling diversity within a school’s community, it is also vitally important to consider presenting socio-economic factors. Socio-economic factors are often strong determinants of the value of education for a community and may provide insight to the level of support for learning and the school that may be expected. “In my current situation, culturally, there’s been no differences from what is considered to be mainstream other than maybe, only from a socio-economic or financial status kind of thing” (MFL6). However, she has worked as a leader in different, more affluent communities, and that was different for her due to the level of respect for the field of education. “Different communities value education more than others. In my current situation, education is not valued to the depths in which I value it...” (MFL6). She feels that working in a diversity of educational avenues has helped to broaden her abilities as a leader. “...It has definitely given me the opportunity, the experience, and exposure in order to be able to work with any facet of education” (MFL6).

**Pattern 5. Impact of hidden biases.** Working harder than non-minority, male counterparts to prove leadership capability has been a common concern and occurrence for educational leaders that are minority and female. Assertiveness demonstrated to

facilitate tasks and responsibilities were often misconstrued and negative character assessments and disrespect were often directed towards these leaders.

In some instances, I've felt that I had to prove myself as a leader more so than my male nonminority counterparts. I'm able to hold my own because I know my job and I perform it well, even in spite of attempts to undermine my authority. I'm well aware that it may be because I'm female and African American. When I presented myself assertively in word or deed, I was often characterized as aggressive. (MFL6)

**Pattern 6. Creating school culture.** A school leader must be confident in her own abilities and unique style in establishing relationships, building constituency, and establishing the climate in schools. "I think the thing for me is knowing your leadership style...Doing what's best for you, your school, for your students, for your parents, for your community" (MFL6).

### **MFL7 Analysis**

**Pattern 2. Strong religious beliefs.** Christian beliefs were described as foundational and were instilled during the childhoods of many minority female leaders. Many assert their resolute faith-based upbringing with the strengths and values that they possess as educational leaders. "I have a Christian upbringing. I was raised around my great grandmother. She wasn't the richest person in the world, but she was a very, very God-fearing person" (MFL7).

**Pattern 3. Work ethic, morals, and values.** Educational leaders assert that the belief systems that they currently possess and desire to pass on to those under their tutelage were those taught and reinforced in them during their upbringing. Those values

were described as foundational to their authentic selves. “I guess the things that make me who I am...would... be my upbringing. My values...my beliefs are what I want my legacy to be...I just try to do that with seeds that I plant within students” (MFL7).

**Pattern 4. Diversity and cultural sensitivity.** Students that attend Title I schools are often from families of lower socio-economic backgrounds and may have limited exposure to enriching and life changing experiences that facilitate a keener awareness of diversity, develop increased cultural sensitivity, and enriching learning opportunities. Knowing this, leaders may proactively plan for learning experiences to provide that exposure and enrichment for students. Cultural integrity in leadership also provides a heightened awareness and deeper understanding for the students, their families, and the community that is being served. “I believe students should be exposed beyond their neighborhoods. My mom and grandmother exposed me to the world through travel. You see different cultures and you see different experiences” (MFL7). She realized that while working with Title I students that their exposure was limited. As a leader, she has always felt it critical that when a child leaves the classroom, they should be able to compete with anybody outside of the classroom. “So, I was very much into taking them to competitions, taking them on field trips, taking them to colleges and universities so they can see what superior looks like” (MFL7). She feels that the experience of seeing things outside of their community will encourage students to bring things back to their own community. “I always wanted kids to have experiences that maybe their parents can’t provide, or they are not even aware of how to give it to them, or how to do it. I was really into that, especially with the minorities and females” (MFL7).

In addition, MFL7 stated, “My cultural experiences have shaped me as a leader by

making me more aware and sensitive to the backgrounds of my students and even staff’ (MFL7). She recognizes that although people may look like us, it does not mean that they have had the same experiences. As a leader, she feels it imperative to develop an appreciation for such differences and learn from them. “It gives you a better idea of how to offer support and provide a basis for leveling the field and improving performance, especially for kids.”

**Pattern 6. Creating school culture.** In order to establish school culture, school leaders must be able to establish effective communication among stakeholders. When feedback is received, it would be beneficial for school leaders to reflect on what has been shared to establish alignment with school goals and initiatives. “I listen to the feedback that I receive from students and the teachers, like a thank you, or when a kid says ‘I figured it out’, or after you’ve fussed at one of the kids and they come back and apologize and nobody had to tell them to do it” (MFL7). These types of exchanges, whether with students, parents, or staff, builds a rich rapport with them that undoubtedly leads towards a culture of trust.

### **MFL8 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Importance of education.** Strong familial support and commitment to education empowered and reinforced academic excellence throughout the lives and academic careers of educational leaders. Education was perceived as the gateway to independence and success in life. “My father is a retired teacher and my mother at a high school as a guidance secretary and clerk. So, parents come from working within the educational system” (MFL8). When growing up, her parents experienced extreme poverty and homelessness, and both saw education as bridge out of that experience. This

was instilled in her and is what she has passed on to her children. “I have four children and I instill in them the importance of education. I do not believe every child has to go to college, but I do believe that a child has to do something post-secondary” (MFL8).

**Pattern 2. Strong religious beliefs.** Despite facing challenges and indifference, these school leaders remained steadfast and unmovable in faith in God. This unyielding faith provided reassurance and courage to believe that barriers were stepping-stones to the next success. Education was not perceived as a job or career, but rather a calling from God, so perseverance and endurance were required, and success was expected and rewarded because of their faith in Him. “It’s okay, you know. God’s got a blessing” (MFL8).

Growing up, she developed the feeling that as a woman, people expect you to be more nurturing than what she believes she was authentically made by God to be. MFL8 stated:

This is a purpose and a calling and a ministry. I’m not telling you have to believe in God, but if you don’t believe in God and you don’t have a vision and understand that the Bible tells us in a leadership role, we’re being held accountable for that we lead just like a pastor of a church. If I’m not good to my people, and I’m not doing what they need me to do, then I’m hindering whatever purpose God has for them because their purpose is tied up in my leadership. I felt like my purpose was about to be taken from me and I was getting ready to be outside of God’s will. (MFL8)

**Pattern 3. Work ethic, morals, and values.** Effective school leaders must possess the focus and drive to create and maintain learning opportunities and

environments that maximize the potential of teachers and the students assigned to them. That passion and focus should target the deficit areas that teachers and students may have with resulting plans and initiatives to increase mastery and competency for both, so that ultimately student learning and achievement is increased. “My parents instilled in me, ‘you can do whatever you want, but you have to have an education and whatever it is that you want to do, it needs to be something that you’ll be happy doing’” (MFL8). From those childhood experiences, she realizes that her true passion in life is to help children. She is anchored by discovering what is best for them. “I have the personal philosophy that there are no good and bad students. I have kids with large skill gaps, whether the skill is behavioral, social-emotional or academic. I have kids with small gaps in those three areas” (MFL8).

She also acknowledged that she has “...teachers with large gaps in their pedagogy and teachers with small gaps in the pedagogy. What gives you the perception or illusion of them being a good or bad teacher is how coachable they are. It’s challenging. You’re challenged” (MFL8). However, she does not see these outcomes as bad students or teachers. She sees this as new possibilities. A way to help fill in the gaps as a leader.

**Pattern 4. Diversity and cultural sensitivity.** Educational leaders are charged with the responsibility of disaggregating the data of students. Often, data are categorized along racial lines. Minority female educational leaders are disproportionately appointed to Title I schools that historically have higher numbers of minority students. Programs and initiatives implemented to address students and their achievement include larger numbers of minority students, giving the perception that these leaders are only focused on the brown students when the areas addressed may have been more socio-economic in

nature than race. “I wasn’t advocating just for the Black kids. I was simply trying to advocate for children who needed additional support no matter what socio-economic, what color, what faith, what language they spoke. It didn’t matter to me” (MFL8). She did have experiences working in school districts where structures to promote diversity were minimal. As a result, she was even labeled by the district as someone she did not identify as. “Although I’m of Hispanic descent, the district labeled me as Black even though I informed them that I had checked Hispanic. I was told ‘Oh, we thought you were Black.’ So, I felt being half Hispanic and half Black, I was forced to deny a part of who I am” (MFL8). She felt like she had to choose to identify as Black or White. In that district, being Hispanic was not really acknowledged; instead, you were considered White. “A lot of the conversations and data presentations...had to be about how all the other children benchmark to the White kids...They didn’t ask me about my Hispanic or other groups...” (MFL8).

Having these cultural experiences helped MFL8 to better relate to and understand her students. She found that to best understand why they are performing a certain way, it is important to examine the social and emotional components they are experiencing.

“What we’re not going to do is railroad my children, Black, White, Hispanic, or anybody else” (MFL8).

**Pattern 5. Importance of hidden biases.** Hidden biases continue to be detrimental to minority female leaders in leadership. Many are pressured to behave in ways that stifle their true and authentic selves in order to conform to Eurocentric male norms and for their behavior and actions to not be negatively misconstrued and maligned. “I’ve found that being a Black female administrator, your passion is often perceived as

you're being the 'angry Black woman' when you're advocating for something" (MFL8).

She feels that there are times when working with other administrators, especially White males and sometimes, White females, she must hold back on some of the things she wants to say. "...I can't say that this is a Black/White thing, but what I can say from my experience being the minority administrator...where I only worked with other White people, that my perception is...I was expected to be quiet" (MFL8).

**Pattern 6. Creating school culture.** Educational leaders build positive school culture by establishing norms that include positive and transparent relationships with students and teachers. The provision of support from the leaders is foundational. It is imperative to develop growth in teacher pedagogy, student learning and achievement. "I make an effort to connect and build relationships with my students and staff" (MFL8).

MFL8 meets regularly with her assistant principal and leadership team to ensure that the goals for the students, staff, and campus are clarified and that progress is monitored. She conducts classroom walkthroughs and meets with teachers to share her observations. She also facilitates initiatives and programs that will increase student learning on the campus for all learners. "I'm responsible for the hiring of teachers for my school, attend and facilitate meetings with district personnel, and connect key stakeholders affiliated with my school and the community it serves" (MFL8).

### **MFL9 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Importance of education.** The significance of education for women in educational leadership was often instilled in them through early childhood experiences with family members. The encouragement from family members to pursue education was rooted in the belief that education would lead to attaining career aspirations and more

successful lives.

What makes me who I am is an old shack that belonged to my grandmother. She worked for a White family and stayed behind their house in a little shack. I used to stay with her a lot. She'd take me up there and make me read the salt and pepper shaker ingredients and things like that. She always told me that she wanted me to be someone. She couldn't read or write, she went to about sixth grade, but she told me she wanted me to be a teacher, a librarian, or something like that. I always held on to that piece. I think that piece is so integral to who I am because it came from someone who others would think nothing of. (MFL9)

**Pattern 2. Strong religious beliefs.** Minority female educational leaders assert that their careers are a *calling from God* which indicated that spirituality empowers them to operate in their leadership roles and was also the core of who they were as individuals.

It was hard to go any way as you are defining everything you want to do, but once you realize there is a higher power than I am and I submit to it, I went from classroom teacher to out of the classroom as a resource to two years later as an AP. I had to slow myself down because of the fear of going too fast. My pastor told me, when you hit the ground, you hit the ground with your knees bent and then you popped up and out because that was my destiny and I didn't realize it then, that this was my destiny that I was kind of trying to avoid. (MFL9)

**Pattern 3. Work ethic, morals, and values.** Women female leaders possess a strong sense of self determination that allowed these leaders to transcend the challenges and confines of race and gender. These women appeared driven by their own strength and sense of self resulting from lives sheer will, spirituality, and commitment. "You can't

back down. You need to kind of force your way into the world as a leader and develop your own philosophy” (MFL9).

MFL9 believes that she may sometimes push her constituents too much, especially when she sees their potential. “I’m really hard on people that I know can achieve. I used to push myself to the limit as well” (MFL9). However, she does not see herself as a micromanager. She allows her staff to determine where they want to grow and how they want to achieve that growth.

**Pattern 4. Diversity and cultural sensitivity.** School leaders must be able to effectively navigate diversity and cultural sensitivity in their schools to ensure the needs of students are met. Minority female leaders revealed that they were unprepared, by their upbringing, preparational programs during their courses of study in graduate programs, or training initiatives in their school districts, for the dynamics of their appointed positions as they relate to the impact that gender and race have on the business of school. “I really try to open myself up to more experiences because I’m from the South. The ability to accept people has always been part of my spirit, who I am” (MFL9). Interestingly, MFL9 had to learn on her own because she was taught not to trust people when she was growing up, especially those that did not look like her. “I’ve always been curious about all cultures...I was bolder than my parents and grandparents could be. I tried to think differently” (MFL9).

**Pattern 5. Impact of hidden biases.** Minority women in educational leadership are pressured to conform their behavior to ensure that their behavior aligns with that of non-minority males. Conformity was demonstrated in monitoring what these leaders said: remain silent, self-monitor facial expressions, and modify style of dress to comply with

expected norms. “Culturally, sometimes, I have to watch what I say. I just think it, but if I think it, I just have to walk away because I will say it” (MFL9).

**Pattern 6. Creating school culture.** Being able to develop positive relationships with school staff is critical for the success of the school. Fair, but firm leadership may be necessary to facilitate the goals and success for the school. It is also beneficial to lead from the standpoint of providing a safe school culture, that allows for exploration and growth. “...I build relationships and give broad expectations to those around me just because I don’t want to be the only one that knows everything in the building, that’s why I depend on so many people” (MFL9). Her goal is to develop leaders. She trusts them and knows that even if she were unable to come to work, her constituents would know exactly what to do because she has faith in their ability. However, she does recognize a generational gap between she and her staff and the importance of establishing protocols of respect while building culture. “...Most were born with my kids...they attempted to call me by my first name and I quickly corrected by letting them know to add ‘Mrs.’ to my last name and that was how they needed to address me in this manner” (MFL9).

### **Themes for Research Question 1**

**Theme 1. Personal faith and upbringing guide leadership.** Positive upbringing refers to being raised to believe that education was critical and played a vital role in a person’s success. Faith in God provided strength, purpose, and a sense of direction in the personal and professional lives of these leaders. Additionally, a strong work ethic along with strong morals and values were instrumental in guiding decisions, performing well in the daily operations of school, and reflecting in the caliber of work produced and the quality of relationships established with key stakeholders that included, but were not

limited to teachers and staff, students, their families, and the communities that they served.

Many of the participants cited that they were raised in families where members of their families, including parents, were educators. Academic excellence was described as the norm, the expectation. There was a background of poverty for some participants. For them, they were taught that education was the way to escape their impoverished condition and they were expected to be and do better. The research indicated that strong familial support and encouragement early in their academic careers was critical in the facilitation of not only achieving educational goals, but in the attainment of career aspirations.

For most of the participants, a strong faith in God was articulated. These participants stated that their faith gave them strength to stand in the face of obstacles, provided protection, and guided many of their decisions as leaders. The research suggested that spirituality appeared to empower these leaders to operate in excellence to serve communities, educate children, and lead staff despite challenges or struggles.

The participants cited having strong work ethic, morals, and values instilled in them beginning in their childhoods and remained firmly established in adulthood. Characteristics and values such as working hard, taking pride in the work, being driven, determined, and failing were not options cited by these leaders. These attributes served as compasses that navigated the actions, behaviors, and decisions of these women as educational leaders. Dantley (2005) indicated that the spiritual nature of these leaders was also the place where motivation and inspiration were housed and that these women learned from the examples of their parents the value of working for what they wanted and through education, they could experience better jobs and a happier life.

