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Perceptions: A Comparative Case Study of the
Lived Experiences of Urban and Suburban
African American Administrators

Edward E. Wilson

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
for the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

in the Department of Educational Leadership, Management, and Policy

Seton Hall University
2020

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Edward Wilson has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the Ed.D. during this **Fall Semester 2019**.

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Abstract

Despite the research conducted on this group, African Americans continue to be underrepresented in educational leadership, particularly in districts with growing minority populations. This qualitative, narrative-based study sought to build on previous research conducted on African Americans working in education, specifically within leadership as principals. By examining the perceptions of urban and suburban African American principals, this research contributed to the understanding of an emerging need within education where many districts are becoming increasingly diverse in terms of student populations, yet still lack diversity within their leadership ranks. The purpose of this study was to be intentional in comparing the lived experiences of urban and suburban African American principals, within the context of race and equity, educational leadership, and student achievement. By examining the experiences and practices, choice and preferences, successes and failures of these African American administrators, this study addressed the challenges these leaders face and provided insight into their perceived barriers of working in an urban and/or suburban district with regard to student progress and achievement. The results of this study support not only the case of increasing the numbers of male and female African American principals but also the claim that students of color benefit most when they *see* themselves reflected in the curriculum and in leadership positions.

Keywords: Critical Race Theory, African American principals, equity in school leadership, urban educational leadership, suburban educational leadership, racial equity in education

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the following individuals who, unfortunately, did not live to see me complete this journey: my brother, Richard Wilson; my godfather, Pastor Joseph DeLoatch; and my step-father, Jimmy Sanders! This dissertation is further dedicated to my mother, Ms. Eve Wilson, who sacrificed so much and *is* alive to see the fruits of her prayer, love, and support! And lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to my son, Amiri Wilson!! As a father, I am proud of the person you're becoming, and am confident that you will do well at Morgan State University!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In today's educational climate, the increase in diversity of student populations from various ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds is changing the landscape of districts in general, but suburban districts in particular (Diarrassouba & Johnson, 2014). In effect, this is causing principal leaders to revisit their practices in terms of addressing the varying needs of diverse student populations (Henderson, 2015). As suburban districts continue to vary in student populations, that is, African American, Latino, Asian and European students, the administrative positions are not as equally diverse. Conversely, in urban districts, where there tends to be more African American principals employed, the question of choice and preference of African American principals to work in an urban environment becomes something of interest and worth exploring.

As efforts to reform education in terms of addressing the achievement gap among students of color become more prevalent, it is clear that African American principal leadership is a necessity in districts with increasing minority populations. Additionally, in order to address the problem of the achievement gap, the role and impact of race in education in general, but educational leadership in particular, must be considered as well.

For students of color, African American principals serve as a vital and integral resource in not only their learning, but also their cultural development (Hozien, 2016). Not only is the role of African American principals important for students of color, it is also important for other students (and adults) outside of this ethnic group as it adds to the diversity of learning and leadership in a way through which other cultural groups can benefit. The role then of African American principals working in suburban districts with increasing minority populations in the

context of race serves as part of the basis for this research. The other focus of this research deals specifically with African American principals working in suburban districts, that is, the lived experiences in terms of their perceived successes and challenges, in comparison to their counterparts working in urban districts. It should be noted that this researcher opted to focus primarily on urban and suburban districts due to the fortunate opportunity and experience to have worked in both settings.

Considering this, the researcher felt compelled to ascertain the perspectives of colleagues working in similar environments, that is, either an urban and/or suburban district, in efforts toward comparing and analyzing their experiences in the context of race and educational leadership. By analyzing two different dynamics, this researcher also wanted to provide insight and visibility into a reality that impacts educational leadership in a way that can only be narrated by those directly impacted by the nuances of race, prejudice, and inequity. To be fair and honest, this is not to say that other ethnic groups cannot attest to such realities, but it is this researcher's intent to be meaningful in highlighting how race has impacted educational leadership as a profession, specifically for African American administrators.

In education, it is a known fact that school principals are critical to the success of student learning and achievement (Hill et al., 2016). In today's educational climate, the performance, or lack of performance, among students of color continues to generate concern as evidenced by data collected on state assessments across the country. However, despite some gains among Black students in 4th grade mathematics in 2007, *and* slight gains among Black students in 8th grade mathematics (Vanneman et al., 2009), the conversation on how *race* impacts education is augmented by the lingering achievement gap, access to advanced placement courses, and the suspension rate of students of color – who are suspended more times on average of 16% as

compared to 5% of their White counterparts (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

Moreover, it has been well documented by Karpinski (2006), Tillman (2004), James (1970), and Lyons and Chesley (2004) how the number of African American educators/principals was drastically reduced after the landmark *Brown vs. Topeka BOE (1954)* decision – hereafter referred to as the *Brown* decision. More specifically, in terms of hiring (and recruitment) of African American principals, the period preceding the *Brown* decision witnessed a significant number and presence of African American principals employed in segregated schools. For example, in a 1978 study conducted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), “fifty percent of all black principals were employed in the South, while only fifteen percent of principals in the total sample [held] positions in the south” (Hines & Byrne, 1978). Ironically, during the post-*Brown* era, it wasn’t a question of hiring more African American principals, as much as it was about *retaining* this group to work and lead integrated schools. Inevitably, this begs the question of choice and preference among African American principals in regard to working in suburban and/or urban districts, which will be explored in succeeding sections of this research.

Relative to this narrative is the question of *equity* within suburban districts regarding educational leadership and the low numbers of African American principals, despite growing minority populations in districts (NEA, 2015; SREB 2013 as cited in Hozien, 2016). In the tables below, the total number of principals in New Jersey and New York were reported as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Principal Data Reported as of 2007 (National Center for Educational Stats 2007-2008)

State	Total	African American	Hispanic	White, Non-Hispanic
New Jersey	2,460	19.4%	Not reported	72%
New York	4,660	10%	13.2%	(73.9) 74%

However, as of 2011-2012, the reported numbers for each group were slightly elevated, but relatively the same as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2

Principal Data Reported as of 2011-2012 (National Center for Educational Stats 2011-2012)

State	Total	African American	Hispanic	White, Non-Hispanic
New Jersey	2, 470	(13.7) 14%	8.0%	77.1%
New York	4,610	(12.6) 13%	(5.9) 6%	(78.7) 79%

And finally, on a national level, based on the reported number of public schools (89,810), the percentage of African American (Black) principals was reported as 10.1%, compared to 80.3% for Whites (non-Hispanics) and 6.8% for Hispanics respectively (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2011-2012).

