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A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of African American Female Educators Becoming Urban School Principals

Tondra Bailey-Collins

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A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences
of African American Female Educators Becoming Urban School Principals

by
Tondra M. Bailey-Collins

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
and School of Criminal Justice in Partial
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Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Tondra M. Collins 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.

Deeb Paul Kitchen, EdD
Committee Chair

David Weintraub, EdD
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.

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Tondra M. Collins

Name

May 23, 2023

Date

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Abstract

A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of African American Female Educators Becoming Urban School Principals. Tondra M. Collins, 2023: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: African American women principals, motivations, challenges, and principalship

This study explored the problem of why there are so few African American women in urban school principal roles in comparison to other racial groups. African American educators have a significant impact on African American students. Additionally, the need for diversity is not exclusive to African American educators and children, but diverse staff overall impacts student achievement levels and improves equity in disciplinary practices. The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of African American women who are currently or were previously urban school principals. Through the theoretical lenses of critical race theory and social inclusion theory, this study examined African American female educators' motivation to pursue the urban principal role and the challenges they faced along the way. The study looked at how African American women describe the factors that motivated and propelled them to become an urban school principal, as well as the challenges they encountered and how they addressed them. With the 12 participants, the qualitative study used semistructured, one-on-one interviews. The researcher analyzed data from the interview transcripts and the field notes. The results revealed that African American female educators transition into the urban principal role most often with support from a mentor. Also, race and gender bias impact African American female educators' likelihood to obtain and secure an urban school principal role, to the point where some women leave the field of education. School districts, organizations, and universities have a responsibility to provide consistent workshops, trainings, and audits on the following for their executive leaders and staff: diversity, cultural sensitivity and competence, self-awareness, and bias.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Although schools have been racially integrated for a number of decades, racial segregation in schools is still a growing problem. In fact, many American schools are more racially segregated than they were in the 1960s but for different reasons than they were in the past (Rosiek, 2019). Most of the research on school integration focuses on the impact of segregation on students. The impact of a lack of staff diversity has a significant impact on the school community.

Currently, in schools, there is a disproportionate number of African Americans in principal roles in comparison to other racial groups. Ladson-Billings (2009) highlighted the impact of African American teachers on African American students, with particular emphasis on the power of communal ties and shared values within the school setting as factors that improved the relationship-turned-motivation for students. Goldhaber (2019) maintained that the need for diversity is not exclusive to African American teachers and children, but diverse staff overall impacts student achievement levels and improves equity in disciplinary practices as well.

The problem to be investigated in this study is a disparity in the numbers of African American women in urban school principal roles in comparison to other racial groups. African Americans accounted for about 10% of all urban school principals, while the percentage for African American women who serve as urban school principals was even lower (Aldrich, 2020; Goldring et al., 2018).

The focus of this study is on African American women as school principals. Therefore, it is important to define urban education and provide context to which educational setting falls into this category. Welsh (2020) defined urban education as

comprising six categories: population/location/ geography, enrollment, student-demographic makeup, resources available in schools, imbalance in educational opportunity, and social and economic setting. Schools that are considered urban have higher percentages of minority students, lower per-pupil funding and student-to-teacher ratios, and higher rates of poverty.

Additionally, within this setting, understanding the positionality of African American women as principals provides perspective on the research problem. The work of Aaron (2019) centered on the leadership skills set of a sampling of African American female principals. Aaron's case studies of four principals found that African American principals showed high levels of student-centered leadership, decisiveness, and connectedness with students and their families. The work of Suh et al. (2020) highlighted a significant barrier to the number of African Americans in educational leadership roles in America. As indicated in their research, the Brown vs. the Board of Education ruling displaced many African American teachers and principals and created barriers that still exist today. For example, there is a shortage of African American teachers, which leads to fewer chances for African Americans to become principals, which contributes to the research problem of this study.

The purpose of this study is to explore why there are so few African American women in urban school principal roles in comparison to other racial groups. The work of Peters (2019) showed that this problem has deep roots that date back to Brown vs. the Board of Education. Prior to that court ruling in 1954, African American students attended schools operated by African American educators. For the most part, these educators were neighbors, church affiliates and community organization members. The intersectionality of the relationship between educators and students' families often meant

shared values and a strong level of familiarity (Milner & Howard, 2004).

African American women have limited access to principal positions due to micro aggressions. According to Holley (2021), for African Americans educators, macroaggressions are a factor that impact access to leadership roles; this includes assumptions about competence, performance, and ability to execute leadership roles in the school setting. Fairclough (2004) shared the experience of African American teachers in that many were displaced, disenfranchised, and disenchanting because of the Brown ruling. As a result, he concluded that many African Americans viewed the field of education as difficult to navigate, which caused an African American teacher shortage. Another point from the research was that African American teachers felt silenced, displaced, and counted out in the field of education.

Despite the current shortage of African American teachers, there is strong evidence of the impact of African American teachers on the achievement levels of African American students. The work of Redding (2019), which was based on the seminal research of Ladson-Billings (1994) showed that African American teachers make a significant impact on the achievement levels of African American students. Spratt's research (2019) discovered that African American teachers-especially women-struggled to advance into leadership roles within the school setting. The African American teachers who did advance to leadership roles faced many professional challenges to make it from teaching to a leadership role.

Phenomenon of Interest

The phenomenon of interest is the practices that lead to the creation of an inclusive environment. The work of Dune et al. (2021) showed the importance of inclusion and focuses on the differences between culture competence and cultural safety.

Social inclusion is similar to cultural safety in the sense of viewing the world through multiple lenses. Cultural safety includes the preservation of culture of people, places, and ideals. Race, citizenship, class, sexual orientation, sex, ability, and gender identity are examples of social groupings that can be viewed as forms of privilege or marginalization. Additionally, organizations and systems like a school need to problematize their level of inclusion and cultural safety as it pertains to attending to these social categories. Creating an inclusive and welcoming culture where people of all demographics have access, is the through line between social inclusion and culture safety (Dune et al., 2021).

Additionally, to further explore the potential to boost the amount of African American women in urban principal roles, Kamruzzaman (2020) examined the connection between participation and empowerment of marginalized groups. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) framework provided data used for the Kamruzzaman's research (2020). The research centered on developing countries receiving aid for housing and labor efforts. Empowerment of historically marginalized groups requires a change development into a more inclusive society. The change means a shift in the way the marginalized group were viewed-they were seen as holding an equal and valuable voice in decision making. This research related to the need for inclusion efforts because it showcased the power of inclusion to boost participation. Although the research served the purpose of addressing housing and labor needs, the demographic was similar and the need to support marginalized groups was the same (Kamruzzaman, 2020).

Background and Justification

In schools, there is a disproportionate number of African American women in principal roles in comparison to other racial groups. To better understand this problem, it is beneficial to look at the promotion rate of assistant principals. The research of Bailes

and Guthery (2020) revealed that the rate of promotion from assistant principal to principal varies based on the race and gender of the candidates. To obtain this data, 1,100 assistant principals (within a public school setting) were tracked from 2001 to 2004 over a 10-year period. First, the data was collected between 2001 and 2004, next the same data were collected later on from 2011 through 2014. The data revealed that African American assistant principals were the least likely to be promoted to the position of principal. Additionally, African American principals also waited the longest for a promotional opportunity in comparison to other racial groups who held the same position.

Additionally, the data from Bailes and Guthery's (2020) study revealed that African American female principals were impactful for students and staff. However, their denial or delay in promotion was correlated with structural problems in the hiring system within the schools. To be precise, the data showed that more cultural diversity among school administrators was correlated with higher student achievement scores and teacher attrition rates. The work of Bailes and Guthery (2020) showed similar results as Pals & Wu's (2020) work in that African American female educators named that they faced a pattern of delayed or denied promotions as they transitioned into school leadership roles. Lastly, data from Bailes and Guthery's (2020) results showed that a lack of strategy in regard to equitable hiring practices and a lack of transparency in promotion decisions impacted the performance of African American teachers. All in all, Bailes and Guthery's (2020) study showed that a contributing factor to why there are so few African American females in principal roles are associated with structural problems within the hiring systems in schools.

The work of Kingsberry (2015) showed two major challenges to African American women obtaining school administrator roles: perceptions about race and

gender. Kingsberry (2015) relied on qualitative data from African American superintendents, and the methodology used was interviewing. The purpose of the study was to understand the challenges African American women faced in obtaining a superintendent role. The data showed that perceptions of race and gender were challenges they faced in obtaining a superintendent position. In terms of race, the participants felt they struggled to obtain a superintendent role because there were limited African American staff within the district. They were questioned as to whether they were experienced enough for the role. Two of the participants named that they were selected for a superintendent interview because they were the most qualified or most experienced out of the candidate pool. Next, gender was said to be a barrier. The participants reported being questioned if they were “ready” for the role and able to “handle” the role. These questions arose within the context of their values and priorities, which were most often cited as family and balance between work and home.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

The problem to be investigated in this paper is that there are so few African American women in principal roles in comparison to other racial groups. There is limited research that focused on African American women in principal roles. For example, there were several studies conducted on the teacher perception of, racial barriers, and challenges faced by African American principals (Duncan, 2019; Marsh & Noguera, 2019). The population was based on African American men and women instead of just African American women. Additionally, the research problem of teacher perception of African American principals was an opportunity to assess leadership styles, and performance indicators in comparison to other subgroups and Caucasians. Ironically, in search of research on the problem of the small percentage of African American female

principals in schools, led to a research on the experience of African American girls in urban schools. The research on African American girls' experience in schools had implications on their experience as adults in the field of education (Farinde-Wu. et al., 2020; Gist et al., 2018; Leath, et al., 2021.)

There is limited research that captures the disparity between African American female principals and other racial groups. The biggest deficiency lies in that there were very few peer-reviewed articles that explained the cause of this disparity. Studies showed that African Americans have a harder time securing principal positions (Anderson, 2016; Bailes & Guthery, 2009). To be exact, Bailes and Guthery's research (2009) found that African American assistant principals were 18% less likely to be promoted to a principal role than their Latino and White counterparts. Additionally, 7% of the urban principal population are African Americans (Anderson, 2006). What is missing is specific data on what factors impede their candidacy for urban principal roles. Therefore, a study that examines the motivations and challenges for African American women who are currently or were previously principals in urban schools is necessary. For, it would build on the work of Davis, Gooden and Bowers (2017), which highlights the disparities in the hiring of African Americans in urban, principal roles.

This study will zoom in on the African American female principal experience; as it stands now most research studies population includes the African American female and male experience into one category. Additionally, some of the research problems focus on the impact of race, leadership styles, and experiences in schools as variables in the experience of African American principals. I will, however, focus on the motivations and challenges of African American female principals. The nuisance of this study's population, variables, and setting may elevate the experiences of African American

female principals and create perspectives on the importance of their roles as principals.

Audience

Understanding the lived experiences of African American women in principal roles may enrich the following departments: performance management, human resources, school leadership, equity and diversity. Additionally, this research will provide beneficial knowledge for principal preparation programs, instructional leaders, African American female principals, teachers, heads of schools, superintendents, executive directors, school board chairs, and CEOs of schools. With this research, human resource and performance management departments would benefit in the following ways: provide a window into the perspective and needs of African American women, inform hiring and teacher/leader coaching practices, and potentially help to identify a recruitment pipeline. Lastly, school board chairs and CEOs of schools can use the data to create an accountability tool to assess their vision for equity, diversity, and human capital.

Definition of Key Terms

Critical Race Theory A theory that seeks to understand the current climate through the lens of race, culture, and oppression from the dominant society (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004)

Inclusion Theory The process of improving the way people participate in society based on their identity markers (World Bank, 2017)

Urban Schools Schools centered in neighborhoods with four traits: population/location/geography, student-characteristics, available resources in schools, inequities in access and opportunity for students and other residents (Welsh, 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study is to understand the lived experiences of African American female educators becoming urban school principals, the

results can provide insight on how to mentor African American women pursuing a principal's position in an urban school. Additionally, this research will contribute to an existing body of work on the challenges African American female principals face while pursuing work in schools.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The goal of this literature review was to understand the lived experiences of African American women who pursue a principal position, so that the understanding can be used to mentor African American women pursuing the position of principal. This chapter starts with the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory and social inclusion theory. Next, there is a focus on the perceptions of African American women in America, how their contributions are perceived in America, negative stereotypes against them, and how African American women express their identity. Then the chapter goes on to explain the underrepresentation of African American women in leadership roles, education roles, and school principal roles. The final section offers a conclusion and lists the research questions.

Theoretical Frameworks

Critical Race Theory

This study was grounded in the theoretical framework of critical race theory (CRT), which seeks to understand the lived experiences of female African American principals in obtaining a principal position. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), 49% of the national student body in pre-kindergarten through Grade 12 were students of color, yet about 18% of the national registry of educators were teachers of color. By using CRT in this study, the researcher sought to understand the current experience of African American women in seek of principal roles through the lens of race, culture, and oppression from the dominant society. CRT was created by Derrick Bell, Alan, Freeman, and Richard Delgado and was primarily used to study racism in the legal system. There are five key components of this theory: permanence of racism, value

of counter-storytelling, convergence of cultural interests, property of Whiteness, and the critique of liberalism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). The most consistent tenets of CRT in this research are the permanence of racism and the interest convergence, although all five are visible throughout the research. Hoag (2020) defined interest convergence as the ability for African Americans to excel when their interests align with those of White people. An example of interest convergence is the increase of African Americans in the role of culture dean or assistant principal of culture due to the presumption that in urban schools, African American staff performs at higher rates in the area of classroom management and parent engagement. Thus, because it was perceived by some that African Americans address misbehavior more effectively, then there was an increase in the number of available dean or culture roles (Hinkley & McCorkell, 2019). In other words, African American advancement occurs in this scenario because it converged or intersected with the needs or beliefs of popular opinion.

Based on the work of Roithmayr (2019), racism impacts many aspects of everyday life for people of color in the infrastructures of every American system. Therefore, it is important for people of color and subgroups to express their identity and communicate their experiences through counter storytelling. Counter storytelling gives voice to their identity and establishes racism as a debilitating force. According to Bahadoosingh (2021), mainstream media likes to create a universal narrative that everyone-regardless of race and gender-have the same experience of being and existing in the world. However, CRT promotes counter storytelling to break the perception of homogeneity and highlight the existence of racism and oppression in this country.