**Theme 2. Establishing roles and school culture.** Establishing roles and school culture refers to behaviors, experiences, and tasks that were implemented by these leaders to establish the culture on the campuses of their respective school sites. Patterns that emerged from this theme were negative perceptions or characteristics attributed to the female minority leaders' behavior; the necessity of diversity and cultural sensitivity; and jobs, tasks, or responsibilities perceived as pivotal in solidifying school culture.

The minority female leaders of this study cited that behaviors that they exhibited in the workplace were often scrutinized and criticized. They also stated that they perceived that the same behavior demonstrated by non-minority colleagues would not be met with the same intensity of criticism, if criticized at all. Minority leaders are often required to adjust their personal appearance and speech, deny their heritage, modify behavioral styles, and suppress facial expressions to matriculate and navigate leadership positions (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; McDowell, 2009; Moore, 2013). Style compliance issues were detrimental to minority women leaders in that they are conflicted with denying who they are authentically to fit into the White male model of leadership (Hekman et al., 2017; Hernandez & Marakami, 2016; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013).

Diversity and cultural sensitivity referred to initiatives and tasks adopted and implemented by these leaders to ensure that that the various cultures represented by the students and families in their schools are acknowledged, respected, appreciated, and included in the academic and social realm of the school's culture. Minority female leaders may often encounter obstacles and deficits in that they may be insufficiently prepared to work with diverse communities due to preparation initiatives ignoring the

interconnected nature of ethnicity and gender and the oppression observed in the schools where these leaders are often assigned (Genao, 2013; Karkouti, 2016; Reed 2012).

### **Research Question 2**

What are the pathways to leadership for minority women in the fields of primary and secondary education? To answer this research question, question #2 from the category “Family support and cultural background,” question #1 from the category “Sense-making of your school leadership,” questions #1 from the category “Your leadership styles/traits,” as well as questions #1, #2, and #3 from the category “Power” were used. Four patterns were noted for this research question: (a) mentor significance, (b) spiritual grounding and significance, (c) building relationships and supporting teachers, and (d) support and advocacy for students. Three themes emerged: (a) mentorship, (b) strength through spirituality, (c) building relationships with key stakeholders.

### **MFL1 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Mentor significance.** Mentor significance referred to people who were in positions of power who encouraged, taught, and facilitated the advancement of a mentee, within an organization. Mentorships were casual or formally sanctioned by an organization. The mentee was usually chosen and groomed by the mentor, who played a critical role in the promotion of others to leadership positions. “I was under the guidance and direction of a wonderful master principal” (MFL1).

**Pattern 2. Spiritual grounding and significance.** Spiritual grounding referred to the spiritual nature that these leaders possessed and indicated as necessary and empowered them to perform in and strive for excellence. In addition, these leaders

credited faith in God as pivotal in the provision of opportunities for leadership recognition and promotion. “My faith is strong...maybe somebody saw something in me that allowed the doors of opportunity to open, part of it, I believe has to deal with my faith” (MFL1).

**Pattern 3. Building relationships and supporting teachers.** Building relationships with teachers referred to educational leaders nurturing and maintaining behaviors that facilitated open communication, support, modeling, a sense of caring, trust, empowerment, and a spirit of collaboration which maximized teacher effectiveness and pedagogy. “I work hard to make sure teachers understand standards. I coach and support them through it. It’s so important that they know it” (MFL1). MFL1 also added, “I’m in classrooms every day, not necessarily to do observations or anything, but I’m there to see the kids and see the teachers. I’m in there so they can see my face” (MFL1).

MFL1 also believes that she is always connecting with her staff and letting them know that she is just as much part of the team as everyone else. “I’m not this mystical head person in my office running everybody like puppets. No, I’m here with you” (MFL1). It also helps her gauge the needs of her school by being present. “At these kinds of schools that are really needy, you can’t gauge the needs of your school and where you need to make adjustments because things look different on paper than they do in real life, right?” (MFL1).

Being able to motivate her constituents is a great way to build relationships with them. “I motivate people by establishing relationships with people. My relationships are individualized and based on what people need from me. How I am with each person is different...My impact motivates ownership” (MFL1). MFL1 is the kind of leader that

makes people feel like they can do more than what they are doing and that they are capable of it. She is persistent without coming across as a bully. “I get to know my staff personally to let them know I’m available to them and so that they will be comfortable communicating with me” (MFL1).

**Pattern 4. Support and advocacy for students.** Supporting and advocating for students referred to behaviors demonstrated by educational leaders that provided an academic culture conducive to maximizing learning experiences for students enrolled in their schools. This entailed leaders being well versed in student data to navigate pedagogy to align with collective and individual needs of students. “I take every opportunity to showcase excellence among my students...Every day I’m pushing the kids to their best potential...While I am goal oriented and data driven, we must still know and understand the individual needs of students” (MFL1).

### **MFL2 Analysis**

**Pattern 2. Spiritual grounding and significance.** Spirituality and faith were articulated as fundamental for minority female leaders in education. While they demonstrated being well qualified for their administrative appointments, these women still attributed their faith in God as the primary reason for their success and the opportunities afforded to them as educational leaders. “Doors of opportunity have opened for me, not because of me. I would say...part of it I...believe has to deal with my faith” (MFL2).

**Pattern 3. Building relationships and supporting teachers.** Building relationships with teachers referred to educational leaders establishing and maintaining behaviors that facilitated transparent communication, trust and collaboration. MFL2 self-

identifies as a transformational leader. She practices servant leadership every day, which she feels has helped to build positive relationships and trust with her staff. However, she knows that she is not perfect. “They know I will still tell them I don’t have all the answers and to help me, let’s work together, more like a partnership” (MFL2).

MFL2 believes that a key to success as a leader is to build community. “Building connections and relationships is powerful...Community building is definitely powerful. Networking and sharing ideas are powerful...I would say this is a big part of my job, you know, is the relationship building, strategizing, networking with colleagues” (MFL2).

**Pattern 4. Support and advocacy for students.** Support and student advocacy referred to behaviors demonstrated by educational leaders to provide an academic culture conducive to maximizing learning experiences for students enrolled in their schools. This includes programs and initiatives to maximize learning experiences and opportunities for students as well as building networks of collaboration among key stakeholders to secure resources and support for students. “They know that I keep students first, so, when we do decisions that are tough, the first thing I put up is, how is this going to affect students. That’s our main role, our main purpose. So, we look at everything. How is this going to affect our students? Then we make decisions based off that” (MFL2).

### **MFL3 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Mentor significance.** Having a mentor was critical to individuals seeking advancement within an organization. The mentor was instrumental in teaching the necessary skills that facilitated advancement and assisted the mentee in navigating the systems of the organization. Minority female educational leaders who were formally mentored, recognized the significance of mentorship and were themselves positioned as

mentors for incoming aspirants to educational leadership. “Starting off and coming into school transformation, there were people there who helped and guided a way for me to become a principal and pull more of my leadership towards that” (MFL3). In her mind, when you have been asked to go to a school as a mentor, or principal, for example, it should be considered a form of power.

**Pattern 3. Building relationships and supporting teachers.** Educational leaders were often required to serve many roles in efforts to support their teachers and staff. The roles were transient and ever evolving based on the needs of the teachers and staff. Minority female educational leaders described the interactions and dynamics between themselves and teachers as, initially, leadership directed and task oriented to collaborative and team centered, as rapport and trust were built and relationships were established.

MFL3 stated, “I feel like a coach, I’m a mother, I’m a sister, I’m a friend to just about all of my staff and students here at school. I think my role changes from minute to minute, day to day, year to year, depending on the situation and what my staff needs from me.” This leader further added:

When I first got here, I was more of a Joe Clark type of mentality, because at the end of the day, the school was one point from an “F”, the state was about to come in, and we had one year to move the school. The next year, it was more like, now we’ve got the structures in place, I was becoming more of a coach, more of let’s work together, collaborative. (MFL3)

She feels that it is important for the team to work together to build on what has already been built. In that sense, the leader is more of the facilitator, asking the team about their

thoughts, how to make things better, and how to make something happen.

MFL3 also required a standard of excellence from school staff. This leader had little tolerance for mediocre performance or excuses. This is indicated when this leader explained, “I’m a very fair leader. I’m a very firm leader. I’m a very consistent leader. There is no gray area with me. Either you know or you don’t” (MFL3). She also added:

I look at the quality of the work. Don’t come and bring something half done. If you’re going to do it, put your all into it. That’s what I instill in them. If you can’t do that, either I’ll get somebody to help you that I know is going to help you get it to that level, or I’ll just move you completely out and put the person in there that I know is going to get it to my level. (MFL3)

To MFL3, power represents people who are willing to follow their leader and go through the channels that they are leading. In other words, they are willing to get in the trenches with their leader. “I’ve had five or six people that have been to different schools with me. They are willing to follow me. They are willing to take my practices and keep them going in every school...and we’ve had success” (MFL3).

She lets her teachers know that it is imperative for them to abide by her rules if they want to work at her school. If they are unable to do so, as a leader, she has the power to not reappoint them. She also sees this as power to help that person and potentially help them flourish somewhere else. “I have the power to move you to certain spots and put people in place that will help make this what it needs to be” (MFL3).

**Pattern 4. Support and advocacy for students.** Supporting and advocating for students involved committing to establishing meaningful relationships with students that inspired them beyond circumstances and barriers, real or perceived. Efforts must also

ensure that all stakeholders are actively collaborating to provide best practices and services for the students, the school, and the community. "...I build relationships with students that most teachers would have troubles with. I've always had the most challenging students. It was the way I spoke with them" (MFL3).

MFL3 believes that everybody has different expectations, but that no matter what, the students need the best. The parents need the best. The community needs the best. The school needs the best. "I'm not going to half do something that I wouldn't want from my own children, or my own family or community" (MFL3).

#### **MFL4 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Mentor significance.** Mentor significance referred to people in positions of power with considerable knowledge and status within an organization. Mentors are critical in nurturing and facilitating promotion in the careers of aspiring leaders. Mentors provided support by offering truthful and thoughtful insight regarding the aspirant's developing skill sets and the navigation of the culture of the organization. The mentee was usually chosen and groomed by the mentor, who played a critical role in the promotion of others to leaders.

MFL4 believes in the power of mentorship and having someone who is truthful, who will be honest, and tell you where your shortcomings are and what things you need to really work on. "My mentor was a formidable force that supported me, helped me navigate through the challenges that I faced as an assistant principal, and then after as a principal. I couldn't have done it without her" (MFL4).

**Pattern 2. Spiritual grounding and significance.** Spiritual grounding referred to a reliance on God's ability to guide and define destiny and possessing the faith to trust in

the method of how it was orchestrated. Leaders asserted that through their spiritual connection, they intuitively knew when a shift was about to occur. While not always knowing the details of the shift, these leaders confirmed a resolute confidence in God's ability to work all things for their good. "For all the times that I was teaching, going into being a dean, and even being an assistant principal, I attribute...all the uncomfortable feelings to God saying it's time for a move, it's time for change..." (MFL4).

She feels that her relationship with God has always been her motivator for the next steps. "I don't know what God's next step is for me, but I know this, when He's ready for me to move, He starts ruffling the nest, it's time to go. He's gonna make it uncomfortable!" (MFL4). She also added, "I'm looking for that moment, cause I kinda feel that coming, cause my purpose is usually tied to one person. I'm finishing the task for that one person, and then it's time to go" (MFL4).

**Pattern 3. Building relationships and supporting teachers.** Building relationships with teachers referred to educational leaders nurturing and maintaining behaviors that facilitated open communication, support, modeling, a sense of caring, trust, empowerment, and a spirit of collaboration which maximized teacher effectiveness and pedagogy. MFL4 stated that:

I believe I'm a transformational leader, transforming students' lives for the better, their families' lives for the better, and teachers' lives for the better. It's about being that spark of inspiration to propel someone towards their purpose and their destiny, to water dry ground, to till that ground, to rejuvenate and empower teachers, to remind them of their purpose and their why.

This leader continued saying, "It's...to get them back to purpose if they lost it."

MFL4 believes that power represents vulnerability and that being transparent is critical in allowing people to see your faults and being okay with that” (MFL4). She embraces collaborative structures since one person could never have all the answers. “It’s about multiple people coming together to discuss something...to hear different viewpoints so that you can approach something in a way that has a combination of multiple perspectives...vulnerability empowers me and my staff” (MFL4). She has found through her leadership that people are always willing to help you, especially if there is rapport with them. “I know I don’t have all the answers. Be open and honest. Allow. Be transparent. That’s what makes me powerful” (MFL4).

**Pattern 4. Support and advocacy for students.** Supporting and advocating for students referred to behavior demonstrated by educational leaders that provided an academic culture conducive to maximizing learning experiences for students enrolled in their schools. Creating this culture involved making meaningful connections with students that demonstrated that students were recognized and deemed important to the school’s culture. “I believe I’m a transformational leader, transforming students’ lives for the better, their families’ lives for the better, and teachers’ lives for the better” (MFL4). She also said, “I try to connect with the kids, walking through the hallways, looking them in the eyes...those are powerful moments, taking the time to connect one on one with the masses” (MFL4).

### **MFL5 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Mentor significance.** Mentor significance referred to people who were in positions of power that encouraged, taught, and facilitated the advancement of a mentee within an organization. It also involved created and nurtured introductions and

relationships with fellow senior members within the organization. Mentorships were casual or formally sanctioned by an organization. The mentee was usually chosen and groomed by the mentor, who played a critical role in the promotion of others to leadership positions.

I think the things that have helped me to be successful is definitely having a mentor. Prior to really starting my journey on trying to become an assistant principal and hopefully, ultimately a principal, I have found that having a mentor, especially a female mentor, has been key. It was one of the keys in helping me be successful because they sometimes know things, more ways and strategies that you can work the system in a sense, to kinda get me noticed. Of course in my district, there's a lot of people obviously going for principalship and so having a mentor gives me kind of a leg up of, you know, different things to expect and being able to bounce things off of somebody's mind who has already traveled down the road in which I want to travel down. (MFL5)

**Pattern 3. Building relationships and supporting teachers.** Building relationships with and supporting teachers referred to being accessible to teachers and staff by offering support with their daily responsibilities and tasks. Staff collaboration, and support were also cited as significant by leaders for initiatives proposed to the school community. This was demonstrated with a stern, but *hands on* approach to facilitate and communicate a spirit of teamwork. “As a school leader, I work towards building relationships with the kids and the teachers so that both perform well” (MFL5).

MFL5 described herself by saying, “I’m very stern, but willingly work alongside the staff at multiple capacities. I’m there for my staff and I will help in any way that I

can.” Additionally, this leader asserted, “I work towards supporting the teachers, especially those that are new to our staff so that they are able to support the learning of our students” (MFL5).

While holding the staff accountable to expectations and competency, MFL5 expressed commitment to supporting her staff by stating, “I’m going to be tough on you, but at the end of the day, I’m going to be right there with you. You know, whether you’re teaching, cleaning up the cafeteria, greeting parents, whatever I need to do, I’m here.” This leader continued by commenting, “I’m someone who’s just like, always there for her staff” (MFL5).