The low percentages and representation of African American principals speak to a greater need for districts across New Jersey to consider not only increasing the number of African Americans in leadership positions, but also *retaining* this group as they play a pivotal role toward addressing the noted issues with equity, achievement, and student engagement that have historically impacted students of color and large institutions of African Americans (Tillman, 2017). Again, this is not to say that African Americans are not applying for principal positions,

but rather to indicate that based on the data shared above, the low representation of African Americans in suburban districts is an area of concern. In this regard, retention efforts become equally important in this analysis.

Moreover, despite the well-meaning intentions of the *Brown* case, it is important to highlight the *irony* of the decision, which had the *opposite* effect on African American principals in terms of the number of African American principals working in schools after the *Brown* ruling was rendered. It can be argued that race and prejudice contributed to the decrease of African American principals as evidenced by the significant reduction in the number of African Americans serving in principal positions post-*Brown* (Lyons and Chesley, 2004). Consequently, such attempts to maintain segregation in the south caused lingering scrutiny regarding the ability and skill set of African American principals to lead in schools. Consequently, this would lead to a fractured school system, where African American principals would no longer be held in high regard within their communities as they were prior to the *Brown* decision (Karpinski, 2006). To this end, the post-implementation realities of the *Brown* case and its legal tenets reflected a constant struggle for African American educators to obtain equity toward maintaining their status and positions as principals in newly integrated schools.

African Americans serving in leadership positions are still scrutinized based on their ability and skill set to perform in key administrative roles – that is, as a principal and/or assistant principal. Further, African American administrators working in suburban districts encounter several challenges related to: prejudice, White privilege, profiling, in terms of being viewed as inept in positions of leadership, and their level of competency to name a few (McCray et al., 2007). This research analyzes how African American administrators function and navigate as principals in different settings, and if they perceive any issues related to race and equity. For

additional perspective, part of this researcher's experience working in suburban districts will be shared to lend further insight into this area. The perspectives of African American principals working in urban districts will also be ascertained in efforts toward obtaining and providing a balanced analysis on the nuances of race in both settings.

Considering the aftermath of the *Brown* decision, where African American principals encountered staunch opposition toward desegregation, equity in the leadership ranks has been minimal since 2007, and still raises concern among many scholars (McCray et al., 2007). Based on this researcher's experience in suburban districts, African American principals work extremely hard to not only improve student achievement, but also prove their value and worth as administrators. Given this context, *race* and equity in educational leadership has become not only a topic of discussion, but also an area of concern in light of the increasing minority population and the persistent achievement gap among students of color.

Therefore, it is this researcher's aim to be purposeful in examining and discussing the challenges of African American principals by analyzing their lived experiences in terms of success and challenges as educational leaders, and how this dynamic potentially impedes student learning. If reform efforts are to be successful, such honest conversations are necessary to do more than assuage the achievement gap and progress of students of color. To this end, as the "gap" in education continues to draw debate on how to reduce (if not eliminate) its existence, the role of African Americans in leadership positions is equally important to this research and combating this lingering dilemma for students of color.

Purpose of the Study

Despite the research conducted on this group, African Americans in educational leadership is still an area that continues to be underrepresented, particularly in districts with

growing minority populations. This research seeks to build on previous work and dissertations conducted on African Americans working in education, specifically within leadership as principals. By examining the perceptions of urban and suburban African American principals, this research seeks to add to an emerging need within education where many districts are becoming increasingly diverse in terms of its student populations, yet still lack the diversity within its leadership ranks. However, to be clear, the purpose of this research is not to simply reproduce previous studies that have documented the statistics related to African American principals, but rather to be intentional in comparing the lived experiences of urban and suburban African American principals, within the context of race and equity, educational leadership, and student achievement.

Problem Statement

In a succinct manner, this research seeks to conduct a comparative analysis on the nuances of educational leadership from the lens of ten African American administrators working in both urban and suburban settings in northern New Jersey, where there is an existing achievement gap and a growing minority population. By examining the experiences and practices, choice and preferences, successes and failures of these African American administrators, the purpose is to not only address the challenges of these African American leaders, but also provide insight into their perceived barriers (if any) of working in an urban and/or suburban district with regard to student progress and achievement.

It should be noted that in the absence of data specific to the number of African Americans applying for principal positions in general, but suburban districts in particular, this study will ascertain the perspectives of five suburban African American principals to be interviewed for this research. Further, this research will ascertain the perceptions of five urban principals in

relation to their preference (or not) to work in an urban district. By interviewing both groups, it is expected that their insight will provide relative qualitative data and relevant information that will contribute to the gap in literature, as well as add to this area of study within educational leadership.

Research Questions

Central to this analysis are the lived experiences of both African American principals working in suburban and urban districts, and its impact on educational achievement for students of color. Therefore, driving this research are the following questions:

Overarching question:

1. What are the lived experiences of African American urban school principals compared to those of suburban African American school principals?

Sub-questions:

1. How do these individuals perceive stereotypes, challenges and work preferences in these respective locations?
2. In what ways do these experiences and perceptions influence the principals' decisions to stay, leave, or move within the profession of school leadership?
3. In what ways does gender contribute to inequity in educational leadership?

Additionally, it should be noted that attention will also be given to the sub-issue of gender in educational leadership in relation to African American female principals, as no research and/or conversation on the topic of African Americans in educational leadership can be completed without giving acknowledgment to this population.

Methodology

This research utilized a qualitative design in the form of a narrative study based on the perceptions and insight of practicing and retired school administrators. Creswell (2009) states that “Narrative inquiry/research relates to the study of the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives [or experiences]” (p. 231). Considering the qualitative nature of this study, it was deemed appropriate by the researcher as the best methodology to use in obtaining information. As such, each identified principal will participate in a pre- and post- structured interview, as well as a small focus group of their respective colleagues within similar working environments, that is, urban and suburban. It should be noted that although scripted, the researcher will allow for additional questions to be organically raised and answered based on responses from each participant interviewed in this study.

Further, each administrator will be interviewed face-to-face in their respective schools utilizing an audio recording, each lasting between twenty-five to forty-five minutes per principal. Results of each participant will be verified after being transcribed, via Dedoose and/or Rev, and returned to ensure accuracy of responses. Finally, after this review, the researcher will code information into specific categories related to this topic, then discuss in further detail in the *Discussion and Analysis* section of this research.