Social Inclusion Theory

The second theoretical framework used in this study will be Social Inclusion

Theory, which is a school of thought created by the World Bank (World Bank, 2022), that problematizes the level of access a group of people possesses within a setting based on their demographics. Participation, empowerment, and social justice are tenets of inclusion theory that are relevant when studying why there are so few African American women in urban school principal roles (Gidley et al., 2010). Social inclusion theory is used in this study to understand similarities and differences between African American women seeking urban principal roles in comparison to other groups.

When diversity is a priority, social inclusion flows naturally (Swartz et al., 2019). The work of Swartz et al. (2019) addressed the value of diversity with data on inclusion and diversity. The research revealed that a diverse workforce is beneficial because it brings an appreciation for a diverse set of skills. Life experiences, places of origin, and universities attended are some factors that contribute to diversity. With different and nuisance experiences, people bring a broader perspective and reflect the culture of the world. Therefore, the more diversity within the organization, the better able to appeal to the needs and perspectives of those being serviced (Chaturvedi, 2022). Additionally, diversity provides a platform to comprehend intersectionality. grasping intersectionality creates awareness, tolerance, and sensitivity toward others, which reduces discriminatory practices-thus promoting inclusion-as referenced in the work of Swart et. al (2019) The conclusions drawn in this research call for a complete examination of policies and procedures to ensure all groups are included and valued in the practices of the organization.

In summary, Swartz et al.'s 2019 research showed that, in order to show a true value for diversity, organizations must have a diversity strategy to make it a priority. One avenue is by making sure there are diverse employees throughout the organization, in all

positions. As well as creating infrastructures where diverse employees receive support and mentoring; furthermore, all policies and systems must be evaluated consistently for bias and exclusion.

In understanding the roots of Social Inclusion theory, Taylor (2012) shone a light on groups classified as “other” and with the implementation of Social Inclusion Theory, she created lines of access in order to tear down the walls of separation between groups. In examining the opposite of inclusion, which is exclusion-we get to see how social constructs foster inclusive environments. The work of Allman (2013) highlighted exclusionary techniques. Ostracism is a technique used to preserve the purity and predictability of group dynamics, where groups are isolated from the majority set of people. Whereas stigma-another exclusionary technique- pertains to the degradation and caste away of people based on demographics. Stigma is a strategy used to devalue and downgrade other groups. According to the World Bank (2022), exclusion prevents groups from having the same level of access as other groups and is deeply rooted in discrimination; additionally, exclusion can lead to higher mortality rates which are evident in racially marginalized groups.

Perceptions of African American Women in America

America’s Perception of African American Women’s Contributions

In the previous sections, the following was discussed: the impact of women in executive leadership positions, and the experiences of African American women. These two topics now lead to a look at the intersections of gender and race. To investigate the experiences of African American women provides an opportunity to affirm their existence and to elevate their viewpoint (Geyton & Ross, 2022).

Negative Stereotypes Specific to African American Women

Coleman, Reynolds, and Torbati (2020) noted that America has a long history of negative stereotypes against African American women, which are rooted in slave depictions and justifications for slavery and mistreatment. These stereotypes are so profound that they created an opportunity for injustice towards and marginalization of African American women in America. They noted that the three most persistent stereotypes are the following: Mammy -who is self-sacrificing and exists to help others; Sapphire-who is perceived as over-sexualized and baseless; and the Angry Black Women-one that excels at berating men.

Similar to Coleman, Reynolds, & Torbati (2020), the work of Eckr (2018) highlighted stereotypes against African American women. The three core stereotypes against African American women rooted in slavery and racism are Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire. The purpose of his work was to determine the impact of these stereotypes on American literature. For the purpose of this paper, Eck's work (2018), codified these stereotypes with clear definitions and roots. The stereotype of Mammy dated back to slavery in the depiction of a female slave who resided in the house. Living in the house with the slave masters included the following duties: to nurse and nurture the children, looking after the slave owners' children with more care and regard than her own children. This motherly figure had a strong sense of influence and autonomy over the children, yet remained in a subservient role due to race and gender. In fact, the archetype of Mammy was not a representation of African American female slaves' affect, but a scapegoat of White guilt for the inhumane mistreatment of African American women who nurtured their own children and family during slavery time (Lewis et, al, 2016). The stereotype of Jezebel referred to African American women during slavery who were perceived as

sexually enticing toward slave owners and utilized their sexual skills as a form of currency to navigate the slavery ranks. Lastly, Sapphire referred to an African American character that was created on television in the 1970s, to represent an angry, aggressive, and strong-willed woman.

The stereotypes represent a mindset and attitude toward African American women. A separate but related topic is the impact of stereotypes on the experience of African American women. Some African American women faced extreme levels of discrimination in the American workforce to the point where it negatively impacts their health and physical well-being. Lewis et al. (2006) concluded that daily mistreatment based on race and gender raised the cardiac artery calcification levels of middle-aged African American women. The researchers examined the impact of their daily mistreatment in comparison to situational mistreatment or injustice. Injustice meant that the mistreatment happened inconsistently or occurred by a set group of people or within certain conditions. When comparing the two, the greatest effect came from African American women experiencing daily mistreatment due to race and gender.

In the previous section, the impact of stereotypes on the target was discussed and evidenced by research. On the contrary, stereotypes had a significant impact on other groups as well. Skinner-Dorkenoo et al. (2021) conducted research that defined and explained micro aggression toward African Americans, which showed that micro aggressions have lasting effects on the dominant society-besides just the intended targets because it promotes racism. This research is connected to the problem of African American women in principal roles because it highlights the pervasiveness of micro aggressions. Additionally, it pinpointed how African Americans shifted from being mistreated to being excluded from leadership roles over time. According to this study,

examples of micro aggressions are the following: exoticism, eroticism, judgments on language acquisition, tokenism, racial categorizing, and the ascription of intelligence. The findings concluded that micro aggressions ostracized one race or group of people while elevating another group of people or race. Participants reported feeling that their performance was questionable in comparison to other faculty members. In turn, they felt a sense of fear or insecurity in their performance and therefore job placement. Skinner's work (2021) stamped the pervasiveness of micro aggressions in the workplace on all parties.

To be precise, stereotypes against African American women had lasting effects. Lewis et al. (2016) emphasized the danger of stereotypes on dominant groups' understanding/ perception of African American women. In this study, there were two streams of data: focus groups and demographic interviews. The results were categorized into one theme: *Projected Stereotypes*, and two subthemes: *Jezebel* and *Angry Black Woman*. The participants reported often feeling overlooked, ignored, and stepped on by dominant groups (males and White people). These feelings stemmed from direct interactions with White groups, and from visible experiences (i.e. being a minority in a group setting or being called out as a spokesperson for their race or sex). All in all, the participants were African American women who reported negative feelings and maltreatment that led to marginalization and silencing. For example, in the workplace or in a group setting, they felt the need to tone down their passion or neutralize their attire to prevent attention or curiosity from White males.

African American Women and Identity Expression

The work of Alfred et al. (2018) provided additional context on the connection between identity expression and stereotypes toward African American women in the field

of education. Their work sought to understand why there are so few women of color in the field, with a focus on early childhood development to career opportunities and retention. The theoretical frameworks were intersectionality and social capital, due to an emphasis on how race, gender, and access impact the success of these women. The methodology used was a literature review and extant literature. They examined research on the following: impact of early childhood development/public school treatment and student interest in the field college entrance process and experience, and barriers to career advancement. In the literature review, two areas were highlighted. Two findings in the research were the impact of education on women of color's interest in the field and the treatment of women of color in public schools. The results concluded that both- impact of education on women of color's interest in the field and the treatment of women of color in public schools had an impact on their ability to express scientific personality traits. Additionally, women of color who pursued the field struggled due to societal stereotypes, school structures that can be said to curb their interest, and college/post-college experiences that ill-equipped them to navigate the workforce. Overall, their work revealed a connection between discrimination and identity. (Alfred et al., 2018).

Related to identity and societal pressure, Williams (2018) explored the identity challenges of African American teachers working in public schools, which offers a counter-narrative when compared to the work of Farinde-Wu and Fitchett (2018). In Williams' study (2018), the participants were four African American educators that engaged in life history interviews, and 17 White, preservice teachers that attended discussions on bias, race, and education as an extension of a required course. The African American educators felt the pressure of stereotypic threats and worked hard to fight it (in their identity, appearance, and affect) and prove themselves worthy of the title and

position as a teacher. The pressure came from a variety of sources: district officials, their administrators, and even colleagues. Additionally, the participants reported feeling a sense of isolation and othering in the education world due to racial and cultural differences from the mainstream. Although the participants brought cultural capital, there were no known established opportunities for this capital to be applied in the experiences of the African American educators. Williams' research (2018) stood out through the educators' lived experiences, they embraced and magnified parts of themselves which connects with critical race theory's counter storytelling. Each participant shared the power of close family and friends (also known as a "fictive kin") in the development of their positive self-image as educators, despite the pressure they felt in the school system. In turn, they were able to create a "fictive kin" in their classrooms and the workplace which was similar to a safe haven where they were valued and belonged. The study concluded that the experiences of African American teachers can be used to filter out White-dominant ideals within school structures and systems. To use counter-storytelling in this way, challenged the current system and create opportunities for equity and inclusion (Williams, 2018).

To examine the way African American women expressed their identity in schools, the work of Sandles (2018) examined the unspoken duties that African American teachers most often fulfill within schools. Sandles (2018) defined these duties performed most often by African American educators (in comparison to other groups) as being a disciplinarian, surrogate parent, and a cultural sage. The researcher conducted a literature review using the framework of Critical Race Theory, which shined a light on the racist foundation of African American teachers' role in schools. The work of Sandles (2018) reinforced the findings of Williams (2018) and Farinde-Wu and Fitchett's (2018). In all

three studies- some African American teachers struggled with a sense of belongingness and identity.

The Underrepresentation of African American Women in Executive Leadership Roles

Alqahtani (2020) highlighted the underrepresentation of women in executive leadership roles, in the following settings: education, medicine, adult education, STEM, and others. Alqahtani's research (2020) was in the form of a literature review that sought to understand the leadership gender differences in educational settings all over the world. Within the research, women were said to be less visible in executive leadership roles, and there were structural and cultural factors within the organizations of their employment that also related to limited visibility of women in executive leadership roles. For example, women advanced into leadership roles at a slower rate than men.

Alli et. al (2021) revealed that women are underrepresented in the medical field, especially at the executive leadership level. Women comprise about 25% of the roles in the medical field. Five case studies were used as data sources, and the results revealed that women felt put into work quandaries that required them to put their jobs up against their families. Additionally, women were being paid less money than their male counterparts to perform the same tasks. Lastly, women's previous experiences were not weighted equally to those of men, thus creating a barrier to advance roles.

West (2020) sought to understand why there were so few African American women in education, specifically student affairs administrator roles throughout American universities. From hiring data, the researchers found that African American women made up 7% of the student affairs administration jobs, while White women made up 38%. Knowing that only 7% were hired, it led to a closer look at the qualifications for the role

to determine the average level of candidacy for African American women. To hold a student affairs administrator job, candidates required a master's degree. Graduation data showed that African Americans earned the largest number of advanced degrees out of any other minority group in 2017. Data from the African American Women's Summit, which was a group geared toward African American female student affairs administrators, was used to determine demographic information and lived experiences anecdotes. The results revealed that although most of the participants held the professional requirements, in the long-term only 8% were interested in remaining their current positions. Understanding why the participants did not desire to remain in their positions may lead to an answer to the question of why there are so few African American women in administrative roles within the field of student affairs. The participants not only held the requirements needed for the role, they also possessed characteristics that made participants stand out, in comparison to their White or male counterparts. Examining the characteristics that made candidates stand out provides context on why there were so few African American women chosen for the administrative roles. Next are examples of characteristics that made the participants stand out in comparison to their White counterparts: 13% held doctoral degrees, many worked at least 2 other universities before their current one and held those positions for 5 years or less. The results reveal that increasing the number of African American women in leadership roles was not a problem because they were not qualified for the roles.

The work of McCluney and Rabelo (2021) argued that in order for African Americans to be visible in the workforce, there have to be conditions in place for them to be seen. To explain, their research elevates the challenges of Black women in being overlooked and silenced in the workplace. The researchers discussed the White gaze

which means the actions, skills, and experiences that align with what White or dominant culture deems valuable. It serves as a toolkit of how to assign value and attention to people, places, and things in the world; a function of racism or Whiteness as permanence that excludes and overlooks anything or anyone outside of a set category. According to the researchers, the White gaze manifests itself into systems and structures that can isolate, overlook, and silence Black women in the workplace (McCluney & Rabelo, 2021).

McCluney and Rabelo (2021) sought to understand how to increase the visibility of African American women in the workplace. They came up with four routes to being visible, and within these there is tension between being valued for their distinct qualities and being recognized as a member of a larger group. Their work revealed the intersectionality of race and gender, which could make it challenging for African American women to feel a sense of belongingness in the workforce. Within these spaces, the participants had varied degrees of social capital which led to an ideal way of showing up, expressing oneself, etc. Because of the nuisance of identity, African American women may not have felt free and/or accepted to present their authentic selves in the workspace. African American women experience visibility on the following levels: precariousness, invisibility, hypervisibility, and partial visibility. According to the researchers, at each level, African American women are required to adjust their identities against mainstream culture (McCluney & Rabelo, 2021).

In West's study (2020), a common theme in the participant data about African American women in administrative roles in the field of student affairs was the lack of visibility. The data highlighted how the participants did not feel recognized as a value add to the department. Additionally, although most of the participants had more years of

education than their counterparts, they did not feel distinguished in the work community. For example, the data revealed that some African American women had one more Master's degree than their White counterparts, but it did not lead to increased chances in obtaining leadership role. In fact, participants with doctoral degrees still struggled to be visibly seen as viable candidates for leadership roles.

The themes of visibility and equity can be understood using the work of Mcquillan and Hernandez (2021), who examined the disproportionate number of African American women in STEM educational roles and strategies to address the disparities. Through the work of the ADVANCE program, universities, companies, and organizations received training and support to boost promotion and hiring opportunities for women of color in the STEM field. Data were used from three time periods of clients: 2000-2007, 2008-2013, and 2014-2020. Over time there was a small change in the number of female faculty, though the improvements were inconsistent. It was discovered that the most transformational change happened in hiring minority women in leadership roles. On the contrary according Mcquillan and Hernandez (2021), when the organizations attempted to promote women from within, the percentage of women and women of color were so small, that it did not promote real change in the attrition data for the organizations. What can be learned from this study is that change happens over time. In relation to the research questions, why are there so few African American women in principal roles-to foster change- change requires an examination and restructuring of structures and systems that birthed the status quo. In other words, simply hiring more African American women in this study did not permanently change the population and pipeline of African American women in leadership roles.