MFL5 believes that as a leader, it is important to be able to get buy in from people, especially when you want an initiative to go well. “You must be able to communicate and consult with the ‘go to’ person, whether that person is a leader or not, the person who can make things happen because ultimately, that’s how I would define power” (MFL5). She feels that her power comes from being able to be real with people by being transparent. “Sometimes, I’ll be honest, it’s not me. Sometimes, it’s another colleague, who you know, kind of makes it happen because this might be an audience in which they are accustomed to and that person can get buy in” (MFL5).

**Pattern 4. Support and advocacy for students.** Supporting and advocating for students were in reference to creating and nurturing a mindset of limitless possibilities for learning opportunities for students and teachers, inspiring both to operate in excellence. “My work is always focused on doing the very best for kids. I push my kids towards being the very best that they can be” (MFL5). She added that, “as a school leader, I work towards building relationships with the kids and the teachers so that both perform well”

(MFL5).

She knows that it is important to also acknowledge that every child deserves a chance and can grow. “I facilitate initiatives and work with students that are in the lower performing groups...Don’t leave people behind, even when you think a person is never going to get it” (MFL5).

### **MFL6 Analysis**

**Pattern 3. Building relationships and supporting teachers.** Building relationships with and supporting teachers involves being able to facilitate communication that results in problem solving, a sharing of ideas, and mutual respect demonstrated by all parties. Effective communication fosters the building of relationships. Strong relationships are advantageous to the business of an organization and the individuals that it serves. Educational leaders that can facilitate communication among students, staff, parents, and the community, effectively connects the necessary stakeholders for the benefit of students.

For years, I thought my leadership style was more servant leadership. I do have a little servant in me because of my background and being a former counselor. I think when I talk to my colleagues, they say my arrow is longer when it comes to how I deal with certain situations, how I talk to and deal with people, how I deal with adversity, how I don’t allow my emotions to drive decision making, in having a different ear for the conversations, the much needed conversations.

(MFL6)

MFL6 knows it is important to treat people the way you want to be treated and being very understanding, listening, and empowering them. “My greatest asset or power

is empowering people, supporting people, helping people who want to aspire, and giving them the coaching, modeling, and the support that they need in order to achieve their goals” (MFL6).

**Pattern 4. Support and advocacy for students.** Educational leaders experience fulfillment and a sense of purpose in working with students and witnessing them fulfill academic goals. It is more rewarding to have former students express gratitude to teachers and leaders that powerfully impacted them while in school. “This work gives me the joy of helping students, helping shape, and mold them into the individuals that they’re becoming” (MFL6).

MFL6’s greatest joy in a day is working one-on-one or in small groups with students. She loves getting phone calls or emails from former students. “I think that’s the joy in the job itself, knowing that you, unlike other professions, you’re working with humans and you can help grow and develop and help them reach their fullest potential” (MFL6).

### **MFL7 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Mentor significance.** Mentors play a critical and significant role in the professional lives of aspiring leaders. Mentors encouraged, taught, created leadership opportunities for aspirants to refine and perfect leadership skill sets, and facilitated the advancement of a mentee within an organization. The mentee was usually chosen and groomed by the mentee, who played a critical role in the promotion of others to leadership positions.

I always go back to experiences I think as a school leader, things that made me successful were experiences that were given to me, even when I didn’t want them.

Like one leader, I truly looked up to, is one of my former principals. She would always ask me to do something and I say ask in quotations. She commented that I would roll my eyes when she asked me to do something, but she knew I would do it. Now that I'm a leader...I know how to handle those experiences. I was prepped to handle those experiences not knowing...she was preparing me... (MFL7)

**Pattern 2. Spiritual grounding and significance.** Spiritual grounding referred to the spiritual practices of these leaders and their engagement in the practices of prayer and meditation. Through these practices, these leaders gained clarity and perspective that empowered them with the ability to make decisions and facilitate necessary initiatives and activities to lead their schools. "It takes a lot of prayer; Ooooooh, a whole lot of prayer and a lot of reflecting" (MFL7).

**Pattern 3. Building relationships and supporting teachers.** Building relationships with teachers referred to educational leaders nurturing and maintaining behaviors that facilitated open communication, support, modeling, a sense of caring, trust, empowerment, and a spirit of collaboration which maximized teacher effectiveness and pedagogy.

MFL7 stated that she was available and willing to support teachers and staff in a multiplicity of ways by stating, "I'll jump in wherever to support teachers and staff, and do whatever needs to be done...to make sure the school is successful and ultimately the students are successful" (MFL7).

She likes to be aware of issues, problems, or concerns, and for people to share those with her as well as their potential ideas for solution. She wants her team to feel that they are part of the resolution by working together. Also, making sure they feel

appreciated. “Just providing that positive self-affirmation, even though they might not be rocking it out, but they need to know somebody appreciates me, somebody wants me here” (MFL7).

**Pattern 4. Support and advocacy for students.** Educational leaders provided support and advocacy for students by facilitating an academic community and culture that is conducive to maximizing learning opportunities and achievement. This included investing the effort to form meaningful relationships with students and facilitating behaviors and actions that demonstrate genuine care and concern for students. It is important for students to know that their leader cares. “It’s a powerful moment because the student understands that they have an advocate and somebody understands them” (MFL7). She added:

I make sure I get to know and understand the kid, even after I fussed at him, I tell him go into the world and be great or I tell him I love you. So just putting that back into them after sitting and talking to them is important. They’re not hearing that, they’re not getting that, and that’s why a lot of them are building up these walls in various ways. I know some people say, don’t hug kids, but I hug them from the side. That’s part of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, like you need that. I even hug their parents because it’s just part of being human. (MFL7)

### **MFL8 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Mentor significance.** Mentors played a vital role in the professional lives of minority female leaders. Not only were they instrumental in assisting these leaders in navigating the organization in their role, but they also served as confidants and figures of inspiration.

My mentor died, um early August. So, I was heartbroken about my school. I quit my career. I was at a sense of not knowing who I was anymore, 'cause I was an administrator. I had lost me in the process, and so, my mentor, who helped guide me, who I would normally go talk to, died before I could talk to her and tell her what happened. (MFL8)

**Pattern 2 Spiritual grounding and significance.** Educational leaders indicated being grounded spiritually was necessary and empowered them to perform and pursue excellence even in the presence of challenges and barriers. “My last school district was simply about the means by which God provided for me. But God was still going to provide for me” (MFL8). She added that, “It’s that freedom to know that there’s faith that God has it in control and I don’t have to worry about it. I just need to facilitate what he’s telling me to do” (MFL8).

**Pattern 3. Building relationships and supporting teachers.** Educational leaders must foster nurturing relationships with teachers that facilitate open and transparent communication, initiatives of self-care for teachers and staff encouraged and facilitated by educational leaders, supporting and modeling desired teacher pedagogy, a sense of caring, trust, and collaborative efforts that maximize teacher pedagogy and student learning.

As an instructional leader, MFL8 is concerned with teacher pedagogy, instructional resources, systems, and programs that increase the learning of her students. She attempts to make connections with her staff to empower them to make the best choices in their educational journey that positively impacts students. She also encourages her constituents to challenge her thinking, but not her authority. “I think the definition of

power is directly correlated for me, to the ability to influence those within your reach. I don't want to have control over anyone or anything. I simply want to...influence..." (MFL8). She simply wants to help people grow. "...I want students to learn without fear and teachers to teach without fear. I'm here to help, not get you. The power that I have is to take the fear away from the learning and teaching process" (MFL8).

**Pattern 4. Support and advocacy for students.** Educational leaders create and sustain academic cultures that are conducive to maximizing the learning opportunities and experiences for students enrolled in their schools. Ensuring that students have these opportunities may often require that these leaders take a stern and no-nonsense approach especially when resistance, usually to their authority, is detected.

"I think of how parts move together for the benefit of my children" (MFL8). She added, "...in the time that you are here, you're gonna do what I ask you to do, how I ask you to do it, when I ask you to do it, to benefit these students and anything else means that you are here for you and not my children" (MFL8).

### **MFL9 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Mentor significance.** Educational leaders serve as mentors to educational leadership aspirants identified from their own staff members. For these leaders, teaching these leaders through their own experiences and expectations, was an assurance that academic excellence would continue. "The ways that I see myself as powerful is what I give to others. I can leave a legacy of those that I have mentored or supported along the way..." (MFL9).

**Pattern 3. Building relationships and supporting teachers.** Building relationships and supporting teachers may be demonstrated by educational leaders

demonstrating trust in the skills and capabilities of their staff, especially those that aspire to leadership. These leaders did not engage in surveillance but, offered an environment of courage and safety for staff to practice developing skills. “I’m a grower of leaders. I don’t micromanage people because I think better of people’s abilities” (MFL9).

**Pattern 4. Support and advocacy for students.** Educational leaders exhibit advocacy and support for students by establishing and assisting in initiatives to ensure that available resources are equitably distributed and accessed by all students. These leaders also build networks of collaboration among stakeholders to secure resources and support for students. “My work involves opening and forcing the door open, even with teachers, making teachers believe. My work is making kids and teachers, mainly kids, believe that they can even when someone says they can’t” (MFL9).

Making sure that there is a diversity of students represented in different programs is important to MFL9. “I’ll look for it at my gifted clusters ‘cause I do high achieving clusters and I make sure minority students are spread throughout the different programs that we have” (MFL9).

## **Themes for Research Question 2**

**Theme 1. Mentorship.** Mentorship refers to the formal or informal relationship between senior members of an organization and a novice mentee. The nature of the relationship entailed the mentor selecting and grooming the mentee through teaching, encouragement, facilitation of relationships between other senior members of the organization and the mentee to facilitate the advancement of the mentee. The research indicated that mentoring is a critical practice in socializing the mentee into a new role within an organization and the mentor acts to remove barriers for the mentee to facilitate

upward mobility within the organization.

**Theme 2. Strength through spirituality .** Spiritual grounding refers to the belief in God that these individuals possessed. Their spiritual beliefs empowered them to believe that their strength and fortitude as leaders came from God and in his strength and guidance, they were able to lead and guide their schools. The spiritual nature possessed by these leaders empowered them to operate in excellence. The research referred to these religious beliefs as the core of an individual's being where the authentic self, motivation, and inspiration are housed that allow these leaders to lead their staff, children, and the communities that they serve regardless of struggles or challenges.

**Theme 3. Building relationships with key stakeholders.** Building relationships with key stakeholders refers to efforts and behaviors of school leaders in establishing a professional community for teachers and staff that involves empowerment, trust, open communication, and support. The building of relationships extends to the identification of needs, establishing strategic planning and courses of action to address the identified needs, locating resources, targeting real or perceived challenges, and celebrating and promoting accomplishments to facilitate student learning and school improvement.

### **Research Question 3**

What are the perceived barriers that minority women experience when seeking leadership positions in education and what are their strategies for success? To answer this research question, question #3 from the category "Family support and cultural background," question #4 from the category "Sense-making of your school leadership" and questions #2 and #3 from the category "Your leadership styles/traits" were used. Five patterns for this research question included (a) perceptions of inequities in the workplace,

(b) negative perceptions of minority female leaders, (c) lack of trust in competency, (d) building relationships and supporting teachers and staff, and (e) resilience and perseverance. Two themes resulted: (a) biases and the Eurocentric male model of leadership, and (b) transcending barriers.

### **MFL1 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Perceptions of inequities in the workplace.** Minority female leaders affirmed that completing the required tasks, responsibilities, and assignments as educational leaders required that they expend considerably more energy, effort, and time than their nonminority counterparts. The awareness of the negative perceptions formed because of the interconnectedness of race and gender of these leaders, resulted in overcompensation in their leadership approaches to demonstrate ability, competency, and to justify their positions as educational leaders. The discrepancy described resulted in additional pressure for excellence in performance and task related results so as not to appear incompetent or “less than” when compared to their nonminority counterparts. These women added that they felt their freedom to lead their schools in the manner in which they felt most effective was stifled and restricted, diminishing their authority,

I think the majority of women, we have more compassion in our leadership. I do think there is a difference in the way minority women lead...Based on my own experience, minority women, being a double minority, feel like we have more to prove. When you're a new leader...you feel like you have to prove yourself more. I think...we overcompensate because we don't want to be seen as less than because we are a double minority... nonminority women have the freedom to lead with more enthusiasm. (MFL1)

**Pattern 2. Negative perceptions of minority female leaders.** Negative perceptions of minority leaders referred to behaviors adopted by minority women in educational leadership in efforts to avoid having negative attributes erroneously assigned to them. These women operated with restraint with regard to how they spoke and consciously controlled physical gestures and facial expressions so as not to appear and be perceived as “volatile”, “angry”, or “rude”. Minority women leaders expressed that these limitations were not in alignment with who they were as women or as leaders. “I was a lot more reserved in that environment in that even working with kids and working with teachers because that type of strength and passion is often seen as something else” (MFL1).

MFL1 believes that women, in general, do lead with more compassion than men. She believes that male leaders can be more laid back in their relationships than female leaders. “I think it’s much more amplified when you are a minority woman in terms of not being able to be as laid back; not a rule, this is what I think is true for the majority of minority women leaders” (MFL1).

**Pattern 3. Lack of trust in competency.** Lack of trust in competency referred to behavior that indicated a lack of confidence in minority female leaders as demonstrated by subordinates, superiors such as district office officials and possibly, the minority female leaders, themselves, to be able to effectively operate in their appointed positions. The resulting behavior demonstrated by subordinates and district level superiors was demonstrated in comments or actions that signified disrespect or mistrust and that also created a challenge for these leaders to execute their tasks, duties, and responsibilities.

I think Black women wearing leadership roles, I have to be this certain way

because I'm a double minority and I have to show people that I'm doing this and I think that mindset has us portraying ourselves as mean and angry people. We're not as open to say I don't know how to do that, or I failed at this before.

Sometimes, we are hesitant to be vulnerable, to be human, to be transparent, because we feel that people are going to view us a certain way. I think that's why sometimes, as women, we feel like we have to be really strict and hard. (MFL1)

**Pattern 4. Building relationships and supporting teachers and staff.** Building relationships and supporting teachers and staff referred to these educational leaders nurturing and maintaining behaviors that facilitated open communication, support, modeling desired behavior, a sense of caring, trust and empowerment which maximized teacher effectiveness and pedagogy. "I think I have a lot of support. I'm really big into building relationships and I think that has really been helpful. I haven't experienced any difficulties in the sense that there were forces working against me" (MFL1).

**Pattern 5. Resilience and perseverance.** Resilience and perseverance referred to the mental, emotional, and spiritual capacity to learn from negative experiences by not allowing them to change the essence of who you are or stifle your growth and ambition. "The majority of people in this environment were looking to advance. I'm going in with the mindset that we're going to help each other...they're going in with...in order for me to advance, we can't all advance" (MFL1). This was a difficult learning experience for MFL1 as it did not align with her own thinking. "It took a while for me to realize that it was even happening" (MFL1).

However, she was able to persevere because of her inner faith and optimism, which has resonated with her staff. "I'm super optimistic, have a lot of energy, really

demanding, supportive, want to be a better version of the administrator that I am now” (MFL1). She added, “I feel the teachers are taking on my personality traits, taking on some of my energy which is good ‘cause I want that kind of energy buzzing through here” (MFL1).

## **MFL2 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Perceptions of inequities in the workplace.** The perception of inequalities in the workplace referred to the belief of minority female leaders that they are often required to work harder than their nonminority male and female counterparts.