Theoretical Framework

In conducting this research, three areas will be explored in greater detail: (a) “meaning full” silence, (b) perception, specifically in terms of how African American school leaders are viewed in the context of their aptitude, skill set, and competency to serve in leadership positions, and finally, (c) White privilege in society as manifested in educational leadership. To analyze this theoretically, Critical Race Theory (CRT) will be used, and conceptually, the phrase/term

“meaning full” silence as discussed by Chapman (2013) and Diem and Carpenter (2013) respectively will be used.

Put simply, CRT examines race through the lens of the oppressed by allowing minorities to reframe their stories and experiences from their perspective (Chapman, 2013). Here, it is worth reinforcing that the key in CRT is that of the perspectives of those *directly* impacted. As an emerging theory, many scholars have used CRT to explain the nature of inequities in society by providing a voice to those affected by systemic and societal prejudice. In this study, CRT is applied and used theoretically to offer insight into the complex role in which African Americans lead in diverse schools, as well as to delve deeper into how their experiences shape their current practice.

According to Diem and Carpenter (2013), “meaning full” silence refers to the absence of race-based conversation in pedagogy. Therefore, within this discussion, this researcher elected to use this concept in relation to educational leadership programs with respect to the lack of training aspiring leaders receive that address the issues of race, prejudice, and discrimination in education. As a point of clarity, the need for African American presence in administrative roles not only serves the interest of students of color, but also serves the interest of *all* in providing diversity within education. So too would the presence of African American administrators assist non-African American principals and leaders in dealing with cultural issues in education. To this end, this research is meaningful in its approach.

Relevance of Study

The relevance of this study is rooted in what Green (2019) refers to as the “silent crisis” that exist within American schools, as many districts are becoming increasingly diverse, in terms of student of color, attending suburban schools (Green, 2019). More specifically, in the years

since the historic and legal de-segregation *Brown* case, issues related to equity in schools in general, and educational leadership in particular, persist, as many suburban districts still lack diversity in principal leadership positions despite changing student demographics. Further, African American principals represent a small fraction of those in leadership positions in New Jersey, yet as a group, they serve as a critical resource in the education of African American students. They serve as leaders with whom students of color can both identify and relate to (Tillman, 2017). As the 21st Century approaches and diversity becomes more relevant, both urban and suburban districts must begin to consider issues related to equity in the context of the academic performance for students in general, and for students of color in particular.

In this analysis, the insights of both urban and suburban principals will be explored to analyze any perceived challenges of working in their respective settings in terms of choice and preference, success and failure, and race and equity. By looking at both groups of principals, this researcher aims to provide a balanced analysis of how African American administrators function and navigate, and how they view their roles as educational leaders. The academic gap has been a long-standing issue, not only in urban school districts, but also suburban school districts where the representation of African American principals is significantly low – 9.2% as of 2012 as reported in the School Staffing Survey (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). As a result, the concept and understanding of leadership in urban and suburban districts becomes essential to the discussion geared toward addressing the achievement gap.

Examining this area through the lens of how African Americans operate as school leaders not only adds to the literature, but also provides insight as to how issues related to equity within instruction and in the classroom can be addressed and possibly improve student performance.

This analysis also provides insight into those aspiring to pursue educational leadership in terms of working in suburban schools.

At the core of this analysis is the consideration of race in education within the context of educational leadership. As previously indicated, race has impacted educational circles in a multitude of ways as evidenced by how students of color are educated, the existence of an educational achievement gap, equity in education, and finally the representation of African Americans in leadership positions, that is, principals, assistant principals, and district level administrators. The role, then, of African Americans within educational leadership is the basis from which this researcher will begin to analyze these noted issues of race in education, specifically in suburban districts.

By examining the lived experiences of retired and practicing administrators, it is expected that this researcher will gain insight into not only their struggles, but also the impact their experiences have had with race in suburban districts. So too will these administrators' experiences provide recommendations for districts to increase the presence of African Americans in leadership positions.

Limitations of the Study

In terms of limitations, it should be noted that although this research focuses on two distinct groups/populations with regard to African Americans working in urban and suburban districts, it is necessary to note that it only highlights the issue of gender within the context of inequity in educational leadership. Although some of the participants interviewed for this the study are female, the researcher feels that gender deserves its own separate research in light of challenges and struggles in comparison to males as a group. Further, this limitation also extends to the duality African American women endure in terms of gender and race. Again, this

researcher highlighted this topic, understanding that the nuances between race and gender deserve a more in-depth analysis.

Another limitation of this study is that it does not focus on rural settings because this researcher does not have access to participants working in this area. This researcher elected to focus on urban and suburban districts because he has experience in working in both settings, and is familiar with some of the challenges that African American principals encounter in terms of race, prejudice, and negative/false assumptions regarding skillset. To this end, it is understood that this research does not reflect the general scope of settings in terms of environments, that is, rural, but acknowledges that insight into this setting is an area recommended for future study.

Finally, the last limitation of this study is that of ascertaining *student* perceptions regarding how they view the relevance of having an African American principal within their school environment. As is true with any discussion regarding education, the group that is most impacted, and that we, as educators, ultimately serve, should have an equal voice in discussing and sharing their thoughts, views and opinions. In this context, this researcher acknowledges that student input was not solicited, but future research is necessary in order to provide an additional perspective from the population directly affected: the students. To this end, while it obvious that there are several sub-issues related to race, equity, gender, and student achievement raised in this study, it is important to the researcher that the focus remains on the analysis of African American principals working in urban and suburban settings within the context of educational leadership and how they view their roles as leaders.

Definitions of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the phrase “students of color” and the term “Blacks” are used interchangeably to reflect the variations of Africana and Caribbean students and educators of the diaspora. Additional terms that will be introduced and/or discussed include the following:

Achievement Gap: the underperformance between African American students in comparison to their peers of other racial ethnic groups – i.e., White, Asian, and Hispanic, etc.

Administrator: Used interchangeably throughout this research to denote specific positions within suburban districts (principal, district, superintendent).

Critical Race Theory (CRT): theory used to challenge the idea of White privilege in society by examining the historical lived experiences of people of color and how it manifests in present society (Chapman, 2013).