An article by Roberts and Mayo (2019) showed the experience of African

American leaders, and how the work environment impeded their success in the role. This study examined the experiences of five administrators. The research revealed that African American administrators are not being retained due to not feeling a sense of community, or fitting into their roles. Sixty percent of the participants shared experiences with micro aggressions from their superiors. The participants described feeling invisible. Based on the results, the following conclusions were drawn: restructure the hiring, retention, and promotion practices. Here are examples of restructured practices: hiring practices related to the process of interviewing and selecting candidates with the experience of candidates in mind. Retention practices meant monitoring effective measures that influence staff's decision to remain employed in the organization. Promotion practices spoke to establishing an equitable process of being promoted from one position to the other. Lastly, establishing a structure that monitored and created touchpoints with African American women from hiring to promotion through retention, could lead to higher levels of visibility for African American staff members.

African American Women in Education

The previous sections focused on the experiences of African American educators: teachers and administrators. There is limited research on the experiences of African American women, so research was examined on the African American male experience as well. The African American educator experience is heavily influenced by politics and societal responses to race (Townsend, 2021); therefore, the purpose of this section is to provide context on the environmental climate of urban principals.

Sims and Carter (2019) focused on the leadership styles of African American women. Their research built on the earlier work of Parker and Ogilvie (1996). Parker and Ogilvie's work (1996) was a seminal study that codified African American women's

leadership style as a combination of male distinct, Anglo distinct, and African American female distinct. Parker and Ogilvie's work (1996) is an example of seminal research, for their model elevated the importance of race and gender within the context of leadership. Ironically, they found similarities between the leadership tools used by African American women and White men: self-determination, self-confidence, and networking. Sims and Carter's (2019) research sought to add perspective to the African American female leadership experience by exposing challenges based on race and gender: tokenism, isolation, and invisibility. The researchers found that African Americans faced unfair challenges and often avoided situations that could lead to being stereotyped in the workplace. For example, it is said that African American women experience a myriad of challenges due to their race, gender, and positionality in the workplace. Sim and Carter's research (2019) concluded that micro aggressions in the workplace impacted the level of happiness participants contributed to their employment. In turn, the participants ignored racial micro aggressions and avoided situations that would lead to potential discriminatory responses. The work of Sims and Carter (2019) and (Townsend, 2021) shed light on the impact of micro aggression on the workplace experience for African Americans.

African American Women in Principal Roles

The work of Curtis (2017) affirmed the need for more African American women in school principal roles. This work explained the value of African American women in leadership roles. The participants were eight African American women, who participated via pre and post interviews, and pre and post focus groups. Three themes emerged in the results of Curtis (2017): African American women felt silenced, either from a lack of representation or being excluded from decision-making. They were concerned about

being taken seriously as leaders, and being denied promotional opportunities.

Additionally, they experienced reservations about their own stamina to fight the bias and unfair treatment. African American women were motivated by their challenging experiences and future aspirations; through the research. Through community and shared collaboration, the women in the study were said to be empowered by their struggles. It was said that African American women utilized their knowledge of and experience with their culture to champion change in their communities and social circles (Curtis, 2017). This is called bicultural leadership, which means African American women were said to analyze the strategies used by the dominant culture. The purpose of analyzing the strategy is to understand how to best survive and advance within the system. Overall, the results in Curtis (2017) concluded the necessity of African American women in school leadership roles in urban education. For African American women possessed the cultural capital and competence to understand the needs of the community, while holding the experience and credentials in the field of education.

Jang and Alexander (2022) found that African American female principals tend to lead schools with higher populations of students that are economically disadvantaged when compared to White and male counterparts. This work gives perspective on the impact of their leadership. Their quantitative study used data from the High School Longitudinal Studies collected from 2009-2016 which provided long-term data on students from 9th grade through adulthood/entering the workforce. The research questions focused on the intersection between the race and gender of the principal as it related to the population of students that attended the school. Additionally, their leadership styles led to higher student achievement rates in math and teacher collective responsibility rates. For example, the findings show a positive correlation between the

grade 9 math achievement scores of students from low socioeconomic status and under the leadership of African American female principals. In fact, African American female principals were associated with math achievement scores that were 2.84 points higher for all 9th grade students-this included White, Black, American Indian, Asian, and students from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds.

African American female principals experience duality as women and a person of color (Curtis, 2017; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). For some African American women, this looked like toggling between two worlds. The work of Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) in their seminal study explained Bi-culturalism, which is the shifting between personal identity and majority culture. The participants were 333 African American women. The participants completed a questionnaire with questions centered on their experiences with racism and sexism. Bi-culturalism meant that African American women may have felt pressure to choose an alternate method (like Black English or formal English) to communicate and exist other than one that comes natural to them in order to be understood/taken seriously. Shifting relates to the ways African American women choose to communicate based on their audience, the intended purpose for the communication, and perception of being misunderstood or discounted-without shifting. Some participants discussed how shifting led to feelings of depression, as the need to shift the way in which one communicates also leads to a shift in one's identity. Shifting serves a couple of different purposes: for the participants, it created a barrier between themselves and stereotypes of their persona and it created what they thought to be a better way to be understood. The findings conclude that the utilization of an alternate method to exist, assert, and express themselves illuminated the oppression African American female leaders face today. Yet, the shift in personal identities occurred due to feeling like an

“outsider” or “other” in group spaces (Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

Conclusion

This literature review sought to understand the issues faced by African American principals in urban schools. Leaders are defined as assistant principals, principals, and superintendents. In this literature review, critical race theory (CRT) was used to examine why there are so few African American women in urban principal roles. Of all the CRT principles, the permanence of racism was the most consistently seen through the research. Conducting a deep dive on the impact of Brown vs. the Board of Education, was the first step in providing context on the shortage of African American teachers and administrators. The next step was an analysis of African American teacher candidacy and placement. Understanding the hiring criteria and job placement of African American teachers helps the readers become critical of the role of equity and in teacher placement decisions. Next, there was a perspective on the experiences of teachers interested in leadership opportunities. While examining the experiences of teachers who showed interest in leadership roles, a principle of crt emerged, Whiteness as property. For example, Whiteness as property became evident in the large percentage of White males being chosen for leadership positions over other groups, regardless of experience, credentials, and skills. Lastly, this was later confirmed through the use of counter-storytelling by African American leaders when they shared their experiences of interviewing for leadership roles.

Research Questions

Central Research Question: How do African American women describe their experiences in becoming an urban principal?

Support Research Question 1: How do African American women describe the

factors that motivated them and propelled them to become an urban principal?

Support Research Question 2: How do African American women describe the challenges they encountered to become an urban principal, as well as how they addressed the challenges?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Aim of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of African American female educators who are currently or were previously school principals-with an emphasis on their motivation to pursue the role and the challenges they faced along the way. The goal was to uncover what factors motivated African American women to become school principals. Also, while participants were in pursuit of the role, the researcher sought to highlight any challenges that presented themselves along the way. African American women are a subset of a dominant group. Their experiences and perspectives enrich and add breadth to the quality of service they provide in the field of education. Understanding African American women's motivations and challenges contributes to an existing body of work on the following: importance of diverse staff within school districts, equitable hiring practices, the impact of diverse staff on student achievement, and inclusionary practices in principal preparation programs, as well as the impact of African American women's leadership on the achievement levels of students. Chapter 1 explained the following: the research problem, definition of terms, background and justification of the problem, deficiencies within the evidence, the intended audience, and the importance/significance of the study. Chapter 2 was a literature review that describes the theoretical frameworks (Critical Race Theory and Social Inclusion Theory), the importance of women in executive leadership roles, African American women (including their experience with discrimination and as educators), and the research questions.

The following are the research questions: How do African American women describe their experiences in becoming a principal? How do African American women

describe the factors that motivated them to become a principal? How do African American women describe the challenges they encountered to become a principal? Once these questions are answered, the goal is to have an understanding of the motivations and challenges African American female educators face on the road to becoming school principals. Chapter 3 gives information on the research design, methodology, population, appropriate strategy for research, data collection process, and data analysis.

Qualitative Research Approach

A qualitative phenomenological approach was used to learn about the views and experiences of the participants within the study. Qualitative research was used to assess a process over time (Creswell, 2013). The researcher obtained information from a set of participants. The study focused on the lived experiences of the participants within their natural environment. The researcher collected data and analyze the participants' feelings and attitudes.

According to Creswell (2013), phenomenological research is a journey to find meaning based on the experiences of the participants. This research approach is appropriate because the researcher seeks to understand the African American female principal perspective on the motivations and challenges faced along the path to urban school principalship. This research topic is critical given that only 20% of school principals in urban schools are African American, which is an even lower number for African American women in this role (Goldring et al., 2018).

The research unpacks and problematizes the world around us. To do so, there are guardrails and systems in place to establish proper functionality. In other words, research design created a set of guard rails that can be used to keep research within a logical zone of understanding (Creswell, 2013). The researcher analyzed the data with participants.

There was no random assignment since the participants are grouped based on a set of characteristics. For this study, using the experiences and perspectives of the participants, the researcher sought to elevate the experiences of educators that may contribute to the field of education and equitable hiring practices for school administrators.

The potential participants were contacted via social media through purposeful and snowball sampling. This means the participants were selected based on their alignment with the inclusion criteria. For the purpose of this study, the researcher connected with current and former African American female principals to conduct one-on-one interviews. To collect data, the researcher utilized a qualitative research approach where one-on-one interviews were used to respond to the research questions. The goal was to identify trends and underlying meanings across participants and data sources.

Participants

The researcher identified 12 to 15 participants who are currently or were previously African American female principals. To obtain the participants, the sampling procedure for this study was purposeful. Also, potential participants were asked to recommend other potential candidates (snowballing) to help the researcher identify additional participants.

Data Collection Tools

The researcher utilized two tools to collect the data needed to answer the researcher's questions. The following tools were used in this study: interview protocol and field notes.

Interview Protocol

The first data collection tool that the researcher used is the interview protocol (See Appendix A). The interview protocol was created by the researcher as a means to

address the research problem and questions. Interviews were appropriate for this study because they will provide context, perspective, and a deeper understanding of what motivates the participants (Hannan, 2007).

There were nine interview questions. The goal of the interview questions was to provide a response to the central research question and the supporting research questions. The interview questions were scaffold versions of the central research question. For example, the first five interview questions started with a broad inquiry into the participants' motivations, challenges, and means to address challenges. These five questions connected to the research questions in an effort to understand universal factors that motivate and challenge participants. Next, the last four interview questions sought to understand the motivations and challenges within the school setting that participants experienced in pursuit of the principal role. To be precise, interview questions one, two, six, and seven focused on motivation to pursue the principal role and aligned to support research question one. Interview questions three, five, eight, and nine focused on the challenges in pursuit of the principal role and are aligned to support research question two.

Field Notes

The second data collection tool that the researcher used was field notes. During the one-on-one interviews, the researcher took low inference notes as a means to process the research questions' responses from the participants. To organize the responses into concrete buckets, the researcher filled in each of the four quadrants based on the titles: connections, anomalies, contradictions, and areas to probe. The field notes were included as part of the data analysis process of the research study.

Field Testing

To assess the validity of the interview protocol, a field test was conducted prior to the launch of the research study. The participants in the field test were African American educators. The field test participants were not participants in the research study. The purpose of the field test was to confirm that the wording of each of the questions on the interview protocol were clear, not confusing and addresses the research problem. Also, the field test helped the researcher determine if the number of interview questions was adequate to provide the data to address the research questions. It sought to determine if there were questions that need to be added. The researcher made changes to the interview protocol based on feedback from the field testing process.

Pilot

The purpose of the pilot was to understand if the methods of this research study provide insight on the phenomenon. After IRB approval, the researcher conducted a pilot. In the pilot study, the researcher ran through the entire data collection process with a set of participants. For example, the pilot was a rehearsal of the interview for this study. The participants of the pilot were African American, female educators. The data collected from the pilot was not used for the actual research study. With the pilot, the researcher sought to gain insight on the procedures for collecting data. Ultimately, the pilot provided the researcher perspective on the interview process. If any changes are made to the interview protocol, based on the pilot, the researcher needed to resubmit the interview protocol to the IRB of Nova Southeastern University for approval.

Procedures

The researcher began the study after approval from the IRB of Nova Southeastern

University. After approval, the researcher created a social media page that markets the research for the purpose of locating participants. When a potential participant expressed interest in the study, the researcher emailed her Appendix B. Next, the researcher sent Appendix C.

Data Collection

The researcher began to collect data from the participants via Zoom. At the start of the interview via Zoom, the researcher described Appendix C. The purposes of the participation information sheet are the following: summarize the study, share the rights of the participants, and communicate the voluntary nature of the participation process. The researcher ensures that there was a signed consent form from each participant prior to the start of the data collection process. Data collection officially began within the one-on-one interview.

During the one-on-one interview, the researcher followed the interview protocol in asking open-ended questions and follow up questions (see Appendix A). Once the interview begins, the structure of the interviews was as follows: one-on-one using set interview questions but leaving space to ask follow-up questions as they arise. Given the nuisance of each participant's experience, the use of semistructured interview questions was necessary to obtain a wide range of information on the research topic. (Kallio et al., 2016)

Throughout the interviews, the researcher took low inference notes as a method of processing the responses received from the interviewees. The low inference notes were called field notes. The researcher continued the interviews until data saturation is achieved. Data saturation means that enough responses are collected from the participants, so that there is a level of consistency reached to complete the data collection

process. (Creswell, 2013).

At the close of the interview, the researcher asked the participants if they had any follow up questions or needed any information clarified from the interview. The researcher completed the interview by explaining the member check process. The member checking process looked like the following steps: the participants received a transcript of the recorded interview, via email, within approximately 3 days after the interview. The researcher requested that the participants read the interview transcripts and submit changes within 24 hours. Changes were made to the master data file to reflect all changes that participants submit through the member check process.

Data Analysis

The interview was recorded on Zoom, with the transcript and recording saved. The researcher checked for internal validity by re-reading the interview transcripts, while listening to the Zoom recordings. The goals of external and internal validity were to ensure the data valid and reliable (Gordon, 2018). Additionally, the researcher conducted a member check for external validity by completing the member check process. Member check was designed to preserve construct validity (Zairul, 2021).

The researcher analyzed data from the interview transcripts and the field notes. All of the participant data was analyzed as a collective to identify trends, patterns, themes, and responses to the research questions using the application called Dedoose. Dedoose created a coding system to support a thorough analysis of the data. Dedoose is a computer application that compiles, organizes, sorts, and analyzes qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method data from multiple sources (UCSF, 2021). The researcher utilized the content thematic analysis approach, which analyzes the data based on themes. All of the data were translated into a common language using themes, where

the data sets are equally interpretable and recognizable in the context of the criterion and predictor variables (Haynes-Brown & Fetters, 2021).