I think we are perceived to lead differently from men, in the sense, I’ve heard it from several colleagues even when I was an assistant principal, that men are more laid back. They’ve let a lot of things slide, where it seems a lot of women are very much on top and I think it’s because we feel like we have to do that in order to prove that we should be in spots that we’re in. We have to work a lot harder. I feel as though we have to work harder as you’re moving up the career ladder in leadership roles where you’re even over men. It’s tough. It’s tough. (MFL2)

**Pattern 2. Negative perceptions of minority female leaders.** Negative perceptions of minority female leaders referred to the negative perception associated with these women for demonstrating behavior perceived as characteristically female, which was deemed undesirable in the workplace. “We’re perceived to be more emotional than men and sometimes, we could be a bit more motherly and that can be a challenge, too” (MFL2). She also added that female leaders, from her experiences and perceptions, are seen by others as nagging. “Sometimes, men are perceived as very laid back, you know, not sweating the small stuff, where women can naturally be more detail oriented, but that

may be interpreted as nagging” (MFL2).

**Pattern 3. Lack of trust in competency.** Minority female educational leaders operate under considerably more scrutiny in their leadership efforts than their nonminority counterparts. These leaders seem to attract more and harsher criticisms and judgements for the choices made for their leadership initiatives.

I think as an African American female and working in a corporate type environment to where you are still the minority, that can be very challenging; especially being a leader because whether it’s a perceived sense of judgement or it’s real. It feels like you’re being judged on every angle, sometimes harsher than your counterparts. I’m consciously and always thinking about decisions that I need to make and what would be the pros and cons how would this be perceived, and that has been very difficult. It continues to be difficult. It’s gotten better as I’ve become more confident in my abilities and I’ve built trusting relationships with people to where I feel like they see beyond my face and know what I stand for. (MFL2)

**Pattern 4. Building relationships and supporting teachers and staff.** Creating and maintaining positive relationships with teachers and staff is integral to promoting positive school culture which positively impacts students. An ideal skill set for educational leaders is being able to communicate with transparency and respect and effectively resolve disagreements with and among staff. It is vital that educational staff be able to communicate and interact despite disagreement. “Some of the personality traits that I value is relationship building. I’m very good at building relationships, even with people who can be difficult...that’s something I’ve learned to do” (MFL2).

MFL2 tries to give her constituents a fresh start when there has been less than desirable exchange with them. She realizes that people are human, and she should not take things personally because there is always some reason at the root of a response.

**Pattern 5. Resilience and perseverance.** Resilience and perseverance referred to actions, beliefs, behaviors, and abilities that enabled minority female leaders to adjust to challenges and barriers and continue efforts towards leading a staff and educating children despite difficulties, failure, or opposition. “You gotta have intrinsic drive to push yourself because you are the cheerleader. Your energy, your everything determines how everyone else in the building is going to respond to you” (MFL2).

### **MFL3 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Perception of inequities in the workplace.** Minority female leaders are characterized as being emotional and angry leaders in their demeanor and speech. Similar behaviors demonstrated by nonminority counterparts are often described as being assertive. This negative assertion to their character is detrimental in that it undermines their authority and deem them as less credible.

I think as far as women, women are very emotional, and I think sometimes we tend to drive things more with our emotions. I tend to do that sometimes and I have to stop and reflect and refrain from making quick decisions and process this. I think with men, they just make a decision. They’ll look at the results later. I don’t think sometimes that they analyze all the extra pieces that go whereas some women do. (MFL3)

She feels that female leaders can let past things and emotions associated with those experiences drive their decision making. “For men, they can go ahead and make the

decision, if it doesn't work out, cool. They work it out and it's fine" (MFL3). However, she sees it the opposite with female leaders. "With women, we show...that emotion, it didn't work out, why didn't it work out, instead of letting it go and saying what can we do to move forward 'cause there's no need going back and forth about it" (MFL3).

**Pattern 2. Negative perceptions of minority female leaders.** Negative perceptions of minority leaders referred to negative attributes erroneously assigned to the character and personalities of minority female leaders as a result of misinterpreting or intentionally misrepresenting their behavior and intent. Having negative characteristics and stereotypes attributed to them based on perceptions of their behavior resulted in these leaders adopting behaviors and mannerisms, that do not align to their authentic selves, in an effort to assimilate into their leadership roles and presented barriers to the process of ascension for their careers. For MFL3, she believes that there is a perception that because she is Black, that others believe that she will just get by as a leader. She has had to compete with her White counterparts because she did not want to let this be the perception of her or other Black female leaders.

I feel as though Black women in leadership roles get labeled heavily with being angry Black women, especially if we're vocal. If we become passionate, then, we're loud, we're aggressive, you're hostile. I think you just get those bad perceptions and not treated fair because what is the difference between me saying what I just said compared to what this White woman or this White man saying the same thing? But, because I'll go ahead and voice it, I'm the aggressive one. That's my battle with things. I'm told that I am belittling when I state that I'm going to put things on evaluations, and I have to respond that that's part of my

job. So, it's perceptions; you perceive that because I'm holding you accountable. I really try to monitor my approach. Even for Black females, to watch our facial expressions. I'm very bad with that, because I was over in the eyebrow effect, but it's just the way I handle and carry. We're very emotional, very loyal people. When we work, we work hard, so we let the drive and determination come out. Some people don't know, and it can be misperceived. (MFL3)

**Pattern 5. Resilience and perseverance.** Resilience and perseverance referred to actions, beliefs, behaviors, and the abilities that enabled minority female leaders to adjust to challenges and barriers and continue efforts towards leading staff and educating children despite difficulties, opposition, or failures. "I experienced the flip side with people who looked just like me, commenting that I thought I was White...better than everybody. I had to experience those adversities and not let those kinds of things hold me back..." (MFL3).

MFL3 experienced great adversity, especially in her childhood. However, she feels that this is what makes her a strong person and leader. "I take someone's negative words and flip them around and say 'You know what? I'm gonna show you' and not let it fester and carry me in other areas in my life" (MFL3).

#### **MFL4 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Perception of inequities in the workplace.** Minority female leaders expressed feeling the need to take on a more masculine persona for their authority to be recognized and respected. They also shared that the perception that their male counterparts appeared to take on a more laid-back approach in the workplace leaving them with the added responsibilities of working more to ensure that details of school

business were completed.

I do think that men get away with a whole lot more. I think that some women feel they have to take on a male persona in order to be in leadership, thinking I had to be stern and things I was not. Men, I think get away with a lot. I think we need to use the strength that we have as women, that nurturing side of us, that ability to see things, see many things and figure out what the problem is. Men are very lenient; have one drive: provision, carnal desire, sports. We are balanced in everything. God made us that way on purpose. (MFL4)

**Pattern 2. Negative perceptions of minority female leaders.** Educational leaders attest to having negative attributes erroneously assigned to their character and personalities as a result of misinterpreting or intentionally misrepresenting their behavior character, and intent. A negative tide of this magnitude bred contempt and mistrust towards this leader within the school's systems and the community that her school served. MFL4 stated:

This particular school was my third placement and it was my first-time facing adversity during my first year here. It was a new building, a new structure, so there were lots of challenges with everything not working perfectly as it should. From day one of the school opening, I had families calling the community to complain about me. I'm a third time experienced principal and I'm reflective, so I want to know what's going on and what is it that I did to give that perception. It just took me some time to realize it didn't matter. It didn't matter what I did, what I said, how I acted, there was just this perception of who a very few select, but vocal people thought about what my being an African American woman would

mean. They started full steam ahead, painting a story of untruth to prove their point.

MFL4 recalls an experience with a family within her school's community that said that she was unapproachable. "...She said I was hard to talk to. Then, I started going back looking at emails and such. This parent had complained...many times and she never answered any of my phone calls...emails (MFL4). MFL added to illustrate her experience:

It came to a point where an EAD and a retired principal had to come in. God just puts people in the right place at the right time. This family, can't remember what the complaint was now, with something that I'm unresponsive. So, I went back, thank God for emails and archives, that's how I realized too, this was the father and husband that had complained the first day of school about parking to the learning community. So, I saw my response emails. I pulled them and copied them. I pulled and printed all those emails. I had responded to them every time they had ever complained and showed them to my boss before the meeting. So, she had a chance to read through them. We sat in the meeting and she said to this family, 'You know, one of your complaints was that this administrator was not responsive to you, but I have several emails here where she's responded to each one of your complaints from the beginning of the school year.' Their response was, 'She can doctor anything and put it together.' So, I think when my boss saw that response, she knew exactly what the situation was. That family's name wasn't one that had been given to me, but it let me understand there were families just like this one, no matter what I do, what I say, you would create whatever lie

because of who you think I am, that's hard.

**Pattern 3. Lack of trust in competency.** Lack of trust in competency referred to behavior that indicated a lack of confidence in minority female leaders as demonstrated by subordinates, superiors such as district office officials and possibly, the minority female leaders in themselves, to be able to effectively operate in their appointed positions. The resulting behavior demonstrated by subordinates and district level superiors was demonstrated in comments or actions that signified disrespect or mistrust and created a barrier or challenge to the ability for these leaders to execute their tasks, duties, and responsibilities. "Being a female and...minority, you have to have a true understanding of who we are and what our purpose is because like I said, you're going to have people who doubt you, even people who say things about you" (MFL4).

**Pattern 4. Building relationships and supporting teachers and staff.** Creating a sense of caring, empowerment, open communication, and trust are crucial factors for creating positive relationships. This process of building relationships is severely impacted, at times irrevocably, depending on the severity of deceit, mistruths, and sabotage.

The attributes that I have are interpersonal and intrapersonal building relationships. I could not exhibit these traits the way I wanted because there were things that had to get done, but I went into work mode, task oriented, and because of the letter, I didn't want to connect with anyone because I didn't know who it was. I think relationships matter and I still do. (MFL4)

**Pattern 5. Resilience and perseverance.** Resilience and perseverance referred to actions, beliefs, behaviors, and the abilities that enabled minority female leaders to adjust

to challenges and barriers and continue efforts towards leading a staff, and educating children despite difficulties, failure, or opposition.

I have the attribute of resilience as a result of the negative experiences that I encountered. The attribute of resilience is one that I have through my spiritual connection, which has grown as a result of the negative experiences that I encountered. I'm a people person and God allows me to see people the way that he sees them, which is full of potential, always hoping for the best, hoping that they will turn to him. He's allowed me to love people despite their faults and even when they hurt me. I still see past it and do good because I'm on purpose. Transforming and empowering people to do what they're purposed to do, that's what I do. (MFL4)

MFL4 added:

My mentor gave me a call at the end of my first year and validated where I was. She told me when the decision was made to place me at this school, they knew that I would face some challenges. I was given the history of the town that my school was in. I was told that the home across the lake from my school belonged to the head of the KKK and that there were principals in surrounding schools that were also a part of that group. I was told that they did not like me because of the color of my skin. 'Cause you know, you kinda feel it. Then, you kinda wonder, 'Is that it?' and I would just try to push through, but she validated it for me. She let me know what families because I had parents complaining all the time.

MFL4 realized that she could not change her ethnicity or gender, so she went back to doing what needed to be done. "I decided the proof would be in the pudding. I

just keep doing what I need to do and stay consistent. These people still exist, but they have to take a backseat” (MFL4).

She knew that under her leadership, she had turned the school performance around and that was something positive to continue focusing on. And she attributed her resilience to her spirituality and understanding her purpose. “You’re going to have to really know yourself if this is what you’re destined to do” (MFL4).

### **MFL5 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Perception of inequities in the workplace.** The perceptions of inequities in the workplace referred to the belief that minority female leaders were often required to work harder than their nonminority male and female counterparts. The discrepancy was described in instances of working longer hours, engaging in more thorough and detailed problem solving and analysis regarding the school’s functions and systems. These leaders experienced the added pressures of fulfilling additional roles outside of their careers. “I think we as women, put a lot more pressure on ourselves. My principal is male, and...‘Type B’, kinda drops the ball on things...I’m...‘Type A’, so I’m a lot harder on myself. I’m more driven” (MFL5).

MFL5 believes that she holds people accountable a lot more than her male colleague because he is not confrontational. MFL5 self identifies as not being afraid to have honest conversations with others. The male leader prefers to pacify people as opposed to confront the issues. “That’s not who I am as an individual female leader. I think female leaders tend to be more direct and to the point, they’re not afraid to have those crucial conversations” (MFL5).

Likewise, as a female, MFL5’s day does not end when the school day is over. She

must now juggle the role of wife and mother. “I just think sometimes our sacrifice is greater; it may not necessarily be the case, but it feels that way a lot in that we can’t just leave home at home and we can’t leave work at work, either” (MFL5). She sees this much in contrast to her perceptions of the male leader in her workplace who seems to leave work and his responsibilities for the day are over.

**Pattern 2. Lack of trust in competency.** Minority female leaders experience behavior targeted towards them from subordinates and superiors that indicate a lack of confidence in their abilities as leaders. As a result, these leaders express feeling it necessary to engage in behavior to prove their value, competency, and worth as leaders within their organization. According to MFL5,

Also, female leaders, like we always have to prove ourselves, especially as a minority leader. It’s like people want to know that you know what you’re talking about and that you know how to do the job, so you always have to prove yourself. It’s like, some people don’t get that coming in. It’s like if you’re male, and if you’re a White male, the perception is he already knows what he’s doing, so he doesn’t have to prove himself. But, for me, it’s always getting people comfortable that I know what I’m doing. So, I think that’s what’s different; not just for minority females, but, females in general.

**Pattern 5. Resilience and perseverance.** Resilience and perseverance referred to the resolute determination to resolve barriers experienced while seeking promotion through enlisting the guidance and counsel of senior administration. Refusing to resign to stalled progression in their careers, these women chose to explicate the capacity to navigate the organization’s systems, under the tutelage of mentors, to attain promotion.

“I’ve definitely experienced adversity, but I will never allow it to stop me” (MFL5).

I found myself hitting a wall and this was before I realized that I really needed a mentor, somebody who had traveled down the road in which I wanted to go down. I felt over-qualified and over educated, but not receiving any interviews. Then, I started getting interviews and never chosen for the job. It took a while, but what ended up helping me get to the place I’m in today was...that mentor principal that I had, who really helped to break down barriers and put me in positions that I’m not sure I would have been able to get in...on my merit. (MFL5)

MFL5 sees herself as a driven and determined individual. She said that her dad referred to her in childhood as having the tenacity of a bulldog, although she did not fully understand what he meant at the time. “I have the traits of being resilient, driven, determined, no matter what...going through the ringer, being through the fire, always having to prove yourself, but never letting that get you down...I think having those traits helps me to be a strong leader” (MFL5).

### **MFL6 Analysis**

**Pattern 3. Lack of trust in competency.** Educational leaders, especially women and minorities, are often placed in positions to prove their worthiness of appointments to leadership. “On the high school level, it was more of you gotta prove yourself, that you are leadership worthy” (MFL6).

### **Pattern 4. Building relationships and supporting teachers and staff.**

Educational leaders should possess the characteristic of helpfulness to build relationships. Female leaders are regarded as more nurturing than males, with males being perceived as the visionaries. It is implied that women may possess increased capacities to build

relationships because of their perceived abilities to nurture and engage on a more emotional level with people. “I am a helper by nature, so I love to help people...Having to understand that everyone does not come from the same background, doesn’t have the same moral value, or loyalty” (MFL6).