Educators: Used to denote teachers and principals grouped together; however, “principal” will be used directly when referred to as a specific group. Although the primary focus of this research is that of African American principals, this research also recognizes the number of African American teachers equally affected and decimated by the post-*Brown* decision.

Ethno-humanism: Used in Henderson’s (2015) study to define and describe the commitment of African American principals on the following: the education of African American children, the compassion for and understanding of African American children, and the confidence in the educability of African American children.

External influences: Used in reference to perceived community-based stakeholders and parent perceptions of African American administrators.

Internal influences: Used in reference to perceived faculty perceptions of ability and skill set of African American administrators.

“Meaning full” silence: Concept used to discuss the absence of pedagogy and conversations that critically examine race within educational leadership programs. Additional terms associated with this are “color-muteness” and “culture of fear.” Finally, the term “*meaning full*” is intentional in spelling as used by Diem and Carpenter (2013).

Racial Literacy: Term used as part of Toure and Dorsey’s (2018) study regarding the *White Racial Frame* (WRF) to discuss the context in which the United States defines and maintains racialized hierarchies. In short, racial literacy is defined as “a dynamic framework for understanding American racism . . . to decipher the durable racial grammar that structures racialized hierarchies and frames the narrative of our republic” (Guinier, 2004 as cited in Toure & Dorsey, 2018).

Suburban district: Term used to reference the higher socio-economic status and affluence of a school district in comparison to a lower socio-economic status of a district.

Urban district: Term used to reference the lower socio-economic status and resources of a school district in comparison to a more affluent and higher socio-economic status of a district.

Summary

As briefly alluded to, this research will include aspects and insights of this researcher’s own personal experiences of working administratively in suburban districts. Having worked at various levels in education from teacher, to social worker, to vice principal, to district supervisor and principal, this researcher’s experience is provided in comparison to colleagues within the profession participating in this research.

The research conducted bears witness to the state of educational leadership in terms of the low numbers of African American administrators, despite emerging minority populations. The truth of the matter is that our schools must reflect the student populations we serve. Given

the lingering achievement gap, educators and policy makers must begin to view the impact race has in education, and more importantly, be courageous in challenging race-based prejudices that impact student learning and achievement.

Moreover, the research presented here offers insight into the nuances of educational leadership from the perspectives of African American administrators in urban and suburban settings. In addition, while the voices of urban and suburban principals are solicited, it is necessary to note that nearly sixty years later, the promises of the *Brown* decision have yet to be fulfilled in terms of equity within education. It should be clearly stated and reinforced that this is not a “White-Black” issue, but rather a student issue as we strive to improve the quality of education and improve student learning. Therefore, this research is very meaningful to the researcher and intentional in addressing the issues related to race, prejudice, equity and diversity in student learning, as it is a real dilemma, and must be challenged with candor and determinism toward improving learning for all students.

In the succeeding sections are the following: Chapter 2: Literature Review, Chapter 3: Research Methodology, Chapter 4: Research Results, and finally, Chapter 5: Analysis, Discussion and Summary. Each section will delve further into this topic in hopes toward increasing one’s understanding and view concerning the evolving world of educational leadership. To this end, we now look at the literature associated with this critical aspect of educational leadership in suburban and urban schools.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

As is true in any discussion, there must be a context in which its impact is analyzed in society, and – in this case – Education Leadership. This is particularly significant when discussing the interplay between race, racism, race-relations and/or educational leadership. Such discussion tends to evoke a certain level of discomfort for two reasons: (a) It is contrary to the ideals of *what* America was founded on; and (b) People do not want to be *perceived* as being racist (Palmer & Louis, 2017). Although progress has been made over the years as it relates to addressing these issues, such discourse does not negate the accomplishments of the Civil Rights era, nor does it negate the fact that there's still more work to be done – particularly in educational leadership.

In this research, African American principals working in suburban and urban districts serves as the focal group. The experiences of African Americans in education histrionically lends itself to a greater conversation related, but not limited to, inequity, prejudice, and ascendancy into leadership positions. The trajectory of African Americans since the notable *Brown v. BOE Topeka* decision has initiated debates of whether the original intent of the case to desegregate American schools has really ever materialized. Given the on-going gap in performance in terms of achievement of students of color, as well as the growth of minorities in suburban districts, many scholars would argue in the pejorative that the promises of *Brown* has not been fulfilled (McCray et al., 2007).

In a post-Obama era, race has been propelled to the forefront. As educational leaders, we must take note of this dilemma if we are to be serious about improving student progress that provides an equitable education for all. To this end, this literate review is organized in a manner

geared toward providing the reader with insight into the areas this researcher believes contributes to the challenges of African American principals working suburban and urban districts. In this regard, the succeeding sections analyze race within the context of the following: its historical underpinnings, via the irony of the *Brown* case in educational leadership and African Americans; the impact of “meaning full silence” within administrative prep/training programs; CRT and how race is maintained in American schools, urban educational leadership, lingering myths and stereotypes about African American leaders, and lastly, gender and educational leadership in relation to African American women.

Brown v. BOE Topeka Revisited: The Irony of the Brown Decision

Prior to the historic decision of *Brown v. Board of Education at Topeka Kansas* (1954), the notion of “separate but equal” was the prevailing thought of the south, as it was legally upheld several years prior, via *Plessey v. Ferguson* (1896). However, given the intent behind the development of the *Brown* decision to challenge this doctrine, implications of this legal decision were significant in theory because it would take almost fifty years for many southern states to comply with the mandates of the Supreme Court. More specifically, what is most alarming is the number of African American educators, that is, teachers and principals, who lost their jobs in the aftermath of the *Brown* decision. For example, one southern state reported that there was an actual decrease in the number of African American administrators from roughly 620 to a disappointing 170 at the time of the initial ruling (McCray et al., 2007, p. 247). Karpinski (2006) observes that

In Maryland, a border state, the number of Black principals decreased 27% while White principals increased 167% from 1954 to 1968 (Displacement, 1971). At the secondary level, this meant a 50% reduction in the number of Black principals. In Kentucky, the

decline was also severe as the number of Black principals declined from 350 to 36. (p. 251)

However, prior to *Brown*, African American principals represented and reflected a segment of the professional middle class of African Americans living in the south. Despite the prevailing myth/belief that African Americans were less adept and intellectually inferior, African American principals represented the antithesis of that thought, as they were the leaders within their communities, and served as “cultural” models for students (Tillman, 2004) and (James, 1970). As educational leaders, they became the conduits between non-White segregated public schools because they were able to navigate between and advocate for educational equity for Black students attending segregated schools. Tillman (2004) aptly notes that