Step-By-Step Analysis

An analysis of Interviews using the Dedoose program (Hannan, 2007) follows:

1. Carefully read each interview transcript and underline key words, phrases, and statements.
2. Re-read the research questions and highlight the underlined parts that answer the research questions. This process ensured relevant information stands out.
3. In a separate area, cut and pasted the underline parts that are not highlighted, because they were useful but not currently relevant.
4. Uploaded the highlighted parts to the Dedoose application, so they can be coded.
5. In Dedoose, the coded data, was bracketed in order to establish patterns across the data.
6. The patterns were examined to identify similar patterns that merged into themes.
7. Once the themes were organized, the researcher summarized the themes into written descriptors.
8. Finally, the written description was synthesized to respond to the research questions.

Ethical Considerations

As it pertains to the matter of ethics, there were several ethical considerations as this qualitative research study was conducted. All participants received the participant information sheet (see Appendix C), the data collection instruments, and were given the

option to provide consent for their interviews to be recorded. Informed consent was required for all participants, which means they had to state in writing that they were participating in the study and give permission for their responses to be counted as data toward the research study. The researcher provided emotional and physical protection and safety by creating research conditions where the participants are free of emotional and physical danger. This means asking the research questions in an objective way and only asking follow-up questions that were broad, open-ended. This started with the adaptation of research instruments and tools that do no harm to the mental and physical states of the participants. Protecting the participants also included maintaining privacy of their personal information and ensuring that their responses or data are not linked to them personally during the data collection process and after the findings are published. An additional layer of emotional protection is the awareness of the researcher's positionality in reference to the participants. Additionally, there were two other factors to consider: coercion and bias. The researcher had eight years of experience as a school administrator, therefore she had been in supervisory roles with educators. The researcher did not select participants that she has worked with previously or currently, as a way to reduce the likelihood of coercion or bias.

Trustworthiness

The data's correctness will be contingent on the format of the data source, which will be semistructured interviews. The interview questions were the backbone of the data source. Therefore, to establish trustworthiness, the researcher utilized the step-by-step procedures. There are three aspects of trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, and confirmability; each tenet is vital in boosting the trustworthiness of the research study's data and analysis (Patton, 2015). Trustworthiness pertained to how

reliable the research study and its findings are at addressing the research problem. For example, it answered the questions: does the data address the research problem? Is the data credible? Does the data represent a sampling of the population? In research, trustworthiness legitimizes the data and makes the research credible (Krefting, 1991).

Credibility had to do with the alignment between the research findings and the research problem. So, speaking specifically to this study, how closely aligned were the results of the semistructured, one-on-one interviews with the research problem of there being so few African American women in principal roles? Additionally, could the participants' responses lead to an understanding of the motivations and challenges of African American women in principal roles? One way to determine was through the selection of appropriate research methods. In this case, the use of semistructured, one-on-one interviews provided a specific view into the experiences of the participants. The interviews were semistructured, which meant that the researcher prepared a list of pre-set questions. However, based on the responses from the interviewee, the researcher had the flexibility to ask follow-up questions that round out the responses or add information to the research topic. Interviewing was the chosen research method because doing so one-on-one created an intimate setting for participants to feel comfortable and get vulnerable. An additional measure of trustworthiness was the submission of researcher field notes. The purpose of the field notes was a space where the researcher can process the participants' responses in real time. The field notes represented a window into the mind and decision-making of the researcher, which added context and depth to the data analysis process.

Potential Research Bias

The researcher sought to understand the educational experience of African

American women as they pursued the school principal role, specifically an understanding of what motivated them to and motivations the challenges they encountered along the way.

Due to the researcher's experiences, there was a potential for researcher bias. The researcher was an African American female educator that taught elementary and middle school level special education and English language arts for nine years. After leaving the classroom, the researcher had been a school administrator for eight years, in which she fulfilled the following roles: dean of curriculum and instruction, assistant principal, and principal. As the researcher transitioned from the role of teacher to principal, it was a difficult process due to structural problems within the organizations in which she was employed at the time.

The researcher was motivated, yet challenged when pursuing the principal role. The researcher was motivated to become a principal due to the following reasons: love for the students and families, and success she experienced in increasing student achievement/parent engagement as a teacher-within the same organization. The researcher was challenged by a lack of onboarding when promoted from the teacher to principal role. This challenge manifested in the following ways: researcher did not feel equipped to manage school board governance and school board communication, secondary leader training and performance management, as well as support and development of low-performing staff members. Since the research content was so closely related to the experiences of the researcher, the researcher will use the clustering method to identify patterns within data- to ensure the results are focused on the data versus personal experiences of the researcher (Hannan, 2007).

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of African American women who are currently or were previously urban school principals- with an emphasis on their motivation to pursue the role and the challenges they faced along the way. The chosen participants were African American women who are currently or were previously school principals. The study focused on one central research question, how do African American women describe their experiences in becoming a school principal?

The phenomenological research approach was appropriate for the purpose of this study. According to Creswell (2013), phenomenological research is a journey to find meaning based on the experiences of the participants. The researcher connected with participants to conduct one-on-one, semistructured interviews (via Zoom). The goal was to learn their perspective on the motivations and challenges faced along the path to school principalship. The researcher utilized two tools to collect the data: interview protocol and field notes. This chapter explains the findings and the themes that emerged from the analysis. The findings will be presented through tables and theme analyses.

Research Questions

Central Research Question: How do African American women describe their experiences in becoming a school principal?

Support Research Question 1: How do African American women describe the factors that motivated them and propelled them to become a school principal?

Support Research Question 2: How do African American women describe the challenges they encountered to become a school principal, as well as how they addressed the

challenges?

Table 1 gives a snapshot of the demographics for the 12 participants.

Table 1

Demographics of the Participants

Participants	Years in the Field Education	Years in an Administrative Role	Years as a Principal	School Setting of First Principal Role
A231B	14	5	3	C
C458E	7	5	4	C
E678B	18	2	2	P
G891D	24	21	6	D
J670C	33	19	4	D
D444P	21	8	6	D
M458F	26	16	6	C
H781D	11	3	3	C
K122C	20	2	2	P
L246F	19	17	15	C
B000C	18	6	2	D
X333S	22	2	<1	D

School Setting of First Principal Role: Charter (C); Private (P); District (D)

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher collected data through interviews, field notes, and recordings. In order to conduct the interviews, the researcher utilized the interview protocol. The interview protocol consisted of the interview questions. Additionally, the researcher used the field notes. During the interviews, there was a personalized field note for each participant. The field notes aided the researcher in comprehension of the interview content and supported in the creation of follow-up questions during the interview. For example, as the participants answered the interview and follow-up questions, the researcher jotted down key words and phrases stated by the participants. The key words and phrases became the backbone of the follow-up questions asked by the researcher. Once the participant had all of their questions answered, accepted the interview invite,

and submitted the consent form, the interviews began via Zoom. The interviews took place between December 29th, 2022 and February 13th, 2023. The participants showed enthusiasm to share their experiences and passion for the field of education.

Theme Analysis

Lester et al. (2020) argued that using qualitative data to create themes is a way of making sense of the data. Based on the semistructured interviews, each participant discussed unique and complex circumstances and experiences that led to the pursuit of the principal role. According to Vaismoradi (2016), the theme is defined as, "...a high degree of generality that unifies ideas regarding the subject of inquiry" (p. 101). The creation of themes established interconnectedness between the participants and their experiences. The major themes provided context to the lived experiences of the participants. The researcher used the recordings of the interviews, the transcripts, and the field notes to create themes.

Development of Emergent Themes

The researcher enlisted the help of Dedoose, which is a software app, to identify the themes, experiences, and deep analysis of the data. The length of each transcript was an average of fourteen pages in length. Once the researcher finished uploading the transcripts in Dedoose, it was time to read, organize, and analyze the data. Six themes emerged from the analysis of the data. The themes are (a) childhood experiences were motivating factors to become a principal (b) experiences with bias while pursuing and/or fulfilling school leadership roles were challenges encountered on the path to principalship (c) the interview and hiring process for the principal role was a challenge on the path to principalship (d) mentors as motivating factors on the path to and during the principalship (e) impactful employment transitions as motivating factors and/or challenges while in

pursuit of a leadership role and (f) Representation as a motivating factor to pursue the principal role. Table 2 notes the emergent themes and categories and Table 3 notes the explanations of those themes.

Theme 1: Childhood Experiences Were Motivating Factors to Becoming a Principal

Participants shared the impact of their childhood experiences on their perspective in becoming a principal. The way they viewed education was shaped by their experiences as a child. Participants cited the value they put on education, the importance of giving students' access through education, and the necessity of school systems, which were established based on their experiences with their parents, teachers, and trusted adults as children. The pivotal responses from the participants are listed below:

Impact of Upbringing on Educational Perspective. X333S said,

Okay, well, my journey in education truly began in the church as a young person. My father was a pastor of a small church. So with that I would often teach Sunday school to both adults and young people. So it wasn't a thing/big deal for me to have a class full of 30 kids on Sunday morning, so I always love teaching. My dad was a teacher. Mom taught music in the church.

M45BF noted,

No, my mom was a warm, but strict disciplinarian. When I was at my mom's school, I would watch her 2 fingers in the air, and the whole entire room would fall silent. I was someone who had classroom management from day one because I grew up watching my mom. And so when I thought about what a school should be, what a school could be versus what I saw when I got into teaching (I started teaching in Baltimore), that's when I recognized it's the leadership. Well, my high school was a public high school, but you didn't take a test to go [admission

process]...They had every activity, every foreign language.\

Table 2

Emergent Themes and Categories of Responses by Participants

Themes	Categories of Responses	Participants
1. Childhood Experiences Were Motivating Factors to Becoming a Principal	Upbringing; educational disparities faced in K-12 schools	(A231B), (C458E), (M458F), (X333S), (H781D), (B000C)
2. Experiences with Bias While Pursuing and/or Fulfilling Leadership Roles Were Challenges Encountered on the Path to Principalship	Bias based on age, gender, race, personality, and experience level Hand-picked for the role; selected based upon completion of pre-requisites; extensive interview process	(C458E), (G891D), (M458F), (H781D), (A231B), (K122C), (L246F) (C458E), (G891D), (J670C), (D444P), (M458F), (H781D), (A231B), (L246F), (X333S), (B000C)
3. The Interview and Hiring Process for the Principal Role was a Challenge on the Path to Principalship	Coaching; modeling, and support in the principal role District reassignments, misalignment of values, transitions due to feeling immobilized and used	(C458E), (G891D), (J670C), (M458F), (H781D), (A231B), (L246F), (B000C)
4. Mentors as Motivating Factors on the Path to and During the Principalship	Vicarious Success, Empowerment, Advocacy	(C458E), (G891D), (M458F), (H781D), (A231B), (L246F) (C458E), (M458F), (A231B), (X333S), (H781D)
5. Impactful Employment Transitions as Challenges and Solutions to Challenges While in Pursuit of a Leadership Role		
6. Representation as a Motivating Factor to Pursue the Principal Role		

But the academics were at a high level. It [the academics] was hard and it was rigorous, and it prepared you for college, and the rigor... you had to pay attention in class.” But it was that type of practice that made college easy. I was in the debate club, you know, and so I think that those things were the things that I wanted to create... mainly the rigor and the expectations.

H781D said,

I think, especially for Black women, we're so used to fixing everything because we've always had to fix everything like this is completely not related [to the pursuit of the principal role].” “But like from my own personal experiences, I was raised by a Black woman that was just like, forget it. I'll do it. My mother was like, “Forget it. I got it.”

Table 3

Emergent Themes and Explanations

Emergent Themes and Explanations	Explanation based on Participant Responses
1. Childhood Experiences Were Motivating Factors to Becoming a Principal	Participants discuss their upbringing, education disparities as a child in school, interactions with teachers, and general experience in K-12 schools as motivating factors to becoming a principal
2. Experiences with Bias While Pursuing and/or Fulfilling Leadership Roles Were Challenges Encountered on the Path to Principalship	Participants share their experiences with bias based on their age, gender, race, personality, and experience level in pursuit of school leadership roles
3. The Interview and Hiring Process was a Challenge on the Path to Principalship	Participants explain challenge of the hiring and interview process for the principal role: hand-picked for the role, selected based upon completion of pre-requisites; extensive interview process
4. Mentors as Motivating Factors on the Path to and During the Principalship	Participants reflect on the impact of a mentor, that encouraged/coached them up for leadership, modeled leadership, and supported them in the principal role
5. Impactful Employment Transitions as Challenges and Solutions to Challenges While in Pursuit of a Leadership Role	Participants reflect employment transitions that either motivated or challenged them due to the following: misalignment in values, district reassignments, and feeling immobilized and/or used
6. Representation as a Motivating Factor to Pursue the Principal Role	Participants discuss how being a symbol of representation served as motivation toward the principal role

So that's the example of the Black woman that I saw” “I also think that Black women get tired. We get tired of having to fix it all. So we shouldn't have to fix it all. But if we don't do it, who won't do it? And it's just like the discouragement is so very real. I remember being told: Oh, yeah, you will be a great leader. But

who's gonna teach? Who's gonna be the great teacher today? And I'm like, well, if I'm the leader then it will be my job to create these great teachers.

B000C noted,

But after I had my daughter I had a degree, but I wasn't doing anything with it, and I had my daughter, and I was looking at her, and I thought I remembered those conversations in school. What do you wanna be when you grow up? Well, what do your parents do? I never had an answer for what my mom was doing, because she didn't work. And so I remember those conversations...I didn't want that for my daughter, so I decided to go back to school.

C458B said,

I always believed that God has ordered every one of my steps because I never thought like I'm going to be a school leader. I didn't feel developed. I didn't feel prepared. At first, I never thought about that because as we are growing up- coming from an immigrant family and being Black in America- you always felt like you had to prove something, or if you didn't do it well the first time it was a sign of failure. I was looking at the students just thinking through, how do we definitely prepare independent middle school students to where they feel proud of themselves and they're confident in their skills.

Impact of Educational Disparities Experienced in School as a Child. (X333S)

When I was growing up, in 4th grade there was a difference in the science projects. We used to plant seeds, which is science. They do come to fruition. My mom transferred me to a school on the south side of Tulsa for 5th grade. It was a predominantly White school. The science projects there were dissecting hearts, dissecting lungs you know. It was just a higher quality of rigor even in our

computer classes.