Despite considering herself as a helper, MFL6 sees her greatest challenge as managing people. She stated:

I think in working with men, they’re not always warm and fuzzy. They have vision, they share the vision and don’t get caught up in the colors and flowers. They are warm and have relationships, but it’s probably perceived a little bit different. I think they surround themselves with people that can help add the components that they may be lacking. Education is a heavily female occupation. The style of a woman, from walking into schools or sitting in the lobby, you can feel it and tell if it’s female or male. (MFL6)

### **MFL7 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Perception of inequities in the workplace.** The perception of inequities in the workplace referred to the assertion of minority female leaders that in the field of education, the largest percentage of teachers are female. However, in educational leadership, there appears to be a discrepancy, with more males being appointed to leadership positions when compared to women.

I guess I can speak from my experience in education, when you walk into an elementary classroom, middle school, maybe some high schools, you see female teachers. That’s predominantly what you see. But once you enter administration, you see males. It’s more quicker for a male to move up in administration because

there is a high need for them. They don't always have to dot the I's or cross the T's, especially at the high school or secondary level. They don't always have to be on point, it's just like if they have that presence, then okay, they're good.

Whereas females, you got to be on point. It's a lot. You mostly see females in elementary. It's a tier for pay. So, elementary principals get paid less. High school principals get paid more. Middle school principals kind of get paid in the middle. So, if you're looking at it from that perspective, if the majority of high school principals are male, then you know who gets paid more, they get paid more. You really don't see a lot of male elementary principals. There's a good mix in middle school. That would be the thing as female, and I think that's overall, in any profession, you really have to show why you're the boss. (MFL7)

**Pattern 3. Lack of trust in competency.** Lack of trust in competency referred to behavior that indicated a lack of confidence in minority female leaders as strong instructional leaders. Minority female leaders explained that teachers questioned their knowledge and ability to be able to effectively operate in their appointed positions. Teachers perceived that these women lacked the knowledge of content and curriculum to support instructional initiatives to increase student learning. The resulting behavior demonstrated by subordinates was dismissive and disrespectful and posed a challenge for these leaders to effectively coach, lead, and model desired pedagogy for teachers.

For example, when going in as a new leader at a school, MFL7 experienced a lot of pushback because she was new. Many of the teachers had been there since the school opened, so they were content, and they did not welcome change. She experienced things like "what do you know, you're just a beginning administrator, so what do you know,

type thing” (MFL7). This process taught her to document everything. MFL7 added:

It made me look at my classroom practice in depth. When you become an administrator, people feel like you don’t know curriculum standards. So, if I’m giving feedback and strategies, I’m researching strategies and looking at standards when I talk to you. You understand that I understand the lingo. I may not be in classrooms every day, but I know at what depth the standard should be taught and what strategies are best for students. I have the research. I have the articles. I have things to support and back it up, so they just can’t say I don’t know what I’m talking about.

**Pattern 4. Building relationships and supporting teachers and staff.** An effective educational leader can create and maintain relationships with significant key stakeholders, students, teachers, and families. Leaders understand that open and frequent communication in addition to collaborative efforts that bridge school, home, and community benefit and increases student growth. “When I became an administrator, I never wanted to forget what it’s like to be...in the classroom and try to relate that back to teachers and let them see that I don’t want to be far removed from the practice” (MFL7).

This made MFL7 see how she really needed to work on building relationships and building them differently with different people. One of the challenging relationships to build is with parents. “Your goal is to work with them so that the child is successful. I let parents know that I’m not calling to work against them, but I want to work with...” (MFL7). Ultimately, the goal is to want to work with parents to make sure that their child is successful, which is all about building relationships.

**Pattern 5. Resilience and perseverance.** Reflective practice allows educational

leaders to study their own practice and experiences to improve the way that they work. Reflecting increases the leader's confidence and to become a more proactive and qualified professional. "I'm a firm believer that you can't just talk the talk, you gotta walk the walk. If I'm asking a teacher to do something, I have no problem doing it either and I let them know that" (MFL7). She added, "I think also being reflective. It's important because not every decision made at that time will be the best decision...Just being okay to say I was wrong or maybe need to apologize" (MFL7).

### **MFL8 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Perception of inequities in the workplace.** The perception of inequity in the workplace referred to the belief of minority female leaders were often required to work harder than their nonminority male and female counterparts. The discrepancies were described in instances of working longer hours, engaging in thorough and detailed problem solving, and analysis regarding the school's functions and systems, only to be disregarded, ignored, denied career opportunities, being required to complete tasks and assignments that were considered more operational than instructional, with the latter being more highly regarded by district superiors, and generally, taking on necessary tasks to ensure that they were completed as required. The added pressure of ensuring excellence was also cited as sometimes being counterproductive and stifled productivity and task completion for these leaders. Minority female educational leaders cited differences in resolution results for themselves when compared with nonminority male and female leaders when assistance was sought from superiors during personal challenges, for guidance to resolve unfavorable work conditions, or when advocating for resources for students. "I had to learn there were times when working with other

administrators, especially if they're White... you have to hold back on...things you want to say...even if they are natural exploratory questions just so you can learn and grow” (MFL8).

I can't say this is a Black/White thing, but what I can say from my experience being the minority administrator on teams of where I only worked with other White people, my perception being the minority on the team, I was almost expected to be quiet or I was assigned to the tasks or duties that were more operational versus instructional leadership and instructional leadership related tasks and initiatives were the ones that you needed in order to be considered for promotion to higher positions. So, it's like I did a lot of grunt work. There were times when I would ask questions or put ideas out there that were a little bit further reaching. Because I did that, if there were guests coming on campus, let's say for instructional walkthroughs, I would be the one that would have to go cover campus and not be allowed to sit in the meetings so that the questions that I pose would not be posed in front of others. Does that make sense? So, yes. I have definitely faced adversity. (MFL8)

During other experiences, MFL8 feels that had she been a White male or White female, she wouldn't have experienced as much push back. “It makes it very difficult to do your job sometimes being a Black or minority administrator” (MFL8). She feels that sometimes when advocating for children, it has come across as her trying to advocate for Black students only. “I was simply trying to advocate for children who needed additional support no matter what socioeconomic, what color, what faith, what language they spoke. I just want to help kids 'cause that was my passion, that's where I came from” (MFL8).

**Pattern 2. Negative perceptions of minority female leaders.** When female minority leaders spoke, gestured, or exhibited facial expressions, these behaviors were negatively perceived and negative traits were erroneously attributed to the character of these women. The communication styles of minority female leaders were misinterpreted and the intent of their behavior was intentionally and unintentionally misrepresented. How others might perceive their behavior was the catalyst for these leaders adopting behaviors and mannerisms that were considered as more acceptable and less threatening. However, the adopted styles of behavior created dissonance between the essence of who these women were and who they were expected to portray in their leadership roles. “I found that being a Black female administrator, passion is often perceived anger” (MFL8).

MFL8 found that many times because of her perceived anger, she came across to others as challenging authority when she wanted to learn and grow. “...I saw like I had to shrink to be there and be less of who I was, authentically me, because if I asked questions, it was seen as me challenging authority versus me just trying to grow” (MFL8). She added, “I can’t say it’s 100% that that’s how White people are versus Black people. But in my experience, all the people that were over me were White, so that’s all I know” (MFL8). MFL8 also stated:

Had I been White male or a Black male in my previous district, doing the things that I did, they would have told me that I was a go-getter, and I was assertive, and I was goal oriented, a goal oriented task master, just grab the bull by the horns, he’s got grit, whatever that would have been. Being female, all those attributes are considered unattractive, in my opinion, because I was challenging White males or White females. I’m a thinker and a planner, not a feeler and I’m not a fun type

person. As a woman, people expect me to be more nurturing than what I am authentically made by God to be. I'm logical, I think, I problem solve, and I'm not going to make you feel good about your deficit. But, because of that, I'm hard or I'm too blunt, or I'm non-invitational, or aggressive. If you work with me. I will close those deficits for you, and then we go celebrate on the back end. I find that people feel that's more of a man's approach.

**Pattern 3. Lack of trust in competency.** Minority female leaders were the subjects of incidents that were attempts to undermine their competency and to create a lack of trust in their capacity to lead students, teachers, and bridge schools with the community they served. These women did not only endure suspicion and disrespect from subordinates, but this behavior was demonstrated by superiors from school district office offices. The resulting ramifications of this behavior proved detrimental for these leaders and created constraints and barriers for these leaders to facilitate duties, responsibilities and tasks.

MFL8 shared, "sometimes, if you know a little bit more than they think you know, then your questions seem threatening as threatening to their credibility." She added, "Sometimes, if I'm thinking a...bit further, and you're my principal, whether you're White, Black or whatever, then what I'm questioning if I asked you a question and you don't have the response...you are upset with me...because I'm challenging you" (MFL8).

MFL8 stated that it was implied she may be to blame for the maladaptive behavior of students in her school that targeted a specific student demographic. This leader recalled enduring disparaging comments by district officials by saying, "I was told

the reason why I have so many ESE students is ‘cause my school, the culture of my school was making them ESE! If we got the school under control, the other students would mimic those behaviors” (MFL8). She added, “I don’t think that comment from a district level person would’ve been made to a White male principal. I think because I was minority, female principal...that comment was made, and I was supposed to just be okay with it” (MFL8). “But that’s not me. I’m smart and I know my theory and research and practice and IDEA and everything else. So, I didn’t come back disrespectful, but I came back with an informed answer using statistics and IEPs” (MFL8). She believes that despite being Hispanic, a lot of what she has experienced in her district was because she was perceived as Black.

MFL8 shared an incident being undermined by leaders in the school district office and stated:

When I asked the superintendent what she felt like I needed to work on to be possibly considered for a principal’s position in her district in the future, she advised that I focus on standards-based instruction and positive school culture and climate. She did not know that my evaluation had already been done and my deliberate practice domains in standards-based instruction was always, and had again, been marked highly effective, which is the highest mark you can get and the equivalent to innovating. So, I knew there was nothing I could do or say. They had made up their mind.

MFL8 also added:

I found out in the process of getting a position in this district, of course they called for a reference, they had to tell them everything they used to justify what

they did, which put a huge question mark on me here in this district, so I had to sit out a year. You have a superintendent or an associate superintendent telling people here that she was awful, she was argumentative, that her teachers left her, then the school grade dropped, but then you have my references that aren't those people saying 'That's not her.' So, do I think they would have done that to a nonminority principal? No. Why extend it and try to blackball me from this district, unless it got personal for you. I think because I was a woman, I was assertive, I'm knowledgeable, and I challenged their thinking. They took me challenging their thinking as challenging their authority. You're not allowed to do that. In this role, especially when everybody is White and the executive cabinet in my previous district and you have this little Black woman who is like, 'No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, but it's about my children' and you couldn't tell me something and I would then go sit down. You're going to have to help me understand why. And that's not something you are allowed to do in that district. You're just not allowed to do that.

**Pattern 4. Building relationships and supporting teachers and staff.**

Advocating for students is imperative for educational leaders. In pursuing resources and facilitating initiatives to best educate children, leaders may find themselves in antagonistic relationships with members of their staff when the staff does not share or respect the leader's vision. Leaders are charged with the responsibility of reconciling relationships between themselves and teachers for the benefit of the students. "I felt like I got into a position where I was on the kids' side, therefore, I was by default against the teachers and that led to a contentious relationship" (MFL8).

Even though that year MFL8 improved her school's status, as a first-year principal, the teachers accused her of destroying the school and running off all the good teachers. "As long as I was assistant principal and echoing everything my female White principal said, I was accepted, but as soon as I had my own voice...and I took her place, I was then maligned" (MFL8). For this reason, she believes that many teachers perceive administration as the enemy.

**Pattern 5. Resilience and perseverance.** Resilience and perseverance referred to sheer fortitude that enabled minority female leaders to adjust to challenges and barriers and persist in their efforts towards leading a staff and educating children despite difficulties, failure, and opposition. "When I left, I was heartbroken and hurt, but there was a sense of relief. I'm free. I didn't get the chance to say goodbye to my teachers or my kids...but I knew God had a blessing" (MFL8).

Now, MFL8 is in a more diverse place. She knows things still exist at her new school, but she feels the diversity and the tolerance is much more amenable to someone like her and she can learn and grow. "Being a systems thinker taught me how to be more concise and quick in my decision making, but I had to learn to trust my gut and learn to trust my experience and expertise and just go with it" (MFL8).

MFL8 has also learned that being a leader in education is a purpose and ministry. We're being held accountable for those that we lead, just like the pastor of a church. If I'm not good to my people and I'm not doing what they need, then I'm hindering whatever purpose God has for them because their purpose is tied up in my leadership. If it's not ministry and a calling for you, it will become a job and you will leave it. (MFL8)

## **MFL9 Analysis**

**Pattern 1. Perceptions of inequities in the workplace.** Minority female leaders articulated behavior from subordinates that communicated disrespect for their positions and authority. Occurrences included directives from them being acknowledged only when acknowledged by a nonminority male leader. These leaders stated that males were more lenient in their leadership styles and allowed more grace from subordinates than what is extended to minority female leaders.

So, gender of cultural, I came behind a male principal. It was difficult giving instruction to the APs, especially one in particular, that was tied to the previous principal. He thought he was in control and talked a lot which I found very interesting about certain people. This AP would come up and he would say something, and I would say the same thing. They wouldn't accept what I said, only when he said it and that was a big deal. (MFL9)

MFL9 feels that female leaders take into consideration all the different pieces such as data, being visible, community, all other different stakeholder pieces. She feels they work harder to make sure all those elements come together. "I've worked with male principals and they are a little more laid back...I do think that people forgive men before they forgive women" (MFL9).

**Pattern 2. Negative perceptions of minority female leaders.** Negative characteristics and perceptions were associated with minority women as educational leaders. Their attitudes and behaviors were incorrectly perceived and misrepresented as emotional with negative undertones. When these leaders exhibited behaviors that were characteristically nurturing, they were perceived as "weak". Conversely, assertive

demeanor and behavior demonstrated by minority female leaders was interpreted as “hostile”, “harsh”, or “aggressive”. Minority female leaders maintain that such negative associations are not ascribed to the behavior, attitudes, and actions of their male counterparts. Furthermore, these women asserted that men were more lenient in their leadership styles and practices than were women, rendering them less like to be perceived as aggressive or hostile by subordinates and colleagues.

MFL9 believes that men are not seen as demanding as women in terms of leadership.

I’m a task oriented kinda person. I’m not lovey-dovey. I’m not a show. What you get is this, that is it. Where I came from, they understood that, but they knew that I loved them; but then, come into another culture and environment, they do not understand that. They thought I was being uncaring and whatever. So, I had to go through the process of really looking at how I perceived myself and how other people perceived me and that was a challenge. (MFL9)

She thinks that people may see women as being a little more difficult or harsh compared to a man. For example, she believes that people see her as unapproachable because of her personality. “I’m focused, on task, getting this done, making sure everything’s done” (MFL9). She said that this leads to people seeing her without emotions. “Sometimes, people perceive me as not having any feelings, but I have to let people know that I cannot make decisions based on emotion. You will never be successful in this kind of role having that emotional baggage” (MFL9).

**Pattern 3. Lack of trust in competency.** Women have experienced a lack of confidence in their own competency as educational leaders. The insecurities were a result

of the different norms and expectations experienced when transitioning from one school culture to another. Initially, this presented barriers in making valuable connections and opportunities to reframe the culture and learning environments in the schools to which they were appointed.

When she was transferred to a non-Title I school, it was a different culture for her. She was forced to stop and rethink the way she was doing things at the point when she became principal. “Oh my gosh! I thought I wasn’t going to make it because I was in a different surrounding, the meaning of things was different. The loyalty was different” (MFL9).