As principals, they, [African Americans], encouraged parents to donate resources to schools, helped to raise funds for the schools, and served as professional role models for teachers and other staff members . . . they also served as instructional leaders and not only provided a vision and direction for the school staff, but also transmitted the goals and ideals of the school to a philanthropic White power structure. (p. 109)

In this sense, it is relevant to this study to acknowledge not only the role, but also the efforts of African American principals that existed pre-*Brown*, and, arguably, during the post-*Brown* era into present day districts. Because of their role and status as leaders, African American principals maintained a certain connectedness that was rooted in the cultural experiences of African American communities in the south, which, to a larger degree, reflected remnants of West African culture prior to the forced removal of Africans during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

The varied roles and layered responsibilities of African American principals, historically, speak to the relevance and importance of this group in relation to educational leadership. To the

degree that the number of African American educators (principals) was large in number is an understatement in comparison to the inevitable decline after the *Brown* decision was rendered. Albeit mainly concentrated in segregated Black schools, the number of Black principals prior to the *Brown* decision clearly speaks to their value and worth as educational leaders during a time where staunch segregationist not only touted the notion of Black inferiority, but also resisted efforts to implement the tenets of the *Brown* decision. To this end, the *blatant efforts* to curtail the Supreme Court's decision were appalling, if not inexcusable.

Resistance to *Brown*: The Little Rock Nine and Stand in the Schoolhouse Door Incidents

Poignant examples of these blatant efforts are two notable southern politicians: Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus (that is, the “Little Rock Nine”), and Alabama Governor Wallace (that is, “Stand in the Schoolhouse Door”), who vehemently opposed the order to desegregate schools. In 1957 in Little Rock Arkansas, then Governor Faubus utilized the full authority of his office to prevent nine high school students enrolled at Little Rock Central High School from entering school. Three years prior in 1954, the federal court ruled, via *Brown v. BOE Topeka*, that the doctrine of “separate but equal,” was not equal and ordered an immediate desegregation of American schools.

Governor Faubus' opposition toward *Brown*'s legal ruling was evidenced by his usage of the Arkansas National Guard to prevent the nine students from entering – to which President Eisenhower countered by sending in 1,200 U.S. para-troopers to eventually escort the nine students into Little Rock Central High School (Jaynes, 2018).

Five years later, in 1962, then Alabama Governor George Wallace, after winning the election, vowed to defy desegregation by literally “standing in front of the school house doors” to prevent African American students from enrolling at the University of Alabama – to which,

then President John F. Kennedy would send in the newly federalized National Guard after the recent incident in Little Rock to intervene (Jaynes, 2018). As history would have it, both, the “Little Rock Nine” and “Stand in the Schoolhouse Door” incidents would consequently cause a permanent blight on the United States, reflective of how staunch opposition was to desegregate schools.

In these two incidents, both Governors displayed *extreme* measures to defy the federal order. As Lyons and Chesley (2004) surmise, such defiance lasted until 1964 before the *Brown* order was fully implemented throughout Virginia. In this context, one could argue that the *irony* inherent in the *Brown* decision to challenge the doctrine of “separate but equal,” further strained the well-meaning intent of the law, considering the resistance toward desegregation, and the significant decrease in the number of African American principals.

As such, since the ruling of *Brown*, African Americans have had to fight an uphill battle in terms of educational equity, despite legal rulings that supported desegregation and challenged the status quo of the south. Further, the ratification of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 signaled a radical shift in educational leadership with regard to advocacy for former African American principals who were now serving in various subordinate roles – that is, as coaches, teachers and assistant principals, and in some instances, janitors. In particular, professional organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), and the National Education Association (NEA) to name a few, aided in the efforts to re-hire African American principals, as well as assisted them in navigating through unrealistic practices rooted in prejudiced beliefs (Karpinski, 2006).

Finally, before concluding this section, it is necessary to reiterate the irony of *what* the *Brown* decision was initially intended for and how it had the opposite effect. As documented thus far, in the years immediately following the *Brown* decision, opponents and opposition toward desegregation were significant to those who thought the federal order challenged their way of living, specifically in terms of the perception of African Americans being inferior, inept and only useful for manual labor. In some instances during the post-*Brown* period, former African American principals had to be either re-educated, re-tested (via the National Teachers exam), perform menial tasks, and/or assume subordinate positions (Karpinski, 2006).

This is not to say that the *Brown* decision did not serve a meaningful purpose with regard to legislation for African Americans, but rather to note that efforts to implement the new law were initially rejected and derailed by many White southerners who wanted to preserve their way of living based on malice and dissent, thereby causing resistance toward the enactment of the *Brown* decision. Hence, as previously indicated, this research is purposeful in its approach toward generating a dialogue on how race has and continues to have an impact on educational leadership in an ever-changing society.

Race, “Meaning full” Silence, and Educational Leadership Programs

In educational leadership preparation programs, many liberal professionals who advocate for diversity and equity in education are often hesitant to speak of race because of the negative connotation associated with it. The absence of such conversations has caused many school leaders to be *unprepared* in addressing delicate issues related to race and diversity in education (Rusch & Horsford, 2009, p. 304). It should be noted that as of 2013, more than 80% of teachers and administrators were non-Hispanic and White (US Department of Education, 2013 as cited in Tyler, 2016). Despite the diversification of many suburban districts, the instructional and

administrative staff remains predominately White. Thus, the importance of this topic becomes significant in that it is incumbent upon educational leadership programs to begin re-assessing *how* to approach and incorporate courses that address race, equity and diversity within education.

“Meaning full” Silence in Educational Leadership Programs

For insight into this, the concept of “meaning full” silence will be explored in two contexts: (a) the impact on African American principal practice in suburban districts with increasing minority populations, and (b) the impact in urban districts where such silence maintains inequity. In a study conducted by Diem and Carpenter (2013), the phrase “meaning full” silences was used to describe the “essence” of how such silences shape the ways in which students and professors interpret and address, and avoid race-related issues, in other words, *the absence of pedagogy and conversations that critically examines race* (p. 57). Their study helps to explain not only non-existent conversations, but also the impact of not having such formal talks and pedagogical instruction serve as a disservice to aspiring school leaders.