A231B followed up with,

How did I get here, or why education for me? I got into education because of my experiences in the lack of high quality education options in my hometown. So I think I was always taught like, get an education. It's the only thing in that, you know-folks can't take from you. So the importance of education was instilled in me at a very young age. My mother didn't graduate from high school, so that was the goal.

Theme 2: Experience With Bias While Pursuing and/or Fulfilling Leadership Roles Were Challenges Encountered on the Path to Principalship.

Participants recalled experiences of bias while pursuing the principal role which posed a significant challenge for them. Some participants reported that during the principal interview process, interviewers and/or peers made comments in reference to their age and questioned their level of expertise as a result. Additionally, participants suspected that their gender and race had an effect on being passed up for promotional opportunities. Lastly, participants believed aspects of their personality prevented them from maintaining a principal role. For example, “being vocal”, “candid and courageous”, “pushing back”, and “being assertive” were specific personality traits that were described by participants. The pivotal responses from the participants are listed below:

Ageist Experiences While in Pursuit of the Principal Role. M458F said,

And then, even when I was interviewing, I looked younger than what I was, and so, you know, people greet you. I remember interviewing -like somewhere in Upstate New York, I forget where it was. It was for an assistant principal position. [During the interview] I actually asked a question. I said, “What if I was trying to

implement a program and there were some veteran teachers that were pushing back, what would be your next step?" And one of the principals yelled, "I wouldn't even have somebody your age talking to my veteran teachers.

M458F noted,

I asked the mayor at the time who had implemented the program, "Is this [the teach half a day and coach half a day program] a stepping stone for leadership, and being a principal?" And he didn't realize that I had been in the classroom for almost 10 years. You know I had been like [teaching for] seven years, and he was like: "You need at least 10 more years [of teaching experience]. That's when you should ask me that question". I thought to myself, this is why I will leave. Why would he have expected me to be 40 [years old]? But he looked at me and assumed I was like 21. So I perceived there to be a little bit of discrimination. And it wasn't just from White people. It was Latino people. There were other Black people, too, age-discrimination, you know. So I just felt that [age discrimination] in a traditional district. They were looking for you to have spent more years [teaching] in the absence of achievement. They'll promote someone who would have been at it for years, but not doing it well for years.

L246F noted,

Number one, my age, because when I became a principal, I was 29, so I was the youngest or second youngest principal in the State of Missouri... I've come in and taken a position that most people are working their way up to. So just dealing with that at a young age, dealing with people older than you, who you're so used to getting support from are kind of intimidated by you now, because here you are.

Perception of Principals' Gender and/or Race and Its Impact. L246F also

said, "You know the strong Black woman. I happened to be Black! But when a Black woman is strong you know that that people tend to be intimidated by your strength- as a leader in such a political realm "

A231B followed up with ,

I think it was for the optics. I think they needed and wanted a Black face and found Black faces to project who is in charge. [To make it appear as if] we value the experience, or we value Black and Brown teachers and leaders. But really they don't. They just want it to look that way. But that value [for Black leaders] wasn't there.

C458E agreed,

I am a creative type of person. I like to chart my own. Don't tell me how to do something, just tell me the guardrails. Because again, I get it sometimes as many Black women are told/ they look to us to do ten different things at once.

H781D added,

It's hard to move up like nobody really took me seriously as wanting to be a leader until I got a master's (degree). I sat in my principal's office like, what else can you give me to do to show you that I'm a leader. I also think that Black women get tired. We get tired of having to fix it all. So we shouldn't have to fix it all. But if we don't do it, who won't do it? And it's just like the discouragement is so very real. I remember being told: Oh, yeah, you will be a great leader. But who's gonna teach? Who's gonna be the great teacher today?

B000C noted,

The last principal that I was under was Black as well, and her husband was a Black man. He had been a principal for years, and she even talked to me about

how she felt. She could say something; he could say something. They say the same thing, but it will be better received by him as a man than from her. And so sometimes, when I'm looking at things, I think people are second guessing. Simply because I am a black lady, you know, and even though I'm a doctor. I'm not, doctor. Always be where I feel like I gotta walk in and be the most intelligent person in the room. I just wanna be me, you know? And I just so happen to have my doctorate. I try to be down on earth, I try not to put on airs.

K122C added,

I also know that there is a perception out there of a woman of color whose voice may be a little deep. I have tall shoulders and a somewhat deep voice. So. me saying, "Good morning. Did you check on 1, 2, 3," comes off completely different as someone half my size, and much lighter. "Oh, could you check on this" [simulating questions she frequently asked her staff members]. It was an expectation that I would soften things and my voice for other people, for them to get comfortable.

Participants listed examples of racial discrimination as the following: micro aggressions, racism, and White Fragility. The participants expressed and named perceptions of micro aggressions, racism, and White Fragility as it relates to the interactions they experienced with White executive leaders. The participants discussed experiences with White executive leaders where the participants felt they were treated disrespectfully as a result of racism, micro aggressions, and White Fragility. The participants named the cause of their mistreatment as a byproduct of their race as African American. When the researcher asked the participants if they were aware of others that fell victim to the same sort of described mistreatment, they said yes, and cited that the

other victims were their same race and/or were a major of another minority race as well.

The following reflect the participant responses:

Micro Aggressions. H781D said,

I had an email that said: Moving forward, you would be the middle school English teacher for your building. And this other man will be serving as acting administrator, and that was it. Nothing happened the day before. There was no warning or anything. My staff was like you just told us that our principal is not our principal. I said, can somebody at least tell me where this came from? Like, what was your thought process? And that's when they told me that they didn't see my growth and urgency as a leader. (Interviewer:) Well, so thinking about how you got demoted, how people labeled you as: emotional, too vocal, divisive, pressured (according to HR), what would you call all of these things, like codify them? Micro aggressions and racism, because all of the people that said those things to me were White.

White Fragility. C458E said,

Then this lady [the former coach] came back and cried in my arms and said I misjudged you. I learned a lot about myself and when I had to look her dead in the eye. I was like that was overt racism and then I was like that was White Fragility at that point. She cried like a baby and then wanted to send the people in her programming to my school to learn from me. When there's White Fragility in the room, and you just feel so many covert racist practices being done, to speak up against it or bring them to light. I will give you a clear cut example. Towards the elementary school, it looks like 5 Black principals and there were 5 elementary schools. ...we took a picture together. She was immediately upset. She reached out

to her head of school. She said why is this picture tracking so much attention? We got to take this down, it is tracking so much attention. At that moment, I just feel like she felt threatened.

K122C said,

When those babies leave, and the grades are bad, and the scores are bad. [Then they would come back to me and say] I thought you could compete [academically with test scores] with other [neighborhood] schools, why didn't you handle...this. I'm like, no, that's not the job. I won't say that it's clearly an issue of White Fragility. But I can't say that it wasn't. I didn't see it when I first got there.

Racism. A231B began this topic by saying,

I think of it by them saying she ruffles too many feathers. She doesn't know how to work with upper middle class families. You're talking about how my cultures and values and how it comes out at work. Then you ruffle any feathers, and you don't know how to work with upper middle class folks so you can't sit at this table. I say that race played a role. I can definitively say race play the role too. It happened to other leaders specifically. For me, I was promised a principal role. For others it happened in leadership roles as well. There was a young Black man who I was really close with, and he again was taking on the operations role and training other operations fellows as the lower level person. But take this on [additional roles] because you're next, next year-it's you. And what was said about him is, he's not polished enough for the job, and a White man got it [the operations job]. I didn't get it [the principal job] a White woman got it. And then, specifically, this school, this network has three elementary schools, three middles and one high, and there is no Black or Brown leader-in a community where it's

like 98% Black and Brown students. So, yeah, and so if I was the one I was the hope for staff, like I was next when they needed something, they [staff] were sent to me.

G891D who added,

I will only speak from that experience. We always have to overcompensate. We're typically in predominantly Black and Brown communities. As leaders, I think there is this sense of, 'We're not going to let people think we let them get off the hook because they look like the students that we serve'. So, we come to the table over-prepared. It is like, "We are trying to make sure there's no excuse for you to say that I'm inferior. So, I need to be here prepared and ready to go". I know I think about that a lot of times, especially if I know that my counterpart doesn't look like me. Sometimes they don't do it to us, we do it to ourselves. Because we don't want to enter the space like, "I'm not prepared, I know I'm less than". I think they're [non-Black counterpart] already thinking that [She-African American woman- is less than and not prepared], so I can't go in confirming it.

M458F included,

Anybody should be able to [be a principal]. you know, and then also, you know, you're Black. So the I perceived there to just be a little bit of discrimination. And it wasn't just from White people. It was Latino people. There were other Black people, too. If anything, it was me seeing someone who was LatinX being looked at to be promoted, who had not had the test scores, did not have the years in the classroom, and who did not have the degree. So in that instance, I literally heard the superintendent is good friends with her aunt and blah blah blah [and that is how she got the promotion]. She was clearly on the fast track- in the absence of

achievement.

Personality Traits and Securing the Principal Role. L246F began,

My candid nature, and my courageous spirit has been a challenge to some. It's a double-edged sword. It's who I am. I'm unapologetic about it. But I'm not combative, you know. I'm not at my job today because of my candor and my strength. So, you know. And I'm okay with it. When you start to see changes in people, and they don't appreciate the same candid and courageous nature you have when you're leading the school. At times they love it and applaud it. They don't like when you have that same candid and courageous nature, when you're speaking up for yourself to your boss.

K122C noted,

I can be assertive. I know how to be very assertive. If I wanted to, I could be aggressive. Then I was told, "People don't understand what you mean when you blink. It's kind of aggressive". I clarified, "I said so, you're saying the way I blink at people is confusing to them, and makes them uncomfortable?" [I was told] Well, yes, you need to communicate more clearly. And I said, "Okay, so I started monitoring my blinking in certain meetings: how often I would blink to make sure that it wasn't being characterized as aggressive or hard to understand.

G891D also said,

For some reason I never got the word, or was pigeonholed as "aggressive". I was assertive, in a way that they could take it from me for whatever reason. I think I don't see myself as assertive, but more so self-assured. I just figured out how to. I don't shy away from conflict, or tension, but I don't like to create it. So when I say "grace" and being assertive, I am being assertive but I am not nasty about it. I

am not negative about it.

Theme 3: The Interview And Hiring Process for The Principal Role Was a Challenge on the Path to Principalship

Participants reported a variety of experiences during the hiring and interview process for the principal role. Some participants were hand-picked for the principal role based on their reputation in the school system, others were selected upon completion of prerequisites, while others applied for the role and completed an intensive interview process. The pivotal responses from the participants are listed below:

Hand-Picked for The Role. G891D noted, “They tapped me on the shoulder, and said you should apply for this position.”

J670C said,

So, I went down to the elementary school, and I think it was my second principal who was called to do something at the central office level. She called me in for a meeting and she said the only way they're going to let me take this position is if I can guarantee them that you're going to step up as principal.

D444P followed,

And then he left, and they wanted me to be the principal, and that's how I became the principal, Yeah. So I never apply. Like, of course, you have to do the application, of course, but I'm saying I never had to just look up anything to go. Yeah. And those are just HR formalities to make sure it's on file.

L246F added,

I had a wonderful experience as an assistant principal, but I was also going to school for my masters in educational administration, and then they asked me to take on the principal role. They finally called me down to the headquarters office.

And we have the person right there in the building, and that person is you.

Selected Based Upon Completion of Prerequisites. A231B began,

So I went. So I went out for that fellowship. To, let's just found my own school ...

So what that meant is that for a year, I was paid to learn how to propose a school to the State Education Department, and how to run a school. Everything from operations to budgets, to facilities, to the academics and curriculum and instruction that I knew. But the key part of this fellowship was that I got to travel the nation. So I studied schools that were doing well in urban areas: traditional public schools, charter schools, private schools, all types of schools who were doing well in urban areas. And then I had to pair with our community, figure out together what would work for [my city]. I went through proposing a school twice, because COVID interrupted everything with the State.

C458E added,

I went to Chicago for national selection. I don't feel like I had the development to become a founding principal. So then I went there and I did not get the development. There were 1 year and 2 year fellowships. I got the 2-year fellowship, and I was fine with that. When I returned home, they told me I would do a combination. They said, we need you to still be a high-performing AP [and] go to the 2-year fellowship and the 1-year fellowship.

H781D followed with, I was hired as a dean of students, and they put me on a track they called it, to get me to be a principal in the next 2 years. But when that time came up they were like, Oh, you didn't finish this program or this thing. You need to do this thing, and we need this from you: 3 years straight, like the same training. three years straight because they kept on saying that I didn't complete it.

B000C noted, “So then I was named principal here [at a different school]. While I was interim at the previous school”

An Extensive Interview Process. M458F began this discussions with,

The interview process was all day long. I mean, it was just so intricate. It was literally like me, teaching a sample lesson. It was me watching videos and asking what would I say to this teacher [based on the observation in the video]? It was walking through a school and being able to look at classrooms. We read articles and debated about them.

X333S noted,

In terms of me actually getting the principal role? There were so many people that were applying for that position. So I actually took initiative, and I wrote a letter to our ILB, who was a White male at that time, and I wrote a letter to him: explaining to him my qualifications: Why I should be in an administrative role, what I could bring to the table, as far as my relationships with parents and students. And he was like, Okay, so then he sent my letter to the human resources dept. They [human resources] in turn called me back the next week through the entire process that some people didn't even have to go through, but they called it The Hunger Games. And it's a very intensive day-long process, in order to get the position. However, you know, I went through it, passed through it.

Theme 4: Mentors as a Motivating Factor on the Path to and During the Principalship

Participants reported being impacted significantly by having a mentor along the journey to principalship. Some participants recounted the value in seeing a mentor (with the same identity markers) fulfilling the principal role, which revealed the possibilities of one day obtaining a leadership role. Additionally, this relationship- in some instances-

provided a guide for the next steps toward leadership. Oftentimes, mentors encouraged participants to do the following: apply for the principal role and resiliently face the challenges that come with the pursuit. Also, it was reported that mentors provided support that assisted the participants in maintaining the principal role. The pivotal responses from the participants are listed below:

Mentors Encourage Participants to Pursue Leadership Roles. A231B said, Then it just so happened that I got a text message from one of my mentors who said, Hey, do you know about like charter incubation? There are nonprofits that are charter incubators. So with a text message, I looked into it [charter incubation]. And they were sort of doing a needs assessment for [my city] and needed another charter school.