#### **Pattern 4. Building relationships and supporting teachers and staff.**

Establishing relationships and supporting teachers was instrumental in creating and maintaining positive school culture that was beneficial to students and staff. Building relationships involved leaders demonstrating a sense of caring, transparency, and empowerment which maximized teacher effectiveness and pedagogy, which proved to be beneficial for students.

The work is different from the other side, which is the compassion side. The work was on the flip side in the inner city. It was work to get the work done. We know that work means love. We know that food, they wanted me to bring them food. That means love ‘cause that’s what I grew up with. Food means love. I would cook for them, collard greens and stuff like that. They wanted me to bring them some food. Coming here, it was like, ‘We don’t care about work, we care about the other side that you’re not showing’, ‘Oh, you don’t want to go out and party with us?’, I’m like, I wasn’t taught that way, to go out, no” (MFL9).

However, MFL9 sees herself as a good listener most of the time. She sees herself as compassionate, too. She is strategic about allowing people “to emotionally hook into me. I shut that down so I’m able to see what the real issue is” (MFL9).

**Pattern 5. Resilience and perseverance.** Resilience and perseverance referred to minority educational leaders observing and becoming frustrated with the imbalance of resources available to students based on the school’s location and the socioeconomic profile of the student population. To facilitate equity and a sense of community, these women made the resources available in their own schools accessible to students in surrounding communities.

The way I did it was started inviting inner city students to come here. We have STEM programs and a chess club, so come get it over here. If you don’t have it over there, I will come show you how to do it over there. So, the challenges, I started making them benefit me. (MFL9).

MFL9 still has challenges that she must deal with, but she tries to think ahead of the challenges so that when they come, she is already prepared. “You have to constantly think what the goals are...The traits of a good leader are not just about having good test scores; it’s about the kids and making sure that the kids have all the resources around them” (MFL9).

### **Themes for Research Question 3**

**Theme 1. Biases and the Eurocentric male model of leadership.** Biases and the Eurocentric male model of leadership refers to the detrimental impact of prejudices experienced by minority female leaders in this study. Those impacts had been manifested

in ways such as the pressure to adopt a style of compliance as it relates to how these leaders chose to speak and express themselves, thereby denying their authenticity. These leaders often found that they were penalized when they exhibited leadership behaviors and patterns that were often associated with and commended by White male leaders. These minority leaders alleged that they instead experienced negative repercussions from subordinates which included blatant and veiled disregard for their positions and authority, as well as being ignored and diminished by superiors. Instead of receiving affirmation, their efforts were often overly critiqued, downplayed, and in some instances, their positions were threatened.

These leaders also articulated feeling overextended and burned out in that they were not only required to work harder and longer hours than their counterparts, but they often had the added responsibility and multiplicity of roles to fulfill outside of their roles as school leaders. The research does indicate that hidden biases have had a detrimental effect on minority females who aspire to and currently occupy leadership positions and have led some to deny their authentic selves in an effort to matriculate into the White male model of leadership.

**Theme 2. Transcending barriers.** Transcending barriers refers to the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of the minority female leaders that facilitated success for them in their positions as educational leaders. These women indicated a strong will to succeed in leading their schools despite challenges. Most indicated that in order to do so, they possessed a strong work ethic, drive, and determination which were instrumental in their resolve to remain consistent in the presence of barriers.

These women also indicated they were reflective in nature, and rather than

collapsing under failure, unsuccessful experiences were used as learning experiences and an opportunity to rethink systematically how to improve their school programs and insulate them future systemic or problematic occurrences. These leaders did indicate a desire for collaboration with school staff and district officials to facilitate success in this effort.

These leaders did attribute their faith in God as a primary source of strength, guidance, and source for a better outcome in their careers. They relied heavily on their relationships with God for wisdom, an enduring love for people, and the belief that their assignment as instructional leaders was a calling from God.

Dantley (2005) indicated that spirituality provides a means of inner strength that allows for critical reflection of barriers such as racism, sexism, and classism and instead of adopting positions of hopelessness, spiritually empowered people of color are capable of engaging in reflection, creativity, resistance, and reconstruction. This reliance on spirituality equips educational leaders with strategies necessary to meet the challenges faced in contemporary schools.

### **Summary**

This chapter pertains to the results of the interview data from nine participants from nine different elementary, middle, and multi-grade level schools in the southeastern United States. The questions utilized provided an in-depth probe into the participants' experiences as minority women in educational leadership positions. The findings were based on seven face-to-face interviews and two interviews conducted via telephone. The interviews were focused on the perspectives and perceptions of the experiences of minority female leaders as they relate to real or perceived barriers encountered during the

period of ascension to leadership and to identify the strategies, resources, and opportunities utilized by these leaders that facilitated growth and promotion in spite of challenges that may have been encountered. The next chapter includes a discussion on the interpretation of the findings, how they are related to the literature, and the emerging themes as a result.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Study Overview**

This chapter includes a discussion of the results from Chapter 4. The intended purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of minority female leaders in education, particularly regarding family support and cultural background, sense-making of school leadership, leadership styles/traits, and power. Cultural experiences, strategies utilized to overcome perceived or real barriers to the ascension of leadership, and the common leadership styles or themes that were instrumental in overcoming obstacles and had facilitated success in the roles and careers of these women were identified in this research. Qualitative methods were employed to gather the data from a sampling of participants representing assistant principals and principals from various schools, from kindergarten through eighth grade, from an identified school district in a southeastern state. The nine participants who met the requirements of the study were interviewed, utilizing a 15-question, semi-structured interview protocol adopted from Wrushen and Sherman (2008) to record the experiences and perceptions of minority women appointed to leadership positions in education. In this chapter, there will be a detailed discussion of the answers to the research questions, as well as an overview of the perceived limitations, a conclusion of the study, and the implications for future research.

### **Research Background**

This study was developed and designed to provide insight and awareness of the challenges and barriers experienced by minority women as leaders in education and strategies that were employed that facilitated their success. Historically, in the field of

education, the presence of women dominated classrooms. Women, however, have been underrepresented as educational leaders, especially at the secondary and district levels (ah Nee-Benham & Cooper, 1998; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017, Fuller et al., 2018; Grogan, 2005; Grogan & Ballenger, 2007; Hagemann & Josephson, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Pyke, 2013; Sanchez & Thorton, 2010; Shakeshaft et al., 2007; Spiller 2013; Young & McLeod, 2001). With the added intersectionality of race and gender, representation has increasingly diminished at the level of leadership (Alston, 2005; Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Brown, 2005; Coleman, 2001; Dimmock & Walker, 2006; Fernandez et al., 2015; Foster, 2005, Jean-Marie, 2013; Lansford et al., 2010; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Mirza, 2006; Pollard, 1997; Reed, 2012; Reed & Evans, 2008; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). Race and gender-based assumptions held fast as firmly entrenched fixtures of *the system* (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Robinson, 2014) in leadership arenas, including school leadership. As a result, female leaders of color have been doubly marginalized in society and in the workplace and endured specific experiences throughout the duration of their professional careers.

The literature (Arnold & Banks, 2013; Banks, 2001; Collins, 1998; Doughty, 1980; Fernandez et al., 2015; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; King, 1995; Pyke, 2013; Reed, 2012; Reed & Evans, 2008; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008) suggested that racism and sexism are perceived variables and barriers for women of color that had aspired to leadership positions or had been appointed to them. This suggested racism and sexism were manifested overtly or were subtly nuanced by defiance or the undermining of leader authority with subordinates' refusal or unwillingness to receive direction or instruction (Reed 2012), increased criticism and scrutiny in comparison to

nonminority male leaders (Fernandez et al., 2015; Jean-Marie, 2013; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013) had been well qualified for positions but received repeated rejections which indicated questionable selection and hiring practices (Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Fernandez et al., 2015; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Moore, 2013; Robinson, 2013) and had been pressured to adopt style compliance that aligned to an Eurocentric and androcentric norm (Echols, 2006; Fernandez et al., 2015; Hekman et al., 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013), and often appointed to disadvantaged and poor performing schools with limited resources and power differentials (Alston, 2005; Arnold, 2013; Arnold & Brooks; Brown, 2005; Fernandez et al., 2015; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Knaus, 2014; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Moorosi, et al., 2018; Reed 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013). While available literature provides some indication and varied perspectives that are indicative of this trend, much of the literature that pertained to minority females in the field of education focused primarily on the lack of accessibility to secondary and district level positions, as well as career opportunities and trajectories that have been provided or made available to leaders aspiring in leadership. The gap that existed in the research was the lack of inclusion of the perceptions and experiences of the barriers faced by minority women aspiring or appointed to leadership and strategies that facilitated their success in being appointed to principals and assistant principals. The researcher conducted a qualitative multiple case study utilizing the following three central research questions as the basis for the study:

1. What are the experiences of minority female leaders in educational leadership?
2. What are the pathways to leadership for minority women in the fields of primary

and secondary education?

3. What are the perceived barriers that minority women experience when seeking leadership positions in education, and what are their strategies for success?

### **Research Questions and Findings**

The findings of this study were descriptions of the themes that resulted from the responses of the participants to each of the three research questions. The themes were characteristics of the participants' particular experiences and perceptions that were identified by the researcher as relevant to the research questions.

#### **Research Question 1**

The focus of the first research question was to understand the early childhood experiences and cultural backgrounds of minority women educational leaders and how and if those experiences impacted their perception of leadership or their practice. While rich and extensive data resulted from this question, the intent was to determine the impact of familial support, identify the unique and distinct cultural experiences of these women, and how those experiences shaped them as leaders and impacted their work lives.

Ethnic and minority women asserted that strong familial support, encouragement, and motivation from childhood throughout their academic careers were essential to the achievement of their educational goals and facilitated the attainment of career aspirations (Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Fernandez et al., 2015; Hernandez & Murakami, 2016, Mendez-Morse et al., 2015) and parental support and encouragement were also declared to be the crucial catalyst that led to the attainment of higher-level education and advanced degrees. MFL1, MFL3, MFL4, MFL6, MFL8, and MFL9 reported that from childhood, education was highly esteemed and respected. These women indicated that excellent

performance in school was the expected norm and they were encouraged to pursue higher education. Having a *good* education was equated to having more choices, a better life, and a ticket out of poverty. The parents of MFL3, MFL4, and MFL8 were educators or employees within school districts.

These leaders maintained their parents instilled and nurtured in them morals and values, belief in God, and strong work ethic. MFL1 stated that she was taught to work hard, take pride in her work, and do everything in excellence because it reflected your work ethic. MFL2 informed that she was raised to be determined and never give up and always keep trying. She also stated that she was raised with strong morals. MFL3 recounted that her single mother always told her that “failure is not an option” and that she had to work hard, harder even, because she was Black and female. This leader stated that she had worked hard for what she has, continued to do so, and instilled the same work ethic in her own children. MFL6 and MFL7 noted that they were raised with strong family dynamics, belief systems, and values. MFL9 stated that she pushed herself hard to achieve and succeed and finds that she does so with others, maybe too much, even though her intent was to motivate towards success. The research indicated that women minority leaders affirmed that their parents instilled and nurtured in them with a strong belief of self-worth, personal confidence, and competence in their own abilities and skills (Mendez-Morse, 2004; Reed, 2012).

Many minority female leaders described their appointments as a *calling from God* and their belief in God and spirituality was the catalyst for their motivation and inspiration. These women were empowered by spirituality and their unyielding belief in God to serve communities, educate children, and lead educational staff in the face of

opposition and struggle (Dantley, 2005). MFL2, MFL4, MFL6, and MFL7 stated that they had all been reared in their faith in God during childhood by their parents and grandparents. MFL1, MFL8, and MFL9 mentioned spiritual experiences and their beliefs in God in adulthood. All the leaders maintained that their belief in God was the source of their strength, resilience, wisdom, and motivation as educational leaders.

One of the themes that emerged from the data analysis for research question 1 related to the impact of family background on their personal development. The theme that was identified was personal faith and upbringing guides leadership. According to the participants, their upbringing, or how they were raised, was vital to who they were as individuals. The participants cited being raised in families whose members were educators and where academic excellence was the expected norm and seen as the gateway to a better life. The participants maintained having a strong faith in God, instilled from childhood, which empowered and protected them, as well as gave them strength to withstand opposition and guided their decision making as leaders. Being able to lead staff, educate children, and serve communities was a result of their faith in God.

These minority women leaders established that moral fortitude, values, and work ethic were taught in early childhood and were maintained into their adult lives. Characteristics such as working hard, drive, determination, operating in excellence, and failure not being an option were characteristics cited by these leaders that currently guided and navigated their actions, behaviors, and decisions in practice.

The second theme that emerged from the data analysis for research question 1 related to the increased scrutiny and criticism experienced by these leaders. The theme that was identified was establishing roles and school cultures decreases leadership

scrutiny. These leaders articulated enduring incidents of disrespect, and mistrust targeted towards them from their staff and superiors. The lack of belonging, respect, and trust for their positions were significant (Jean-Marie, 2013; Kearney & Herrington, 2013; MacKay & Etienne, 2006; Roane & Newcomb, 2013). These leaders perceived the actions were a result of their race and gender in that these incidents were not experienced by their nonminority male counterparts. In addition, these women explained that in their attempts demonstrate assertive leadership, they were often characterized as *angry* and *hostile* and found themselves pressured to change and assimilate their patterns of speech, dress, gestures, and mannerisms to the more accepted White male model of leadership. There was also the perception of these women that in order for their staff and superiors to develop confidence in their competency as leaders, it was imperative that these leaders facilitated initiatives that focused on cultural sensitivity and the necessity of diversity among their respective campuses. By doing so, an increased respect and appreciation, not just tolerance, was facilitated for the various cultures represented in their schools and thereby increased respect for these women and their positions as leaders.

The overall findings for the first research question were that minority female leaders in educational leadership rely heavily on their faith in God, values, and morals instilled in them from childhood to empower and enable them to be successful in their careers as principals and assistant principals. These leaders also believe that they are perceived negatively when they demonstrate leadership behaviors that are commended by nonminority male leaders, resulting in pressure for them to engage in style compliance. These leaders were tasked with the responsibility of creating and facilitating initiatives of cultural sensitivity and diversity to increase respect for all on their campuses, including

themselves, which has enabled them to lead their schools.

### **Research Question 2**

The focus of this research question was to understand the essential elements necessary for the success of minority female educational leaders in their careers as principals and assistant principals. The intent was to identify fundamental components that facilitate success for minority women in securing administrative positions in education.

The first theme identified by minority female leaders was the significance of mentorships in that they were cited as being crucial in the advancement of the careers of these women. The analysis of the data concluded that the women of this study also established that mentors were critical to progression and promotion in educational leadership. Mentors were instrumental in promoting others to leadership positions (Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Spiller, 2013) by acting as sponsors, a support system to remove barriers within the organization, and assist the mentee in navigating the systems of the organization that provided opportunities for upward mobility (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Robinson, 2014; Spiller, 2013). The minority female leaders of this study confirmed that having mentors and being well-qualified provided access to critical individuals and opportunities that would have remained inaccessible utilizing their own merit. MFL5 stated that while she possessed the necessary qualifications for leadership, her applications went unnoticed. She credited her mentor with teaching her strategies to navigate the system and providing opportunities and connections that would not have been available to her with her own merit.