Such avoidance of conversations on race leads to consequences for aspiring school leaders in their practice as evidenced by deficit thinking and the maintenance of inequities within instructional practices and policies – for example, increased referrals of minority students into remedial and/or special education classes. Further, Rusch and Horsford (2009) and Noguera (2003) note that the lack of such conversations leads to “deficit thinking,” which is the “belief some educators have that students fail in school because of internal deficiencies (such as cognitive and/or motivational limitations) or shortcomings socially linked to the youngster – such as familial deficits and dysfunctions” (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001).

For African American principals, this speaks directly to the challenges within their practice of leading diverse schools because it serves not only as a detriment by not having honest

conversations, but also serves as a barrier in challenging such thinking of and practices toward students in general, but students of color in particular. Conversely, for urban educational leaders, this results in an even greater issue because “the explanation of and expectations for what is possible educationally for the children in [low income and urban] districts are shaped by the larger *deficit educational discourse* [emphasis added] that assumes these children will not succeed in school” (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001).

In this sense, it is necessary to reinforce the point of “meaning full” silence. That is, by not having structured offerings in educational leadership programs that provide aspiring leaders space and opportunities to challenge not only their potential biases related to race and equity, but also being able to recognize and challenge such biases of their peers, aspiring principals are susceptible toward maintaining inequitable practices, and will be ill-equipped to challenge prejudice-based thought processes among colleagues with decision-making authority.

Again, as indicated previously, such thinking impacts not only students of color, but also *all* students as it provides a false sense of perspective in terms of how students of color are perceived and ultimately educated. If administrative prep programs continue on the current trajectory, aspiring and future educational leaders will be relegated to their own consciousness toward combating the omnipresence of race and prejudice within education. To this end, this research is relevant to the discourse on diversity and educational leadership in general, both in suburban and urban districts.

Color-Muteness in Educational Leadership Programs

Consistent with this is a similar, yet different study by Welton et al. (2015). In their research, they discovered that although many administrators in suburban districts were aware of race and the increasing demographics of minority students, there still existed a certain degree or

“color muteness,” that maintains inequalities within educational systems (Welton et al., 2015). According to Welton et al., “the second aspect of new racism that we examined is ‘color-muteness,’ which according to Polluck (2004b) occurs when educators refrain from race-related speech, and engage in the purposeful silencing of race words themselves” (p. 699).

In urban districts, this “muteness” is reflected in the habit of not viewing race within the context of their practice, in other words, ignoring the existence of race in instruction, challenging racial language when present during instruction, and/or challenging racial biases of teachers toward minority students. Toure and Dorsey (2018) refer to this type of practice/behavior as engaging in racial imagery and language accents, which “relates to the visual and interprets one’s viewpoint or interactions as colorblind.” Despite the varying socio-economic status of a district, both urban and suburban districts alike encounter challenges related to muteness and how it manifests in instructional and leadership practices. Confronting these challenges, via educational leadership prep programs, at least provides a basis in which all aspiring educational leaders can acquire relative training to combat negative practices toward students of color in education.

Racial Literacy and Muteness

Another aspect relevant to this conversation and worth discussing is that of Racial Literacy. Toure and Dorsey (2018) utilize Feagin’s five dimensions of the White Racial Frame (WRF) to punctuate the connection between race and educational leadership – that is, racial stereotypes (a belief aspect); racial narratives and interpretations (integrating cognitive aspects); racial images (a visual aspect) and languages accents (an auditory aspect); racialized emotions (a feelings aspect); and inclination to discriminatory action (Feagin, 2010 as cited in Toure & Dorsey, 2018). For the purpose of this discussion, racial literacy is used to further explore how

muteness is manifested in education, as evidenced by deliberate avoidance of race-based conversations due to feelings of discomfort and not wanting to be perceived as a racist.

According to Guinier, racial literacy is proposed as “a dynamic framework for understanding American racism, [and is] needed to decipher the durable racial grammar that structures racialized hierarchies and frames the narrative of our republic” (Guinier, 2004 as cited in Toure & Dorsey, 2018). From a historical perspective, this contextualizes and frames the conversation to include the false attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions held of students of color that served to limit their educational attainment in a post-*Brown* era.

In an interesting observation from Toure and Dorsey (2018), they provide a supporting detail from one of the participants in their study who reflects on how students of color are viewed within the context of the “whole child,”

Ms. Thomas, the least experienced of the three principals, also maintained a colorblind stance, referring often to an image of the “whole child,” a concept promoted by a popular professional organization for educators . . . “I think of the whole child. I think that when I reflect on them, that’s what I think about them. I mean that they have so many different aspects and sides to them, but when I think of their needs and how to address them, I look at them as a whole.”

This firm colorblind stance does not acknowledge the relationships of children’s funds of knowledge or their home culture to teaching and learning. In fact, Ms. Thomas’ efforts to be colorblind may mask a dysconscious racism that ignores the unique assets each child brings to the classroom and hesitates to question the status quo of underachievement of student of color. (p. 23)

Consequently, this “colorblindness” and “dysconscious racism” can be seen in both, suburban and urban districts, as illustrated by on-going conversations related to growing minority populations, closing the academic achievement gap, and improving student learning.

Given this context, the notion of “muteness” within education and leadership speaks to a candid reality that requires graduate administrative training programs to revisit how courses can be designed and offered for aspiring administrators to be equipped in having race-based conversations and/or focus groups/projects, and hopefully facilitate an awareness of how harsh racial and prejudice-based thinking can impact student learning and achievement.

Finally, another research directly related to this discussion, is Tyler’s (2016) study, which further examines how schools are ill prepared to address diversity. Tyler offers similar conclusions regarding muteness and silence within administrative and teacher training programs. However, an additional caveat discussed is that of how many suburban district administrators feel afraid to have conversations on race,

Aspiring administrators in a school leadership preparation program in Maine were unaware with diversity-related concepts (such as White privilege), and exhibited discomfort addressing diversity related issues, and said that their programs did not prepare them well to respond to diversity-related problems during their work in schools.

(Tyler, 2016)

Consequently, the impact of “color-muteness” further lends support to the growing need for educational leadership programs to seriously revisit its instructional offerings on issues related to equity and race in education, but more importantly how this color-muteness appears and reflects in practice within the lived experiences of an administrator. Although documented efforts to address this issue in urban schools have been well researched, “color-muteness”

equally exists and extends into suburban districts. In this context, school leadership becomes a vital part of addressing this issue, particularly in suburban schools where students of color are underperforming, and, in urban districts, where students are stereotyped.