C458E added,

He was my coach and my AP and he is someone who I felt never boxed me into anything, or assign me to a certain position. He said listen, I just need you to go and show your face. Honestly, that was the motivating factor. Then he was like what is the worse you have to lose? Just go through it, and you get feedback, big deal!

G891D noted, “A motivating factor was one of the people who tapped me. I knew I was going somewhere that I knew that the leadership that was there ...would support me.”

H781D said,

Honestly, one of my mentors, who's also a Black woman. She was in educational leadership-she was like, '... you need to pursue something other than just teaching. No, you can and need to do more, because more people need what you

can offer,' and that's what really pushed me to go above and beyond.

J670C said,

I saw strong African American female administrators-in both buildings. We had an informal mentoring situation: watching them and working with them-motivated me. I saw them and said: They have it together. They are doing A.B.C.D.I did not tell them, nor was I even clear on what I wanted to do, but they motivated me.

B000C noted,

So, even though I didn't have her responsibilities, [I had] very similar responsibilities. And so she asked me one day what was my goal. I told her I wanted to be a dean (for about five years) and become an assistant principal, and retire. She was like, it doesn't work that way. So she kinda pushed me and encouraged me in a way that let me know that I could pursue this [principal] role successfully.

X333S added,

I actually had a class that I took before I took my superintendent's exam, which was called cultural competence. It was taught by Dr. Sherry who actually was my dissertation chair 3 years ago. I had even exhibited things that are associated with cultural competence, cultural relevance, and she was just really deep with her thinking. She really was instrumental in having that come forward. She was really awesome, and she said to me: You are a leader." But yeah, I would say, after taking that test, taking her class, I just decided to apply and it was like" Bam, everything came in place.

Mentors Provide Support in The Principal Role. C458E began,

I called and I quit. Then I called my coach and friend and I cried. He said I understand. I hear you, just drive up and come to my school. I went there and I wept like a baby. He asked me what do you need? I said I don't have an office space or anything. He said you can have your demo lessons in my school because there was no school for me to hold demo lessons to hire teachers.

M458F said, Well, I had a great boss who was always there to talk to me about whatever I wanted to talk about and provide me with support, and so, like. He was a good leader, and then they really focused on professional development, and that and that professional development of teachers was a passion of his, and how to do it in a way that included practice.

L246F noted, “They said, as long as you're doing your part, we will do ours. So you stay in school, working on your program, we’ll do everything to support you in this role...”

Theme 5: Impactful Employment Transitions as Challenges and Solutions to Challenges While in Pursuit of a Leadership Role

Participants reported employment transitions that challenged them to pursuit leadership roles. In some instances, the transition away from a role or school was a solution to a challenge they faced in their role. In terms of causes for transitioning, they left their position and/or schools as a result of one or more the following: typical district reassignments based on need or leader vacancy, misalignment between the values of the principals and mandates of the district/organization, feeling stuck and paralyzed in the participants’ current role, and feeling used to fulfill the agenda of the organization versus valued for their individual contributions.

The typical district reassignments were determined based on the needs of the

schools. However, a different type of transition is a misalignment in values between the principal and the mandates of the district/organization. Next, participants reported feeling stuck and paralyzed in their current roles. When they applied for leadership positions, they were praised for their performance, yet informed that they were not being promoted to a different position. Lastly, participants cited feelings used to fulfill the agenda of the organization. One participant alluded to the work of a principal as a load that was more about execution of tasks outlined by the school/organization. The pivotal responses from the participants are listed below:

Typical District Reassignments. G891D said,

I got my dream job as an executive director of mathematics. I led math for our whole school district-that's what I had been working towards. I shifted, I went back to the school building, but as an academy director- still leading mathematics. Then, I shifted again and got to still do mathematics and science when I led things... and you know things just keep changing.

J670C added, "The coordinator of instruction position that I told you about. I did that position for maybe 5 years. Then the district eliminated that position, and we all became assistant principals after that."

B000C added, "So then I was named principal here [at a different school]. While I was interim at the previous school."

X333S said,

In June of this year [2022] well, at the end of May, beginning of June, they transferred me here. Last month, they did ask me to go, and be the acting principal at [another elementary school], because their AP and their principal were out. So I was acting principal there..."

Misalignment of Values. G891D began,

I addressed those challenges because I left that district. I had to continuously fight with them [people at the district level] about the direction of my program-what it was doing, why because they had no knowledge. It became a constant battle for the last couple of years, while I was at the school. I was constantly fighting to prove our worth against people who don't even know how much we were worth. They did not even know how to measure our worth.

E678B added,

Based on where I was in my own life, I like had to start something new because of issues within the school system. It was unexpected. I would not have ever moved to this different school environment with the issues with 42 children. I left to experience something more in line with what I truly wanted to try to do. It is just that in the previous environment, there was no room for the “what if”. In the new environment, there was a lot of ways to address the mission, vision, and achievement goals. And of those ways, it was just a matter of how do we ...choose the ones that fit our school community. It was a completely different mindset.

H781D added,

I was demoted from my last principal job because they told me that they didn't see my growth and urgency as a leader. And so I won a grant to rebuild the library, and we were supposed to be doing this wonderful reading program. I loved it. But we couldn't do it because we didn't have a library. In our principal meeting, we were going over the data for the reading program three weeks into the school year. I was called out because our data was blank.

K122C noted,

I made my decision that it is time for me to go. That the information that I was talking about was withheld from the board. So it came out that I was shaking things up too much, and I was going against what they're used to. And the person who founded the school put his sign in afterwards, and all that. So they had this [attitude] of how we do things.

Feeling Paralyzed. A231B began,

So they [the superintendent and his wife] said, I don't know how to work with upper middle class families. So yeah, I didn't make friends with them [executive leadership]. And my answer was, if you are the superintendent I have to uphold these policies and procedures for Black and Brown students that sit next to your White child. I don't want to understand how I would even be arguing that this is what we do. This is who we are. Your child has to do it. I didn't like that. So then, when it came to be my turn, to be up next [principal], it was a No [I did not get the principal job]. He was one. He was one of the deciding factors.

C458E added,

The person over leadership did not like me. She didn't like me. When I turned in work, there was never positive feedback. So it was just an obstacle everywhere with her. I even did a school visit where I traveled at 6am, left my kids at home with my husband. I went down there and then while I'm down there, I am on the phone with the lady. She said, you know I just don't know if you're into it or not. I don't know if you're built for this. I told her on the phone that day: I quit. You can continue your project of finding another school leader- this is not for me.

E678B continued this thought with,

When I was in public school, some of the challenges were for me- particularly because I was a good teacher, it was difficult to get umm out of the classroom because principals wanted their strong teachers to stay in the classroom. So it was a lot of you know, I would interview for positions and things will go great, but when it came to my current principal allowing me to leave out of that position, umm it was very difficult. Then I did not succeed in moving into leadership in public school.

Feeling Used. A231B began by saying,

I would say being used. In my quest of being a principal, I have been promised a principal position for about five years. Take this on [execute an additional role or task]. You're on the bench [next up to be a principal] right? Take this on because you're gonna be the next principal, or take this on which were roles\ duties that were preparing me. [For example] I would take on principal things like, take on extra coaching, developing [teachers and future grade level leads]and direct summer school, you know. Do all these extra things because you're next.

It's okay [for me to be visible] when the news comes. And it's okay [for me to be visible] When you know politicians come [to observe classes]. But I guess in making major decisions, it's okay to send them to the leadership team. And it's okay [for me] to run this thing, that thing... summer school this and that. But it's not okay to then have to be at the true table making huge decisions like, it's not okay.

K122C said, “I was angry because everything I did was under a microscope, but when I was doing my professional excellence it was disregarded, and always challenged.”

L246F began,

People don't mind putting you in a principal role. That's the hardest job. They don't mind that. The people above you don't really want that job anymore. But they know that they need strong people in it- to run the schools. You have to put your strongest people in, especially urban schools cause you gotta have the ones that like to be the face of the organization and that can make them very proud. A week before I was terminated, a whole group of the people from our headquarters came over and said, 'How are we gonna be able to keep you in this role, five years from now'?

Theme 6: Representation as a Motivating Factor to Pursue the Principal

Role. Participants believed that being an African American woman in the principal role was a motivating factor. When an African American woman is in the principal role, it becomes a form of representation that affirms the notion that African Americans do have the capacity for leadership. Seeing an African American in a principal role becomes a representation/symbol for African American children and adults, which creates a sense of empowerment and motivation to achieve leadership roles/higher levels of success.

Vicarious Success. C458E noted,

So at that time about 5 years ago-there was a cohort of interim principals. Towards the elementary school, it looks like five Black principals and there were five elementary schools. Prime example, we took a picture together and I noticed like just the meaning of that moment- and the importance of that moment. I was like: hey guys were going to take a picture together. I'm like wow, for the first time, our students will look at the picture and be encouraged to see leaders that look like them. There was so much positivity.

A231B added,

I didn't know college was possible, because my family just wanted me to get out of high school. When I was an educator. I was unhappy where I was. I didn't know that individuals could start their own school. I didn't know what was possible, because I had never seen it, and my students didn't know what's possible, because they don't see it. So I know it's important for children to see themselves in positions of power, leadership roles, and all kinds of roles. So that they can know that's something attainable. Or they think it's [a job or success] like for other people, because nobody looks like me.

Empowerment X333S started with,

I believe that representation is vital. I think that students should see other people in leadership that look like them. I was the only Black choir teacher in Tulsa high schools, we didn't have it. And so that was good. I also had a Women Empowered group at my school. We had over 160 girls that signed up for that program that I was over. When they saw me go and pursue my doctorate, I had several other students go and apply for their doctorate degree. Now some of my students are now teachers and are pursuing principalship. So it's a cycle.

Advocacy. H7891D noted,

Because representation is everything, and when you see yourself doing something, especially something great, you feel like you can do it, too, right? Also, advocacy matters, and you can't advocate for someone; but you can be an ally for somebody. I feel like advocacy and ally ship go even further when we have those shared experiences. It's just really hard for me to see Black and Brown babies in educational systems not run by people that look like them or understand their experiences.

Outlier

Through the analysis of the data set, the researcher discovered an outlier. An outlier is a unique theme that appears in a minority set of the data, however it is presented in the data analysis due to the value and perspective they add to the themes in the research (Truijens et al., 2019). There was one outlier in this research: outlier - impact of bias on motivation to pursue goals . One participant had a unique experience with bias in childhood. When the participant was a child, her teacher told her that she should become a hairstylist instead of a lawyer. This experience is an outlier in the study because none of the other participants shared this experience in childhood, nor did they explain how bias prevented them from pursuing their childhood goals. This outlier is relevant to the research because it provides an example of the impact of bias on personal motivation.

Participant B000C experienced limiting beliefs during her childhood. This took place in the classroom when her teacher asked each student to state their future job.

B000C noted,

I remember my teacher, Miss Fleming, she asked, you know, what do you want to be. When she got to me, I said, I want to be an attorney, a judge. She said, Oh, you can't be an attorney or judge. She said, maybe a hair stylist or something like that.

The participant continued through elementary and middle school with the mindset of aiming for the job of a cosmetologist, not an attorney or judge. The weight of the teacher's limiting beliefs shaped the participant's own understanding of her capabilities. Through the influence of a friend and her family, the participant visited colleges and decided to apply and attend college.

Participant B000C also said,

And somewhere just stuck and that's what I did. I did hair. I remember, you know, after being with my best friend, we went on some college tours. Her mom was a teacher. Her dad was a principal, and we started doing some college tours. And I was like, this is nice (going on the college tour). Her mom was speaking to me and I spent a lot of time, you know, with them.

Field Notes

The field notes aided the researcher in comprehension of the interview content and supported in the creation of follow up questions during the interview. For example, as the participants answered the interview and follow up questions, the researcher jotted down key words and phrases stated by the participants. The key words and phrases became the backbone of the follow up questions asked by the researcher.

Field notes became an integral component in the data collection and analysis phases. There was a new field note sheet created for each participant in the Microsoft Word platform. Field notes were stored on the researcher's password protected computer. The field notes also included the interview questions to ensure the quick notations (of the participant responses) were accurately aligned with the correct questions. The quick notations on average were two to four word responses. It served as a thought space as well for the researcher to formulate follow up questions. Notations on the field notes were made exclusively during the live interviews with the participants. Field notes, transcripts, and recordings of the interviews were used to create themes.

Chapter Summary

The researcher collected the findings from 12 participants through semistructured, one-on-one interviews. The participants shared their experience of the phenomenon: a disproportionate number of African American women in school principal roles. Based on

the analysis of data collected, six themes related to the motivations and challenges of African American women principals emerged. Additionally, the interviews identified one outlier in the data analysis.

The five themes and two outliers are listed below:

Theme 1: Childhood experiences were motivating factors to becoming a principal

Theme 2: Experiences with bias while pursuing and/or fulfilling leadership roles were challenges encountered on the path to principalship

Theme 3: The interview and hiring process was a challenge on the path to principalship

Theme 4: Mentors as a motivating factor on the path to and during the principalship

Theme 5: Impactful employment transitions as challenges and solutions to challenges while in pursuit of a leadership role

Theme 6: Representation as a Motivating Factor to Pursue the Principal Role

Outlier 1: Impact of Bias on Motivation to Pursue Goals

In Chapter 5, the researcher expanded on the themes, outlier and lessons learned through the data. Chapter 5 also provides an in-depth interpretation of the findings from the research, limitations lessons from the study. To close out the preceding chapter, the researcher communicates recommendations for the field and future research studies based on the current study.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of African American women who are currently or were previously urban school principals- with an emphasis on their motivation to pursue the role and the challenges they faced along the way. The chosen participants were African American women who are currently or were previously school principals. The study focused on one central research question: how African American women describe their experiences in becoming a school principal. This chapter interprets the findings and discusses the limitations and opportunities for future research.

Summary of Findings

This is a summary of the findings that emerged from an analysis of the research study data. The following themes emerged from the research study:

1. Childhood experiences were motivating factors to becoming a principal
2. Experiences with bias while pursuing and/or fulfilling leadership roles were challenges encountered on the path to principalship
3. The interview and hiring process was a challenge on the path to principalship
4. Mentors as motivating factors on the path to and during the principalship
5. Impactful employment transitions as challenges and solutions to challenges while in pursuit of a leadership role
6. Representation as motivating factor to pursue the principal role,
7. Impact of bias on motivation to pursue goals

When asked what motivated African American women to become school principals, the participants (Theme #1) cited childhood experiences, (Theme #2) mentorship, and (Theme #3) the opportunity to represent African Americans' capacity for leadership. When asked what challenges African American women encountered on the path to the principal role, the participants cited (Theme #4) the interview and hiring process and (Theme #5) experiences with bias during the interview process and while fulfilling leadership roles. The following forms of bias were experienced by the participants: ageism, race and gender, and personality/affect. Participants addressed the challenges they encountered on the path to principalship by (Theme #6) transitioning out of certain roles and/or schools. There were three causes for employment transitions: typical district reassignments, misalignment between the values of district/organization and the participants, and participants feeling stuck and paralyzed in their current roles. Lastly, the outlier in the study was an (Outlier) impact of bias on motivation to pursue goals.