These women also accredited mentors as being genuine and transparent when sharing areas needed for growth to become more effective leaders and were trusted sources for guidance, knowledge, and inspiration. MFL1 described being under the mentorship of a master principal who guided her career and selected her for her first position as an administrator. In addition, MFL3 recounted being under the tutelage of leaders in the school transformation department within her district and received the help and support needed that led to her being chosen for an administrative appointment. MFL4 and MFL7 explained that they often disagreed with the direction and advice from their mentors, but, found that following their instruction led to appointments to administration. Their mentors were described as transparent by being honest with them in the areas in which they needed to grow and creating opportunities for them to practice new skill sets. Ironically, MFL9 did not report being under the direction of a mentor for her entire career, but she did describe herself as a mentor by stating that she was a grower of leaders.

Having a strong spiritual foundation and faith in God was believed to be a critical element that facilitated success for these women and was the second theme revealed by the data analysis. MFL1 and MFL2 mentioned that they both had strong faith that got them through difficult times. MFL7 stated that being in leadership demanded a lot of prayer. MFL4 explained that she only made decisions only after seeking God's direction and did as He instructed. MFL9 also affirmed that she depended on a higher power for guidance, confirmation, and peace. These leaders asserted that although they encountered various obstacles in their leadership roles, their faith provided strength, resilience, and motivation that empowered them to operate in their roles with conviction, confidence,

and excellence. Some of these leaders described their positions as not just a career, but rather *a calling from God* (Arnold & Brooks, 2013; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Foster, 2005; Jean-Marie, 2013; Loder, 2005; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Robinson, 2014; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014). MFL8 explained that she recognized that her position was akin to that of a pastor. MFL8 asserted that if she were not providing her people with what they needed, then, she hindered them from whatever purpose God intended for them, because their purpose was tied to her leadership.

Another decisive theme that facilitated the success of minority female leaders in their careers as educational leaders is the ability to build and maintain relationships with key stakeholders. Namely, students and their families, teachers, school district superiors, and members of the community served by their schools. The data analysis results revealed that building relationships is critical for school leaders to operate successful schools. MFL8, MFL3, and MFL9 stated that they worked to make a conscious effort to be transparent and genuine with their staff, leadership teams, students, and community. All three described themselves as not being *warm and fuzzy* by nature and were often perceived as *cool and distant*. However, they genuinely cared for all who were under their charge, but their leadership style was more *no nonsense*. These leaders stated that they had created activities and set aside time to connect with their staff on a more personal level because of their awareness of their staff's need to feel connected to them. MFL1, MFL2, MFL5, MFL6, and MFL7 all declared that building relationships with students, teachers, parents, and the community was vital to having a successful school. MFL6 believes that relationship building is natural for her as a result of her background in counseling. These leaders explained that as part of their practice, they made efforts

daily to make connections with others. MFL4 admitted to experiencing many challenges initially in her current placement with trusting her staff and attempting to build relationships with them because of the traumatizing effect of repeated racially charged incidents launched against her. It was not until after student performance began to increase each year, that confidence in her leadership also increased. While tentative relationships had slowly formed and the racial tension had been concealed or had diminished, MFL4 stated that relationship building was still difficult because of this leader's inability to trust the motives of members of the staff. Creating and maintaining a professional community for teachers and staff, students and their families, and the community is facilitated through initiatives that foster communication, transparency, trust, and support with constituents. The establishment of these relationships assists with analyzing needs and creating strategic plans to address the identified needs, as well as locating resources to maximize learning opportunities for students. Acceptance into formal and informal networks of an organization was vital in that these networks provided knowledge and social support (Jean-Marie, 2013; Kruse & Krumm, 2016). The learning obtained through those networks enhanced the leaders' public and professional value, positively impacting employability (Kruse & Krumm, 2016; MacKay & Etienne, 2006; Mendez et al., 2015). Work relationships were enhanced that assisted in the completion of challenging projects and garnered support towards the realization of career goals (Jean-Marie, 2013; MacKay & Etienne, 2006; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015).

The inclusive findings for the second research question were that minority female leaders believe that mentorships were an essential function in the progression of their careers. These women believe that mentors strengthened skill sets they possessed, guided

and helped them navigate the systems within the organization. Mentors also helped facilitate relationships with key stakeholders that were integral in the hiring and promotion within the organization.

In addition, they believe that their ability to be effective leaders is strongly associated with their belief in God. It was through this spiritual connection that they are empowered to teach and lead their students and staff, as well as support the communities served by their schools. Another contributor to their fundamental success is their ability to build and maintain meaningful relationships with key stakeholders marked by trust and reciprocal support and respect to maximize student learning and achievement.

### **Research Question 3**

The focus of the final research question was to gain an understanding of barriers experienced by minority female leaders while seeking leadership appointment or after being placed in them. Rich and detailed experiences of barriers, challenges, and constraints were generated by these women in response to this research question. Moreover, this researcher sought to identify the strategies employed by these leaders that promoted their success as educational leaders despite challenges and barriers.

Minority female leaders reported that enduring biases were a common factor in their work and are hereby identified as one of the themes found for research question 3. These leaders affirmed that how they demonstrated assertiveness or authority is often counteracted with disrespect or disregard for their positions, a phenomenon not observed when compared to their nonminority male counterparts. MFL1, MFL2, MFL3, MFL4, and MFL8 argued that minority women in educational leadership were characterized as mean, angry, and hostile when they exerted assertiveness. These women added that they

were judged more harshly than their nonminority male and female counterparts when they demonstrated the same behaviors. Being goal-oriented, decisive, detail-oriented, or tenacious was misconstrued as blunt, belittling, racist or rude, resulting in strained relationships between leaders and their staff. Additionally, the manner in which they spoke or gestured is often characterized as hostile or aggressive, even when the behavior demonstrated is comparable to their White male counterparts. In an effort to align with nonminority male models of leadership, these leaders felt pressured to adopt style compliance in their speech, facial expressions, gestures, and style of dress, thereby denying their authenticity, in an effort to align with accepted leadership models and norms (Echols, 2006; Fernandez et al., 2015; Hekman et al., 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013). MFL1, MFL2, MFL3, MFL4, and MFL8 lamented about experiences where they felt pressured to adjust their speech, mannerisms, and facial expressions to gain acceptance or to align to a prescribed standard. MFL2, MFL4, MFL5, MFL7, and MFL8 reported that men were more laid back in their leadership styles and had a tendency to *let things slide* whereas women were required to do more, overcompensate, and show more due diligence. MFL7 also felt that men are more likely to receive faster promotions, with those promotions being at the secondary level and usually in more desirable schools. Despite working harder and longer hours than their nonminority counterparts, these women felt that their work was more harshly critiqued, minimized, and sometimes, their positions threatened.

Despite the oppositions that they faced as educational leaders, these minority women believe that being resolute will lead their schools to success and excellence. Being able to transcend barriers was an additional theme for the third research question.

MFL3 explained that obstacles made her strong and inspired to succeed and exceed the expectations of people who doubted her or had negative things to say about her. She did not let resentment fester. Instead, she allowed the negativity of others to fuel her to want and do more for herself with an *I'm gonna show you* attitude. MFL4 determined that having a clear understanding of your purpose and understanding who you really are facilitated excellence. This leader added that women were balanced in so many things and needed to utilize their strength. MFL7 and MFL8 explained that women are intelligent and should interpret and utilize data to guide critical decisions, initiatives, and programs in their schools. Both leaders stated that it was imperative that leaders remain knowledgeable of pedagogy to be able to provide support and guide teachers. MFL5 and MFL9 believed that successful leaders must be resilient and forward moving and forward thinking, always anticipating the needs of the campus and not allowing disappointments to deter ambition. All the leaders maintained that hard work, building relationships, self-confidence, and determination were imperative to be an effective leader. They maintained that they were empowered to do so based on their strong sense of values and morals and unwavering faith in God, which was a primary source of strength to execute and facilitate the duties and responsibilities of leading their schools. MFL1 stated that her faith was an important factor in her success as a leader. MFL4 attributed her spiritual connection to everything that she had become, knowing her purpose, and being whatever God wanted her to be. MFL8 shared that God always had a blessing whenever she faced opposition or the attempts of others to sabotage her, she knew that whatever God had for her, was for her and His will would be done. Dantley (2005) cited that spirituality was a powerful, but hidden element that was the foundation of the work of ethnic and minority female leaders

and appeared to empower them to strive towards excellence in the mission to serve communities and educate children in the face of challenges and struggle. These leaders further believe that building relationships with key stakeholders within their academic communities is vital to creating relationships that are rooted in collaboration, trust, problem solving, and the attainment of resources for the benefit of students.

The overall findings for this research question are that minority female leaders perceive themselves as targets of prejudiced attitudes and behavior as a result of the dual marginalization of being minority and female. These leaders argue that in their professions, they have often experienced disrespect and a disregard for their positions by subordinates, fellow leaders, and superiors. The women reported that when they demonstrated traditional leadership behaviors that align with Eurocentric and androcentric leadership models, they were ridiculed and criticized. They have been often pressured to deny who they really were by changing their speech, mannerism, facial expressions, behaviors, and gestures. Although faced with opposition, these women were able to lead their schools through their reliance on their spirituality, innate moral fortitude and values, a strong work ethic, and a commitment to bridging the gap between school, home, and community.

### **Limitations**

As with any research study, this investigation includes some limitations. First, there was a limited number of participants and they did not represent the full scope of experiences for all female minority leaders appointed as principals and assistant principals. The sample included nine participants from nine different schools. It is difficult to know if minority female leaders in other geographic regions of the United

States would share similar experiences as those who were included in this study. In addition, all participants were administrators in Title I elementary schools, except one, who was not at a Title I school. It was difficult to determine what commonalities or differences existed in the experiences of the participants of this study than those of secondary minority principals and assistant principals assigned to more affluent schools or school districts. Another limitation is that even after assuring anonymity and confidentiality to the participants, they may have still been hesitant to disclose information in their interview as a means of self-preservation.

Finally, this research study was implemented by a novice qualitative researcher. If additional researchers had participated in this study, different perceptions and interpretations of the data may have occurred, and, as a result, different themes may have emerged. Additionally, the researcher could have supplemented hand coding data with qualitative analysis software. This could have given the researcher the ability to make comparisons.

## **Conclusion**

This research study fulfilled the intended outcome of providing information to answer the three central research questions. Overall, the participants appeared appreciative to have a platform to share their experiences as educational leaders as academic study with the possibility that it may have an effect on future discourse on educational leadership and practices utilized by school districts to prepare novice minority female leaders.

The results of this study aligned with existing literature previously detailed in Chapter 2. The findings corroborated that the number of minority women were scarce in

the upper ranks of educational leadership and may have been a worldwide phenomenon (Coleman, 2001; Fernandez et al., 2015; Karamanidou & Bush, 2017; McLay & Brown, 2001; Moorosi, Fuller, and Reilly, 2018; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). The intersectionality of race and gender appeared indicative as the determining factor for *how* or *if* women of color were appointed to secondary or district level positions within school districts. The participants' responses illuminated many barriers and obstacles that minority women leaders were subjected to as a result of the duality of being minority and female. However, these leaders described strategies that they attributed to their success as effective school leaders, despite ever present challenges and opposition. The responses of the participants were genuine, rich, and insightful, and comprehensively included enough information to determine themes and sub-themes in order to demonstrate a convergent or divergent relationship with existing literature.

### **Future Research Implications**

As a result of the findings, two additional areas of study may be recommended for further inquiry. The first would be comparison studies that would involve minority male and White female educational leaders to identify real or perceived barriers experienced by each group and determine the impact that those barriers had on their trajectories as educational leaders. The emphasis of these studies would be to determine the similarities or dissimilarities of experiences between minority males and White females compared to those of minority female leaders in their quests towards attainment of appointments into leadership.

One of the themes of this study with the greatest agreement among participants was the critical necessity for mentorship. Establishing a mentoring relationship is a vital

and constant recommendation for aspiring leaders (Mendez-Morse, 2004; Robinson, 2014; Spiller, 2013), especially women of color in that these women experience limited recruitment (Howe-Walsh & Turnball, 2016) and additional research confirming this phenomenon should be a required consideration for school districts. With intentionality, school districts should work towards the creation and implementation of initiatives, programs, and protocols intended to recruit, mentor, and appoint women of color into all levels of educational leadership. Minority female leaders were highly qualified professionals who possessed a similar repertoire of leadership skill sets and aptitudes that were comparable to their nonminority counterparts; fundamentally, they are contributing culturally rich human beings and equally deserving of equality (Campell-Stephens, 2009; Rusch, 2004).



## References

- Ahmed, S. (2004). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- ah Nee-Benham, M. K. P., & Cooper, J. E. (1998). *Let my spirit soar! Narratives of diverse women in school leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Alston, J.A. (2005). Tempered radicals and servant leaders: Black females persevering in the in the superintendency. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 41(4), 675-688. doi:10.1177/0013161X04274275.
- Arnold N. & Brooks, J. (2013). Getting churched and being schooled: Making meaning of leadership practice. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 16(2), 44-53.
- Banks, C. A. C. (2001). *Gender and race as factors in educational leadership and administration*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bloom, C. & Erlandson, D. (2003). African American women principals in urban schools: Realities, (re)constructions, and resolutions. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39(3), 339-369. doi:10.1177/0013161X03253413
- Boris-Schacter, S., & Langer, S. (2006). *Balanced leadership: How effective principals manage their work*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Brown, F. (2005). African Americans and school leadership: An introduction. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 41(4), 585-590. doi:10.1177/0013161X04274270.
- Bush, T., Glover, D. & Sood, K. (2006). Black minority ethnic leaders in England: A portrait. *School Leadership & Management: Formerly School Organisation*, 26(3), 289-305.

- Campbell-Stephens, R. (2009). Investing in diversity: Changing the face (and the heart) of educational leadership. *School Leadership & Management: Formerly School Organisation*, 29(3), 321-331.
- Carli, L. & Eagly, A. (2001). Gender, hierarchy, and leadership: An introduction. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 57(4), 629-636.
- Chisholm-Burns, M., Spivey, C., Hagemann, T., & Josephson, M. (2017). Women in leadership glass ceiling. *American Journal of Health-System Pharmacy*, 74(5), 312-324.
- Cistone, P. & Stevenson, J. (2000). Perspectives on the urban school principalship. *Education and Urban Society*, 32(4), 435-442.
- Coleman, M. & Campbell-Stephens, R. (2010). Perceptions of career progress: The experience of Black and minority ethnic school leaders. *School Leadership & Management: Formerly School Organisation*, 30(1), 35-49.
- Coleman, M. (2001). Achievement against the odds: The female secondary headteachers in England and Wales. *School Leadership & Management*, 21(1), 75-100.
- Coleman, M. (2003). Gender and the orthodoxies of leadership. *School Leadership & Management*, 23(3), 325-339.
- Collins, P. (1989). A Comparison of two works on black family life. *Signs*, 14(4), 875-884.
- Collins, P. (1998). *Fighting Words: Black women and the search for justice*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Conrad, C. (1982). Grounded theory: A an alternative approach to research in higher education. In *Qualitative research in higher education: Expanding perspectives*,

- ed. C. F. Conrad, J. G. Haworth, and L. R. Lattuca, 2nd ed., 255-61. Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Dantley, M. (2005). African American spirituality and Cornel West's notions of prophetic pragmatism: Restructuring educational leadership in urban schools. *EducationAdministrative Quarterly*, 41(4), 651-674.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children*. New York: New Press.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York: MacMillan.
- Dimmock, C. & Walker, A. (2006). Women, educational leadership, and cultural context: A cross-cultural a American principals. *Educational Policy*, 11(3), 353-375.
- Doughty, R. N. (1980). The Black Female Administrator: Woman in a Double Bind, in S. Bilken & M. Branningham (Eds), *Women and Educational Leadership*. Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company.
- Dowdy, J. & Hamilton, A. (2012). Lessons from a Black woman administrator: 'I'm still here.' *The Negro Educational Review*, 62&63(1-4), 189-266.
- Eagly, A. & Karau, S. (1991). Gender and the emergence of leaders: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 60(5), 685-710.
- Echols, C. (2006). *Challenges Facing Black American Principals: A conversation about coping*. National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA). Retrieved from <http://cnx.org/content/m13821/latest/>
- Elisha, L., & Edwards, F. (2014). Exploring teachers' perceptions of women principals in the Solomon Islands. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 19(1), 71-82.
- Fernandez, R., Bustamante, R., Combs, J., & Martinez-Garcia, C. (2015). Career experiences of Latino/a secondary principals in suburban school districts.