Therefore, despite several efforts to advance this conversation forward, the aim to address the achievement gap is not uncommon, but has remained at the talk or “calling for” phase versus that of the “action” stage (Rusch & Horsford, 2009, p. 304). Whether color muteness, “meaning full” silence, and/or fear, the need to initiate courses addressing diversity is necessary in today’s climate of student performance, or lack of performance, and leadership within diverse schools.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT, which posited the role of race from the lens of African Americans, was first used within the legal context of the 1960s. Since then, many scholars have used it to explain the nature of inequities in society. In this study, CRT is applied and used to offer insight into the complex role in which African Americans lead in diverse schools. As a point of clarity, the need for African American presence in administrative roles not only serves the interest of students of color, but also serves the interest of *all* in providing diversity within education. So too would the presence of African American administrators assist non-African American principals and leaders in dealing with cultural issues in education.

Put simply, CRT “challenges the notion of White privilege, and its theoretical underpinnings are embedded in the lived experiences of people of color” (McCray et al., 2007, p. 250). Within this discussion, this researcher elected to use CRT to further explain and provide greater understanding of how race and privilege is manifested in educational leadership programs, as well as in education as a profession, with respect to the experiences of African American principals working in suburban districts. Of the five tenets that comprise CRT, three

will be used in this research: *interest convergence*, *colorblindness*, and *permanence of racism*.

The two remaining tenets, *Whiteness as property* and *counter storytelling*, will be generally referenced for their relevance to reinforce key points in this research.

Interest Convergence

Regarding interest convergence, López provides a succinct meaning of this concept as defined by Bell, observing that “whites will tolerate and advance the interests of people of color only when they promote the self-interests of whites” (Bell, 1995, as cited in Lopez, 2003, p. 84). More specifically, many scholars advocating CRT such as Lopez (2003), Chapman (2013), and Muhammad et al. (2013) provide compelling arguments that the *Brown* decision was actually to the benefit of the United States given its *perception* as a global power at that time. In this sense, the issue of race, segregation, and prejudice was a direct challenge to The United States’ image as an emerging global power, ultimately causing the U.S. government to pass the historic *Brown* decision, because it served their *interest* in the eyes of the international community. Since such a blemish would not benefit the United States in the emergence of a possible Cold War, it became necessary for the United States to address the lingering issue of race.

Another and more recent example of *interest convergence* applicable to this study can be found in the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) (2002) policy introduced by then President George W. Bush. At the core of NCLB was that of accountability for districts in addressing the underperformance of minority and subgroups, whereas *prior* to NCLB’s advent and implementation, districts were able to conceal the underperformance of students of color attending racially diverse schools. Chapman (2013) observes that “high achieving schools claiming to be integrated and educationally thriving used aggregated data to obfuscate their achievement gaps” (p. 616). However, given the financial penalties and sanctions associated with

NCLB, districts were inevitably forced to report the progress of all groups, in effect exposing existing gaps among minority students of color and students receiving specialized services. In this context, it became prudent, or in the best *interest*, of districts to adequately address such existing gaps among the noted groups.

This ultimately would force districts to begin looking at the achievement gap between African American students and their White and Asian peers on standardized state assessments. From this, the historical impact and harsh realities of race and prejudice of African American children in education comes into question, as there has always been an inequity present since the days preceding *and* succeeding the historic *Brown* decision. From this perspective then, the efficacy of education for students of color, arguably, must be viewed in the historical context of being the subject of disenfranchisement. Part of the work, therefore, of African American principals/educators is viewed in this context as districts with growing minority populations continue to emerge in education.

Colorblindness

Regarding the concept of terms of *color-blindness*, it is argued that race does not serve as a factor in relation to how privilege is manifested in certain groups (Muhammad et al., 2013). In other words, advocates of color-blindness view a problem, without considering the symptoms of the problem, ultimately believing that there is no problem because all signs and symptoms are ignored. In an educational framework, this is reflected in curriculum and behavioral policies, adult-student interactions, and the classroom environment where race is often over-looked and not symptomatic of a larger issue of inequity toward students of color (Chapman, 2013). Taking this perspective into consideration, educational leaders must not only begin to acknowledge, but more importantly, challenge the signs and symptoms when they are manifested in disciplinary

policies, referrals to special education, and instructional expectations. As indicated thus far with educational leadership programs, the subtle power of “muteness” and being “colorblind” can have a severe impact on how students are viewed and approached educationally.

Permanence of Racism

Finally, the *permanence of racism* acknowledges the historical existence of prejudice practices in society. In southern states we see the *permanence of racism* in the years after the *Brown* decision, specifically in educational leadership as evidenced by the staggering number of both African American principals and teachers, as noted previously. Although the number of African American principals has improved, the permanence of racism is equally reflected in the legal ramifications of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, the *Elementary Schools Education Act (ESEA) 1965*, the *Milliken v. Bradley Case (1974)*, and former President Clinton’s *Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) 1994*. Upon further scrutiny of these landmark initiatives, it can be easily argued that these policies created the context not only for White flight, but also the *re-segregation* of education, via the new funding formula for schools, that is, property taxes. Because of lingering opposition to the *Brown* decision, legal cases that forced districts to become fully integrated were being circumvented by *de facto* segregation that did not support the educational opportunities of students of color. In states and cities where remnants of *de jure* segregation were present, the United States Supreme Court,

held that a district court in Michigan [for example] could not force the inclusion of Detroit suburbs in a plan to desegregate inner city Detroit schools since suburbs were not guilty of *de jure* segregation, and were thereby beyond the remedial powers of the judiciary. The decision *Milliken v. Bradley 1974*, signaled the end of the Supreme Court’s willingness to make *Brown*’s mandate for educational equity “a living truth.” Instead, the

court held that the power of federal courts to demand integration could only be used inside those districts that had proven history of discrimination. Subsequently, the newly created suburbs became safe havens for fleeing whites, [which would become] immune from integration efforts. (Daniel & Walker, 2014, p. 260)

By the mid-1970s, it should be noted that due to the on-going opposition and the encroachment *Brown* imposed on antagonists to integration, efforts to solidify the intent behind *Brown* were waning since the initial ruling in 1954, both in the south and the north. To this end, the *permanence of racism* still lingered, despite the well-meaning intent and efforts to desegregate American schools.