Elaborations and Interpretation of Findings

This section will provide the researcher's elaborations and interpretations of the findings as related to the six themes and significant findings of this study.

Theme 1: Childhood Experiences Were Motivating Factors to Becoming a Principal

The researcher interpreted that principals who grow up with caregivers as educators, are more likely to prioritize effective systems and structures for their schools. The participants shared the positive and negative impact of their upbringing on their educational perspective. My results are supported by other research in that African American women principals' childhood experiences impact their interest and perspective on the field of education (Alfred et al., 2018). As a result, many principals enter

leadership with a clear vision of excellence, and thus need autonomy to execute their visions in order to improve the quality of schools.

Conversely, African American women use negative experiences to fuel their passion and drive to affect change. For example, participant H781D viewed the principal role as someone who corrects errors and cleans messes since that was her childhood example for what African American women do throughout life, which connects to the work of Coleman et al. (2020). They explained the stereotypical character of the Black Woman, Mammy, who is self-sacrificing and exists for the purpose of helping others. The researcher noted that some of the participants as self-sacrificing in their roles as principals, in which they denied their own needs. While participant C45BD perceived herself as a failing leader, and thus unable to lead a school, since failure was not an option in the immigrant household of her childhood. Participant C45BD's experience relates to the results from Skinner's work (2021) where it was reported that the weight of micro aggressions in the workplace made the participants question their ability and capacity to fulfill the principal role. Lastly, some participants (A231B and X333S) attended struggling schools in their childhood, so the researcher deduced that their mission as educators was to provide quality education to all students. All in all, African American women tend to neglect their own needs and allow their role as a principal to affect their well-being. It is imperative that African American develop balance between stress management and personal needs.

Theme 2: Experience With Bias While Pursuing and/or Fulfilling Leadership Roles Were Challenges Encountered on the Path to Principalship

The researcher interpreted those experiences with bias was the biggest challenge African American women faced in pursuit of the principal role. African American

women educators experienced a greater number of micro aggressions around assumptions of inferiority, criminality, and environmental micro aggressions compared to all other women of color (Mahatmya, et al. 2022). The participants of this study recalled experiences of bias (with race, gender, age, and personality traits) while pursuing the principal role. An example of ageist bias is the following from participant M45BF: during the school leadership interview process, a participant was told that she was too young to communicate with veteran teachers. African American women principals experience duality as women and a person of color (Curtis, 2017). An example of racial and gender bias is the following from participant L246F perceived that the executive leaders were intimidated by her strength since she was a Black woman. A common theme in West's study (2020) about African American women in administrative roles was a lack of visibility. The researcher discovered that African American female principals often feel the need to adjust their identities against mainstream culture due to experiences with racial and gender bias. An example within this study is bias based on personality and affect from participants H781D, A231B, and C458E; participants were labeled as "aggressive," "vocal," "ruffled feathers," "divisive," yet the participants were expected to take on additional tasks. The labels and expectations were feedback they received or felt from executive leaders with the influence to offer them (participants) a principal role. The researcher realized that these forms of bias are pervasive and contribute to African American women being passed over or removed from the principal role. In other words, participants were passed over or removed from the principal because of stereotypes about their personality, which were masked as performance issues. Findings from the research of Bailes and Guthery (2021) showed that African Americans are systematically delayed principal roles oftentimes for inequalities related to race and gender. The researcher

recommends that school districts establish clear, consistent, documented, and anti-racist guidelines for performance management and job promotion.

Theme 3: The Interview and Hiring Process for the Principal Role was a Challenge on the Path to Principalship

The researcher interpreted that African American women perceived the interview and hiring process as a challenge because the processes experiences by participants were unjust, subjective, and contingent on the executive team's perceptions of each candidate. In example, the participants of this study experienced various interview and hiring processes. For African Americans to be visible in the workforce, there have to be conditions in place for them to be seen because of White gaze (McCluney & Rabelo, 2021). Visibility is based on White gaze which means that only certain actions, skills, and experiences were visible or noticed, in that they align with what White or dominant culture deems valuable. White gaze creates systems and structures that can isolate, overlook, and silence certain people in the workplace. An example in this study is that participants reported a variety of experiences during the hiring and interview process for the principal role. Participants X333S and M45BF went through an extensive hiring process, where other candidates had the same experience. However, participant X333S perceived that the school system engaged in inequitable hiring practices. To secure a fair interview process, this participant contacted the executive leaders in the district to express her interest in the role. Other participants had a different experience. Because of some of the participants' reputations, they were hand-picked for the principal role (J670C, D444P, L246F). The rationale for hand-selection was that these participants were employed/working in the same schools/districts for twenty years or more. On the contrary, participants A231B, C458E, H781D, and B000C were selected for the principal

role upon completion of a set of prerequisites devised by their employers. In the program, they fulfilled an administrative role along with set tasks and professional development workshops. Initially, it was believed by the participants that they would be given a principal role contingent on their completion and performance in the principal preparedness program. The work of Kingsberry (2015) highlights how a lack of structures within a district impacts African American women obtaining school leadership roles. For example, all of the participants cited unforeseen challenges (attributed to a lack of clear structures established by the school board) as a barrier to obtaining a school principal role. Similarly, in this study, each of the participants was denied the principal role without an indication of performance or task completion breaches. In fact, two of the participants reported taking on additional tasks beyond what was required during their tenure in the principal preparedness program. Research by Sandles (2018) who examined the extraneous duties that African American educators take on schools. Extraneous duties relate to the underlying tasks outside of providing instruction and safety. All in all, the researcher recommends that school districts create conditions where the experience, education, and skills of African American women are the focal point. These conditions are created by equity protocols and hiring for equity team to audit staff attrition and hiring data quarterly.

Theme 4: Mentors as Motivating Factors on the Path to and During the Principalship

The researcher interpreted that mentoring was the biggest motivator for African American women to pursue the principal role. African American female educators valued relational leadership: supervisors who showed appreciation consistently, receiving specific feedback and instructional strategies for addressing challenges (Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018). In this study, participants reported being impacted significantly by having

a mentor along the journey to principalship. Additionally, female school administrators reported higher performance in environments that were psychologically supportive, specifically with the ongoing support of a coach or supervisor (De Bruyn & Mestry, 2020) Most participants recounted that a mentor encouraged them to pursue school leadership, oftentimes this occurred with the example of leadership that the mentors provided on a consistent basis (C458E, G891D, H781D, J670C, B000C, X333S). For example, participants H781D, B000C, J670C reported feeling empowered to be a principal based on the model of excellence they saw consistently from their mentors. Additionally, participants (C45BE, M458F, and L246F) reported that their mentors provided them support as they faced challenges while pursuing and/or actually fulfilling the principal role. Support came in the form of brainstorming how to solve problems, proactively planning for the success of their schools, and being a thought partner during challenging situations. The researcher recommends that school districts establish leader mentoring programs where teachers can receive mentoring and support from other leaders in the same district or school.

Theme 5: Impactful Employment Transitions as Challenges and Solutions to Challenges While in Pursuit of a Leadership Role

The researcher interpreted that African American women were overwhelmed, isolated and felt pushed out of their roles as leaders. African American women are the least likely group to transition into the principal role (Davis et al., 2017). Participants reported that in pursuit of leadership roles, they had to make impactful transitions. The causes of the transitions varied among the participants. Participants X333S, J670C, and B0003 transitioned from assistant principal to principal roles due to typical district reassignments based on need or leader vacancy. These transitions were perceived to be

standard procedures and not a reflection of the participants' performance and/or competence. Participants G891D, E678D, H781D, and K122C classified the cause of their transition as a misalignment between their values and the mandates of the district/organization. The researcher expounded that these participants were not trusted and viewed as valuable leaders in their schools, which is why they left their positions. Successful African American female school leaders are motivated by student-first priorities, planning with the whole child in mind, not test scores and summative testing metrics (Moorosi, 2018). In turn, these participants vocalized their objections to the structures and offered revisions; then they felt compelled to transition away from these schools as a result of no changes. In the history of African American women in the field of education, their legacy is one fueled by activism and disruption of the status quo to affect the greater good (Peters & Miles Nash, 2021).

The researcher interpreted that many of the participants who transitioned out of their roles expressed their concerns which made them a target in their school communities. All of the participants attributed the denial of the promotion to personal feelings held against them by the executive leaders as opposed to deficiencies in performance. Oftentimes in the workplace, African American women are misunderstood or discounted among their colleagues (Gooden, 2003). Examples of being misunderstood or discounted include the following: participant C458E was told by the executive leader that she wasn't sure if she was 'built for' the principal role. Participant H781D was told she was "too emotional" to be a leader. African American women are concerned about being silenced and being taken seriously as leaders, especially when denied promotional opportunities (Curtis, 2017). Additionally, they are not being retained due to not feeling a sense of community, or fitting into their roles (Roberts & Mayo, 2019).

The researcher surmised that African American women are more likely to be selected for educational leadership roles if they show submission to and execute the directives of their superiors. One of the pivotal stereotypes of African American women in American history is Mammy (Coleman et al., 2020). Mammy, the slave-depicted, motherly figure had a strong sense of influence and autonomy over the children, yet remained in a subservient role due to her race and gender (Eckr, 2018). Like the caricature Mammy, some participants felt used in their schools and unable to obtain a principal role. Participant E678B was denied a leadership role and was told it would be too challenging to replace her as a classroom teacher. Participants A231B, K122C, J670C, C458E, D444P, and L246F reported feeling used to fulfilling the agenda of the school/organization versus being valued for their individual contributions.

The researcher discovered that African American women being in a principal role is an attractive sales pitch on the part of executive leaders. Participants A231B, K122C and L246F reported feeling used because of their race, work ethic and/or strength. For example, participant A231B described how her classroom was a designated spot on the school tour agenda, where the media, local and state officials visited her classroom as a representative of the school. She said the purpose (for the constant visitors in her classroom) was to give the illusion that a “Black” person was in charge. Participant K122C also mentioned that when she was hired for the principal role, the interview board was “excited” by the way she looked-in reference to her race and upbeat personality. Participant K122C felt mistrusted at times but undervalued when she should have been praised. The distinction between being the principal, being the face of the school, and being a decision-maker, is what caused these participants to feel used, and therefore transition away from their schools. Sadly, participants K122C and L246F transitioned out

of the field of education as a result of feeling used in their last schools.

Theme 6: Representation as Motivating Factor to Pursue the Principal Role

The researcher interpreted that mentoring was the biggest motivator for African American women to pursue the principal role, in turn being a representation of African American women's leadership capacity was a motivating factor as well. African American women in principal roles often feel silenced, either from a lack of representation or being excluded from decision-making (Curtis, 2017). Conversely, participants in this study indicated that having African American women in the principal role was impactful for the purpose of representation. The researcher exclaimed that when an African American woman is in the principal role, it becomes a form of representation that affirms the notion that African American women do have the capacity for leadership. Seeing and experiencing the leadership of African American women was a major motivating factor for most of the participants as they transitioned into leadership roles. The participants were motivated by seeing an African American woman in a leadership role because it made them feel vicarious success. Likewise, as a principal, the participants became a marker of vicarious success for their students. Additionally, the participants being a marker of vicarious success, manifests into empowerment for students and teachers. For example, when a student or teacher felt vicarious success, it pushed him/her/they to work harder and pursue the next level of success. Being a representation of leadership capacity is a reciprocal relationship, in that the student/teacher felt vicarious success, was empowered to strive for excellence, while the participants advocated for more opportunities and better conditions. Participant M458F said that a leader of color may make sounder decisions for African American students in regards to curriculum, student engagement, discipline, and inclusivity. Participants M458F and H781D both

stated that being the same race as the students is not a guarantee that the decisions one makes will always be right.

Outlier: Impact of Bias on Motivation to Pursue Goals

An outlier in the research study is that a participant experienced bias as a child, which impacted her motivation to pursue her goals. The participant's teacher told her that she would not be able to become a lawyer, instead, she told the participant to be a hairstylist. As a result, throughout elementary, middle, and high school, the participant actively worked toward being a hairstylist. Through the encouragement of mentors, the participant defeated the limited belief and went to college. Based on the income of African American female students, teachers hold particular expectations for behavior and outcome later in life (Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson, 2020). This outlier is monumental in relation to the purpose of the study, which was to understand the motivations and challenges of African American women who aspire to the urban principalship. The researcher interpreted that the participant was significantly impacted by the biased statement to the point where she was no longer motivated to pursue her goal of being a lawyer. The advice that the participant was given by the teacher stayed with her because the participant did not have parents that encouraged her to pursue her dreams.

Relation of Findings to Research Question

This section connects the findings with the research questions. The central research question asked how African American women describe their experiences in becoming an urban principal. Some of the African American women describe their experiences in becoming an urban principal as difficult at times yet rewarding. All of the participants entered leadership roles to make an impact and positively affect the future of

children. A portion of the participants described their experiences in becoming an urban principal as rewarding but unexpectedly stifling. The experiences were unexpectedly stifling because of the experiences with bias of some executive leaders on the path to principalship, or while in the principal role. Some participants did not feel autonomy to lead authentically in certain spaces. The first supporting research question: how African American women describe the factors that motivated them and propelled them to become an urban principal. African American women were motivated by childhood experiences, a mentor, and being a representation of leadership capacity for African Americans and African American women. The most motivating factor for African American women in pursuing the principal role was having a mentor. The second supporting research question: how do African American women describe the challenges they encountered to become an urban principal as well as how they addressed the challenges. African American women face the following challenges: gender, race, age, and personality bias, the interview and hiring process, and transitioning from schools/roles. The greatest challenge for African American women in pursuit of the principal role was gender, race, age, and personality bias. Of the African American women who selected bias as a challenge, they addressed the challenge by transitioning from the school/role.

Relation of Findings to Theoretical Frameworks

This study sought to understand the lived experiences of female African American women in obtaining a principal position. In Chapter 2, the researcher discussed two theoretical frameworks: CRT which provides a lens into the impact of race on everyday decisions, experiences, and interactions, while Social Inclusion Theory, which prioritizes diversity of gender, race, and experience. The findings of this research study are consistent with current theories of CRT Participation, empowerment, and social

justice are tenets of Social Inclusion Theory that are relevant when studying why there are so few African American women in school principal roles (Gidley et al., 2010).