- International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 10(21), 60-76.
- Foster, L. (2005). The practice of educational leadership in African American communities of learning: Context, scope, and meaning. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 41(4), 689-700.
- Foster, W. (1986). *Paradigms and promises*. Buffalo: Prometheus Books.
- Fuller, E., Pendola, A., & LeMay, M. (2018). Who should be our leader? Examining female representation in the principalship across geographic locales in Texas public schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 34(4), 1-21.
- Gardiner, M. E., Enomoto, E. K., & Grogan, M. (2000). *Coloring outside the lines*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Genao, S. (2016). Culturally responsive pedagogy: Reflections on mentoring by educational leadership candidates. *Issues in Educational Research*, 26(3), 431-443.
- Glasman, N., Cibulka, J. & Ashby, D. (2002). Program self-evaluation for continuous improvement. *Education Administration Quarterly*, 38, 257-288.
- Gooden, M. (2012). What does racism have to do with leadership? Countering the idea of color-blind leadership: A reflection on race and the growing pressure of the urban principalship. *Education Foundations*, 26(1), 67-84.
- Gooden, M. A., & Dantley, M. (2012). Centering race in a framework for leadership preparation. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 7, 237-253.
- Grogan, M. (1999). Equity/equality issues of gender, race, and class. *Educational Administrative Quarterly*, 35, 518-536.
- Grove, J. (2013). Glass ceiling remains in place for female academics. *Global Index*,

2013. Times Higher Education.

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/global-gender-index-2013/2003517.fullarticle>.

Guramatunhu-Mudiwa, P. (2015). The gender shift in enrollment patterns in higher education: A case study of a school administration program. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, 35(1), 120-133.

Hekman, D., Johnson, S., Foo, M., & Yang, W. (2017). Does diversity-valuing behavior result in diminished performance ratings for non-white and female leaders? *Academy of Management Journal*, 60(2), 771-797.

Hernandez, F., & Murakami, E. (2016). Counterstories about leadership: A Latina school principal's experience from a less documented view in an urban school context. *Education Sciences*, 6(6), 1-16.

Hewlett, S. A., Luce, C. & West, C. (2005). Leadership in your midst: Tapping the hidden strengths of minority executives. Boston, MA: *Harvard Business Review*.

Hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as a practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.

Howard, G. (2000). White teachers at the crossroads. *Teaching Tolerance Magazine*, 18, 13-17.

Howe-Walsh, L., & Turnball, S. (2016). Barriers to women leaders in academia: Tales from science and technology. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(3), 415-428.

Jacob, S., & Furgerson, S. (2012). Writing interview protocol and conducting interviews: Tips for students new to the field of qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 17(6), 1-10.

- Jean-Marie, G. (2013). The subtlety of age, gender, and race barriers: A case study of early career African American female principals. *Journal of School Leadership*, 23, 615-639.
- Karamanidou, M., & Bush, T. (2017). Women primary school principals in Cyprus: Barriers and facilitators to progression. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 45(1), 70-86.
- Karkouti, I. (2016). Professional leadership practices and diversity issues in the U. S. higher education system: A research synthesis. *Education*, 136(4), 405-412.
- Kearney, W., & Herrington, D. (2013). The Role of injury in closing the gap between university experience and assistant principal career transition through simulated realistic job preview. *NCPEA Educational Leadership Review*, 14(1), 69-82.
- King, D. (1995). Multiple jeopardy, multiple consciousnesses: The context of a black feminist ideology, in G. Sheftall, (Ed.), *Words of Fire: Anthology of African American feminist thought*. New York: The New Press.
- Knaus, C. (2014). Seeing what they want to see: Racism and leadership development in urban schools. *Urban Review*, 46, 420-444.
- Kruse, R., & Krumm, B. (2016). Becoming a principal: Access factors for females. *Rural Educator*, 37(2), 28-38.
- Lansford, M., Clements., V., Falzon, T., Aish, D. & Rogers. R. (2010). Essential leadership traits of female executives in the non-profit sector. *The Journal of Human Resource and Adult Learning*, 6(1), 51-62.
- Leslie, L. M., Mayer, D. M., & Kravitz, D. A. (2014). The stigma of affirmative action: A stereotyping-based theory and meta-analytic test of the consequences for

- performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 57, 964-989.
- Litmanovitz, M. (2011). Beyond the classroom: Women in educational leadership. *Harvard Kennedy School Review*, 11, 25-28.
- Loder, T. (2005). On deferred dreams, callings, and revolving doors of opportunity: African American women's reflections on becoming principals. *The Urban Review*, 37(3), 243-265. doi: 10.1007/s11256-005-0010-y
- Mabokela, R. & Madsen, J. (2003). "Color-Blind" leadership and intergroup conflict. *Journal of School Leadership*, 13(2), 130-158.
- Mackay, F. & Etienne, J. (2006). Black managers in further education: Career hopes and hesitations. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 34(1), 9-28.
- Mahmood, A. (2015). Home grown female leadership models. *Planning and Changing*. 46(3), 354-380.
- Marshall, C. (2000). Policy discourse analysis: Negotiating gender equity. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 15(2), 125-156.
- Mattis, J. (1997). Spirituality and religiosity in the lives of Black women. *African American Research Perspectives*, 3. Retrieved from <http://www.isr.umich.edu/rcgd/prba>.
- McDowell, J. (2009). What can we learn from ADs who are Black females? *Women in Higher Education*, 18(5), 19-20.
- McLay, M. & Brown, M. (2001). Preparation and training for school leadership: Case studies of nine women head teachers in the second independent sector. *School & Management*, 21(1), 101-115.
- Mendez-Morse, S. (2004). Constructing mentors: Latina educational leaders' role models

- and mentors. *Education Administration Quarterly*, 40(4), 561-590.
- Mendez-Morse, S., Murakami, E., Byrne-Jimenez, M., & Hernandez, F. (2015). Mujeres in the principal's office: Latina school leaders. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 14, 171-187.
- Mirza, H. (2006). Transcendence over diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education. *Policy Futures in Education*, 4(2), 101-115.
- Moore, C. (2013). Race specialist: What a black administrator ought to be and do. *Journal of School Leadership*, 23, 490-510.
- Moore, D. (2013). Race Specialist: What a Black administrator ought to be and do. *Journal of School Leadership*, 23, 490-510.
- Moorosi, P., Fuller, K., Reilly, E. (2018). Leadership and intersectionality: Constructions of successful leadership among Black women school principals in three different contexts. *Management in Education*, 32(4), 152-159.  
doi:10.1177/0892020618791006
- Moss-Racusin, C., Dovidio, J., Brescoll, V., Graham, M., & Handelsman, J. (2012). Science faculty's subtle gender biases favor male students. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 109(41), 16474-79.
- Murphy, J. (2002). Reculturing the profession of educational leadership: New blue prints. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 19(3), 347-366.
- Murtadha, K., & Watts, D. M. (2005). Linking the struggle for education and social justice: Historical perspectives of African American leadership in schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 41(4), 591-608.
- Myers, L. (2000). Realities in academe for African American women. *Journal of Women*

*in Higher Education*, 9(4), 21-22.

- Neighbors, H., Jackson, J., Bowman, P. J. & Gurin, G. (1983). *Stress, coping, and black mental health: Preliminary findings of a national study*. Newbury Park, CA:Sage.
- Neito, S. (2000). *Affirming diversity. The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (3rd ed.). New York: Longman.
- Patton, L., & Jordan, J. (2017). It's not about you, it's about us: A Black woman administrator's efforts to disrupt white fragility in an urban school. *Journal of Cases in Educational Research*, 20(1), 80-91. doi:10.1177/1555458916689127
- Percy, W. H., Kostere, K., & Kostere, S. (2015). Generic qualitative research in psychology. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(2), 76-85. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol20/iss2/7>.
- Polis, M. (2013). *Promotions in primary education: Review of the years 2009-2013*. Retrieved from [http://www.akida.info/index..php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2337%3A-2009-2013&catid=209%3A2011-07-04-11-33-49&Itemid=63&lang=en](http://www.akida.info/index..php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2337%3A-2009-2013&catid=209%3A2011-07-04-11-33-49&Itemid=63&lang=en)
- Pollard, D. S. (1997). Race, gender, and educational leadership: Perspectives from African- American principals. *Educational Policy*, 11(3), 353-375.
- Poplin Gosetti, P. & Rusch, E. (1995). Re-examining educational leadership: Challenging assumptions. In D. Dunlap, & P. Schmuck (Eds.), *Women leading in education* (pp. 11-35). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Pyke, J. (2013). Women, choice and promotion or why women are still a minority in the professoriate. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 35(4), 444-454.

- Rapp, D. (2001). The implication of raising one's voice in educational leadership doctoral programs: Women's stories of fear, retaliation, and silence. *Journal of School Leadership, 11*(4), 279-295.
- Reed, L. & Evans, A. (2008). What you see is not always what you get! Dispelling race gender leadership assumptions. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 21*(5), 487-499.
- Reed, L. (2012). The Intersection of race and gender in school leadership for three Black female principals. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 25*(1), 39-58. research perspectives, 3. Retrieved from: <http://www.wisr.umich.edu/rcg/prba>.
- Roane, T., & Newcomb, W. (2013). Experiences of young African American women principals. *Leading & Managing, 19*(1), 1-17.
- Robinson, A. (2014). Personal, professional, and sociocultural experiences of African American female school leaders. *Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership, 1*, 1-11.
- Rusch, E. (2004). Gender and race in leadership preparation: A constrained discourse. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 40*(1), 14-45.
- Rusch, E., & Marshall, C. (2006). Gender filters: Plotting a course to equity. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 9*(3), 229-250.
- Ryan, F., Coughlan, M., & Cronin, P. (2009). Interviewing in qualitative research: The one-to-one interview. *International Journal of Therapy & Rehabilitation, 16*(6), 309-314.
- Schmidt, M., & Mestry, R. (2014). South Africa female Principals examined through

- an intersectional lens. *Canadian & International Education*, 43, 1-16.
- Shakeshaft, C. (1999). The struggle to create a more gender-inclusive profession. In J. Murphy & K. S. Louis (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Educational Administration* (99-118). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Shakeshaft, C., Brown, G., Irby, B. J., Grogan, M., & Ballenger, J. (2007). Increasing gender equity in educational leadership. *Handbook of Gender Equity in Schools*. Mahwah, NJ: Laurence Erlbaum Associates.
- Sherman, W. (2005). Preserving the status quo or renegotiating leadership: Women's experiences with district-based aspiring leaders program. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 41(5), 707-740.
- Shields, C., Larocque, L., & Oberg, S. (2002). A Dialogue about race and ethnicity in education: Struggling to understand issues in cross-cultural leadership. *Journal of School Leadership*, 12(2), 116-137.
- Sleeter, C. (1992). *Keepers of the American dream*. London: Falmer.
- Sleeter, C. (2001). Preparing teachers or culturally diverse schools: Research and the overwhelming presence of whiteness. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 52, 94-103.
- Spiller, K. (2013). Preparing female leaders for the role of principal. *Redress*, 22(2), 7-10.
- Tillman, L. (2003). From rhetoric to reality? Educational administration and the lack of racial and ethnic diversity within the profession. *University Council for Educational Review*.
- Tillman, L. (2004). Chapter 4: African American principals and the legacy of Brown. *Review of Research in Education*, 28, 101-146.
- Usdan, M. (2002). Reactions to articles commissioned by the National Commission for

- the Advancement of Education. *Education Administration Quarterly*, 38(2), 300-307.
- van den Brink, M., & Benschop, Y. (2012). Slaying the seven-headed dragon: The quest for gender change in academia. *Gender; Work & Organization*, 19, 71-92.
- Watson, T., & Rivera-McCrutchen, R. (2016). #BlackLivesMatter: A call for transformative leadership. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 19(2), 3-11. doi:10.1177/1555458915626759
- Witherspoon, A., & Brooks, J. (2013). Getting churched and being schooled: Making meaning of leadership practice. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 16(2), 44-53. doi:10.1177/1555458913487034
- Wrushen, B. & Sherman, W. (2008). Women secondary school principals: Multicultural voices in the field. *Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 21(5), 457-469.
- Young, M. & Peterson, G. (2002). The national commission for the advancement of educational leadership preparation: An introduction. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 38(2), 130-136.

Appendix  
Interview Protocol

## **Interview Protocol**

### **Pre-Interview script**

“I am conducting research about the barriers and strategies that facilitate success for minority female leaders and I am interested in your experiences as an assistant principal/principal. The purpose of this research is to add to the existing scientific knowledge in the field of leadership for minority females and to provide educational insights for the wider audience in the field of educational leadership in terms of the experiences of minority women as educational leaders. Your participation will consist of one formal interview that will last from 30 to a maximum of 90 minutes. This research has no known risks. This research will benefit the academic community because it could potentially help us understand and identify cultural experiences, of minority female leaders and the strategies, leadership styles, and themes that have been instrumental in successfully overcoming real or perceived challenges to the ascension to educational leadership.”

### **Family support and cultural background**

1. Please tell me about yourself in regard to family background. What are the things that make you who you are?
2. What conditions have allowed you to be successful?
3. What conditions have been difficult? Have you experienced adversity? How were you able to be resilient?
4. How are your cultural experiences different than what is considered to be the mainstream? How has this affected you as a leader?
5. How have your cultural experiences shaped you as a leader?

**Sense-making of your school leadership**

1. Please tell me about your work.
2. How do you experience your day-to-day role as a leader? Please share stories about your personal experiences.
3. How do you make sense of your role as a leader?
4. How do women perceive their roles differently from men?

**Your leadership styles/traits**

1. Please describe what kind of leader you are.
2. How do women (do you) lead differently from men? If so, how? Please describe differences you see.
3. What personal traits do you believe you possess that influence your leadership? How do you view these traits as contributing to your leadership effectiveness?

**Power**

1. How do you define power?
2. In what ways do you see yourself as powerful? What made you powerful?
3. What actions do you engage in that are powerful?

**Post interview script**

“Thank you for providing me the opportunity to meet with you and discuss your experiences. I will use your experiences along with those of the other participants to help answer the research questions of my study. I will keep all written information secured in a locked and password protected file. You will be contacted by email at a later date to review a transcription of our discussion to ensure that your responses were captured accurately. After 7 years, all written and electronic files will be destroyed. If you have

any additional questions at all, please contact me.”