Social Inclusion Theory

Examining the findings through the theoretical framework of Social Inclusion Theory is necessary to understand what motivated the participants to pursue the principal role and the challenges they encountered along the way. Social Inclusion Theory is a school of thought that problematizes the level of access a group of people possesses within a setting based on their demographics (World Bank, 2022). The participants were motivated to pursue the principal role because of their childhood experiences, mentorship, and desire to help teachers on a large scale. Mentoring, empowerment, and social justice are tenets of inclusion theory that are relevant when studying why there are so few African American women in urban school principal roles (Gidley et al., 2010). Some African American women experienced being included and excluded from the educational space. Some were included because their parents were educators, therefore they were exposed to quality education at a young age. Others experienced low performing schools, so had a foundation to juxtapose their own standard of educational excellence. While others had longevity in schools, so their reputations opened doors for them that may have otherwise been closed due to their race and/or gender.

On the contrary, one of the most pervasive challenges that participants encountered was gender, race, and personality bias. In understanding the roots of Social Inclusion theory, Taylor (2012) shone a light on groups classified as “other” and with the implementation of Social Inclusion Theory, she created lines of access in order to tear down the walls of separation between groups. The work of Allman (2013) highlighted exclusionary techniques. Ostracism is a technique used to preserve the purity and

predictability of group dynamics, where groups are isolated from the majority set of people. In the context of this study, participants felt misaligned to the values of the schools and organizations, to the point where they felt the only solution was to transition out of those spaces. In some instances, the misalignment was so evident that participants felt ostracized from mainstream groups. Examples of ostracism in the study are the following: some participants were swiftly demoted or relieved of their duties without warning for expressing an opinion different from the mainstream group. Additionally, other participants reported feeling alone in ensuring the success of their schools. This meant they felt compelled to plan and execute large projects without the support from their district or organization. Another exclusionary technique- stigma-pertains to the degradation and caste away of people based on demographics. Some participants reported feeling like they were abnormal with comments like: “you ruffle feathers,” “you have the devil in you,” “you need a man,” “you are divisive,” and “I am not sure you are cut out for this job”. These are comments that were made to participants by their executive leaders. These are examples of stigma-based thinking, where the participants are made to feel like something is wrong with them, and that everyone else has a different opinion on the matter. Because of these techniques, some participants reported feeling stuck and paralyzed in their roles due to executive leaders’ perception of them, the needs of the school, and a misalignment of values. All of these reasons manifested into racial and cultural bias toward the participants which are African American women.

Critical Race Theory

Examining the findings of this study through critical race theory is vital to truly understand the motivations and challenges the participants faced while pursuing the principal role. CRT was created by Derrick Bell, Alan, Freeman, and Richard Delgado

and was primarily used to study racism in the legal system (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). By using CRT in this study, the researcher sought to understand the current experience of African American women principals through the lens of race, culture, and oppression from the dominant society. In this current study, participants reported being motivated by factors involving race and culture in pursuit of the principal role. For example, seeing an African American woman in a school leadership role was empowering to them. It motivated the participants to strive for and/or maintain the principal role. This point is mentioned in the sections on the power of representation and the impact of a mentor. Seeing an African American woman in a school leadership role is especially meaningful for this demographic due to the racial and cultural oppression. Seeing an African American woman in a school principal role is not the norm, due to oppression that limits the probability of this group making it a school principal role. African Americans accounted for about 10% of all urban school principals, while the percentage for African American women who serve as urban school principals was even lower (Aldrich, 2020; Goldring et al., 2018).

When the participants were either teachers and/or leaders in the school setting, they felt a sense of advocacy and empowerment when they were the same race and gender as their students. Their physical presence and ability to make decisions in service of children that looked at them speak to the power of representation. On the other hand, participants reported being challenged by factors involving race and culture in pursuit of the principal role. Race and culture were the biggest challenges for participants as they pursued the principal role. Perceptions of their ability, bias against their race, gender, and personality were reported as reasons why African American women were denied or left the principal role. For example, participants reported being denied principal positions due

to bias. Executive leaders' bias overshadowed the participants' competencies, experiences, and education as leaders. Many of the participants were challenged by the racial and cultural bias experienced by executive leaders, to address these challenges, many of them transitioned out of their schools and/or roles.

Implications of Findings

This qualitative phenomenological research study centered on the lived experiences of African American female educators in pursuit of the urban school principal role. The study excavated the motivations to pursue and challenges faced along the path of the principalship. The problem investigated in this study was a disparity in the numbers of African American women in urban school principal roles in comparison to other racial groups. African Americans accounted for about 10% of all urban school principals, while the percentage for African American women who serve as urban school principals was even lower (Aldrich, 2020; Goldring et al., 2018).

As a result of the research study, the following implications emerged as follows:

1. African American women educators find value and seek out opportunities to be an example and advocate for change in their communities. Therefore, there is a need to establish opportunities for African American women educators to give back to aspiring teachers and future leaders in schools.
2. African American women who are educators do not benefit from using the standard promotion and selection process to become a principal. The existing promotion and principal selection processes do not provide African American women principals with adequate visibility and access in order to secure an urban principal role. Therefore, there is a need for trainings that develop executive leaders' awareness of diverse skill sets and student needs.

The current principal selection and hiring processes of the educational system keeps African American women as a minority in the school principal role. Schools and organizations have a responsibility to make their roles equitable and accessible for all.

Recommendations for the Practice

Recommendations for the practice related to the findings of this study are as follows:

1. **Mentorship:** Universities need to offer mentorship opportunities for African American women alumni, so they have an objective advocate outside of their work environment to provide support and guidance in the event that bias arises in the workplace. School districts and organizations need to provide voluntary mentorship as well to African American women, so they can have an outlet and community as they navigate the education sector. The purpose of these mentors is to provide support and advocacy for African American women as they navigate the racist and biased systems.
2. **Equity guidelines and audits:** School districts and organizations need equity guidelines and audits to ensure the hiring practice is just and consistent for all applicants-regardless of their identity markers.
3. **Diversity and sensitivity training requirements:** School districts, organizations, and teacher colleges and universities should provide semi-annual diversity, cultural competence, self-awareness, implicit bias, and sensitivity training to improve the awareness of bias, cultural awareness, leader diversity, leader retention rates, and bias reporting protocols.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for the future research related to the findings of this study are as follows:

1. **Mentorship and Principal Readiness:** African American women benefit greatly from mentors as it impacts their readiness for the principal role. Given that the readiness criteria varies from public, district, charter, and private, researchers can explore the correlation between mentorship and principal readiness.

2. **Representation/ Symbol of African Americans' Leadership Capacity:** Why does seeing an African American woman in a leadership role inspire an African American child or an African American teacher to want to achieve a higher level of success in their own lives? What makes representation so powerful? Researchers can explore the roots of representation and why it matters.

3. **Repli Farinde-Wu., Butler, & Allen-Handy, 2020cate Study in Four Geographical Quadrants:** Research can replicate the study with the requirement that the same number of participants must have served as a principal in each of the four geographical quadrants of the United States: Northeast, West, Midwest, and South in order to be eligible for participation.

Researcher Reflections

Understanding the lived experiences of African American women is vital to the discipline of education. Creating conditions where principals from diverse backgrounds can thrive produces higher levels of success for students and an inclusive environment. Overall, the participants showed enthusiasm to share their lived experiences and passion for the field of education. The participants expressed great energy for teaching, student achievement, and empowering communities. The participants chose the principal role as an opportunity to multiply their impact on students, coaching of teachers, deepen their capacity of influence in a specific subject area, and execute effective systems at the

school level. For example, many participants -when they were teachers- being recognized as effective instructors with the ability to communicate content in a way that led to higher achievement scores for students. As a result, students in the participants' classes outperformed their peers. So, as principals, these participants sought to provide the same quality instruction through the coaching of teachers with the goal of higher student achievement levels for all students. Some participants became school principals in order to leverage leadership to improve the curriculum and achievement in certain subject areas. These participants viewed the school principal's role as an opportunity to improve the quality of instruction and student achievement with a population of students who historically struggled academically. Additionally, some participants viewed the school principal role as a platform to empower the community. For these participants, empowering the community was defined as a principal who did the following: provided quality education, challenged students to their highest potential, provided structure and discipline that prepared students for life, and created a loving and just school environment. Lastly, there were participants -when they were teachers-who were consistently called to support classroom management, community relations, and parent engagement when they were teachers.

Once the participants transitioned to the principal role, they saw the position as an opportunity to tweak and implement effective operational systems that would improve the functionality of the school environment. However, some of the participants became disenchanted and burdened once they became principals due to bias, feeling paralyzed, and stuck in their roles. This research is so significant because many women and people of color are suffering in silence. A few of the participants felt like they were used as the face of the school, but not the decision-maker. While others felt they were constantly in a

battle with executive leadership over deciding the most important area of need. All in all, many of the participants felt the strain of these challenges and elected to transition out of the role, switch to a different school, and two participants left the field of education as a result.

Limitations

1. Five of the twelve participants obtained their first principal role in the Northeastern section of the United States, it can be questioned whether their experiences are a true representation of the experiences of African American women throughout the United States.

2. The researcher only posted the research flier on social media with the goal of attracting eligible participants. Eligible participants that do not have access to social media were not aware of the social media post, and they did not have the opportunity to be reviewed as a potential participant.

3. The one-on-one interviews were held for a maximum of 60 minutes. Participants were made aware of the interview questions at the time of the interview, where some participants may have benefited from additional processing time during the interview.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher provided the following: summary of the research, findings, interpretations, relation to research questions, researcher reflections, limitation, and implications for future research. Additionally, the researcher connected the theoretical frameworks with the findings to provide a lens into the impact of race, gender, and inclusion on African American women. This study is relevant because it highlights the needs of African American women as they pursue leadership roles in schools.

Additionally, it exposes the need for diversity and sensitivity training in universities and schools. Lastly, it calls for school districts and organizations to create and maintain equitable hiring and promotion guidelines, as well as audit these practices consistently.

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Appendix A
Interview Protocol

Introduction of the Interview Protocol

This is a semistructured interview which means the researcher has prepared a small set of open-ended questions. During the interview, the researcher will take low-inference field notes. The field notes will aid the researcher in comprehension of the interview content and support in the creation follow up questions during the interview. The researcher would like to use the Zoom record feature to document the interview. Please sign the consent form. For your information, this research study involves audio and/or video recording. This recording will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution. The recording will be kept, stored, and destroyed after 3 years. Because what is in the recording could be used to find out that it is you, it is not possible to be sure that the recording will always be kept confidential. The researcher will try to keep anyone not working on the research from listening to or viewing the recording. Until the 3year period when the data is destroyed, the interview notes, field notes, recordings, and other pertinent information will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Any information that is shared during the interview is a reflection of your personal experience/opinion and not a representation or review of a school, organization, or state's school district. Participation in this study has no connection to your current or previous place of employment. You have the option to share demographic information based on your own preference and comfort level. In addition, please sign a consent form created to meet our human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not plan to inflict any harm. Thank you for your participation.

The researcher planned for this interview to last no longer than one hour. During this time, we will discuss several questions. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning.

Introduction

You have been selected for the interview because you have been identified as someone who meets the inclusions criteria of the study include: An African American woman who is currently or was previously a principal. This research study seeks to address the research problem of why there are so few African American female principals in schools through an inquiry into the motivations and challenges faced in the pursuit of the principal role.

Interview Questions

1. What motivated you to pursue the principal role?
2. What was the most motivating factor?
3. What challenges did you face in pursuit of the principal role?
4. Which challenge presented the greatest challenge?
5. How did you address the challenges?
6. What practices/factors in the school system/organization encouraged you to apply for the principal role?

7. Which of the practices/factors in the school system/organization provided you the greatest encouragement and why?
8. What practices/factors in the school system/organization may have deterred you from applying for the principal role?
9. What practices/factors in the school system/organization may have deterred you the most and why?

Appendix B

Participant Information Sheet

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to understand the lived experiences of African American women who are currently or were previously urban school principals-with an emphasis on their motivation to pursue the role and the challenges they faced along the way. There is a required 60-minute time commitment to be a participant in this study.

Inclusion Criteria

African American women who are currently or were previously a school principal.

Participation Mode

The researcher will ask participants for referrals of others that may fit the inclusion criteria. Participation in the study is a time commitment of one, one-hour interview. Data will be collected through one on one interviews via Zoom with participants that fit the inclusion criteria outlined above. The researcher requests permission to record the interview. The researcher will contact participants to schedule the one-on-one interview based on their availability. The participants are able to review the interview transcript and give feedback within a 24-hour period. The participants are able to withdraw from the study at any time. Participation in the study is confidential.

Goals of the Study

The goal of this study is to understand the lived experiences of African American women who are currently or were previously school principals.

Appendix C
Confirmed Interest Email

Hello (Insert potential participant name):

My name is Tondra Collins, and I am an education doctoral student at Nova Southeastern University in South Florida. I am reaching out because you expressed interest in being a participant in a qualitative research study via social media posting. The purpose of this research study is to understand the lived experiences of African American women who are currently or were previously urban school principals-with an emphasis on their motivation to pursue the role and the challenges they faced along the way. Please email me if you are interested in participating in the study, meet the criteria listed, and are available to be interviewed via Zoom for 60 minutes.

As a participant in this study, one will voluntary engage in a one-on-one interview, which last 60-minutes. The one-on-one interview will take place via Zoom and will be recorded for transcription purposes. Throughout this process, one may decide to no longer participant-at her leisure. To get the ball rolling please answer the three questions listed below within 72 hours.

Appendix D
Member Check Process

Hello (Insert potential participant name):

This is Tondra Collins, an education doctoral student and a researcher at Nova Southeastern University in South Florida. I am reaching out because you were a participant in my qualitative research study about the motivations and challenges faced by African American women in the school principal role.

As a participant in this study, you engaged in a one-on-one interview with me, which lasted 60-minutes. The one-on-one interview took place via Zoom and was recorded for transcription purposes. To assess external validity of the study, I am reaching out to invite your participation in the member check process.

Here are the steps to engage in the member check process:

1. Attached is a transcript of your interview. Read the transcript.
2. Any changes that you would like to make to the transcript are called feedback. Submit feedback via email within 24 hours of receiving this email.

The feedback obtained from the member check process will become a part of the master data file.

Thank you, Tondra Collins