Moreover, despite the controversy surrounding then President Bush's NCLB policy, in terms of the lack of resources that accompanied the bill, NCLB was instrumental in abetting states to report the gaps in student achievement among students of color and special education in both suburban and urban districts. Prior to this, districts were able to conceal information, as it was not normally reported (Noguera, 2008). Although districts were required to now report the status and progress of each student subgroup, it also created the need for districts to begin critically assessing how to address the gaps in student achievement and student learning. Therefore, it is important to reinforce the indirect effect of *permanence of racism*, as evidenced by the exposure in test reporting, and district's providing the illusion of progress and achievement among students. CRT then, is used to assess how such practices are maintained, and how African Americans working in suburban schools navigate this challenge in relation to addressing student learning.

Urban Educational Leadership

Debatably, the nature of urban education can be viewed and discussed within the realm of an “opportunity gap” in relation to suburban districts. As a point of clarity, this is not to say that learning and achievement is not occurring, but rather to point out that there are distinct challenges related to the economics, policies, and access to community resources within urban settings related, but not limited, to the following: funding disparities, teacher quality, and dilapidated facilities (Gooden, 2012). The “opportunity gap,” therefore, provides a backdrop in this research per se, of the issues inherent in most urban districts.

The Opportunity Gap: The “Moral Debt” and Moral Obligation

Ladson-Billings (2006) refers to what he calls the “opportunity gap,” which posits that the lack of opportunity is rooted in four educational “debts” that impact society,

“The opportunity gap, in essence, consists of an educational debt . . . first, the historical debt refers to education inequities that have impacted particular groups over time. Second, the economic debt addresses funding disparities in schools that are highly segregated. Third, the sociopolitical debt reflects limited access to and knowledge of civic processes impacting the ability of marginalized groups to effectively advocate for their children. Finally, the moral debt describes the moral obligation owed to those individuals who are the descendants of groups who have been historically mistreated, maligned or otherwise abused.” (Ladson-Billings, 2006 as cited in Daniel & Walker, 2014, p. 262)

These “debts” provide a comprehensive, yet succinct, description of the dilemmas confronting education in general, but urban education in particular. Thus far, this research has indirectly delved into the broader historical nuances that have impacted the education of African

Americans as a marginalized group, specifically in terms of the achievement gap and the impact of the *Brown* decision in terms of African American leadership, inadvertently highlighting the “historical” debt. Further, although each debt is relevant to this research, it is the moral debt that will be examined in greater detail with regard to urban educational leadership.

The “moral” aspect for African American principals working in urban districts can be viewed in their obligation to see students succeed despite the environmental, sociopolitical, and economic challenges that may exist. Arguably, the moral debt within urban leadership can equally be viewed in relation to the cultural connectedness that fuels the commitment to and dedication toward the success of students in general, but students of color in particular. Additionally, this connectedness extends to the personal drive and commitment of urban African American leaders to pursue greatness and strive for excellence as professionals, despite negative views of their skill set and abilities to lead. However, to be clear, this is not to say other professionals outside of African Americans are not morally invested in the education of students of color, but rather indicate that there is an added layer of obligation that many African American leaders assume as educational leaders.

In terms of society, the moral debt should be viewed as an outdated obligation to those groups who, historically, have been subject to discrimination. When we examine this debt within the confines of education, there is an obvious promise unfulfilled. As documented thus far, the community ethos of African Americans have always been related to the collective consciousness of a people since the days prior to *Brown*. In today’s educational climate, despite significant gains and progress, there still exist vestiges of prejudice thought, specifically in terms of how students of color in urban environments are viewed, as well as how they learn. For example, educator, author and scholar Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu has championed the cause and importance of

having African American male educators teach in schools, particularly at the elementary level, to combat what he refers to as the “fourth grade failure syndrome.” Kunjufu (1985) states,

In other words, upon entering school in primary grades, black children possess enthusiasm and eager interest; however, by the fifth grade the liveliness and interest are gone, replaced by passivity and apathy. . . . In primary grades, blacks progress and thrive at the same rate as their counterparts until the third-grade syndrome. I found after the third grade, the achievement rate of blacks began a downward spiral which tended to continue in the child’s academic career. (p. 9)

In this sense, the moral obligation for African American principals becomes an extension of their dynamic as leaders and role models, akin to how African American principals were regarded during the pre-*Brown* era. Again, this is not to say that there are not some non-African American professionals genuinely interested in the education of students of color, but rather to point out the need for districts with diverse student populations to strongly consider this reality.

Moreover, considering the impact muteness and colorblindness have in education, it can easily be argued that such avoidance of the cultural identity of students in general, but students of color in particular, will continue a harsh cycle where students are essentially devalued in classrooms, regardless of socio-economic affiliation. To be clear, this is not to stereotype different ethnic groups, but rather to acknowledge the efficacy in how students’ cultural ethos may contribute to improving achievement so when educators look at the “whole child,” the cultural identity is encapsulated in that holistic approach. Therefore, the moral debt in terms of opportunity, and the moral obligation of urban African American principals serves as a mitigating factor in urban educational leadership.

The “Dual-Consciousness” of African American Leadership

Whether in a suburban and/or urban district, African American principals serve a unique role in educational leadership and the African American community. Since the days preceding the *Brown* decision, African American principals were regarded as pillars within the community because of their ability to navigate between two worlds in the United States. As eluded to in an earlier section of this research, African American principals were the conduits of information and advocates for African American children, ultimately articulating the concerns of and issues impacting African American education (James, 1970; Tillman, 2004).

In 1903, author, educator, and scholar W. E. B. Du Bois wrote what would become one of his most monumental works, *The Souls of Black Folks*. In it, Du Bois discussed the concept of a “double consciousness” to describe the struggle African Americans faced in terms of merging their African ancestry with that of their American citizenry. More specifically, this duality poses as a struggle for African Americans, as there were two souls warring with each other, attempting to balance an identity that was heavily rooted and influenced by race and society. Thus, being Black in America presents a constant struggle to prove not only one’s ability, but also one’s identity and character as a human. Equally important, this duality extends to those individual who are of mixed origin, which is, being of Black ancestry and another ethnicity. Du Bois (2007) states,

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the

world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.

This balance between the two souls establishes the context toward exploring how African Americans have progressed in society, which can easily be connected to today's racial climate as evidenced by the previously mentioned issues, in other words, proving one's ability and maintaining their identity/individuality as a person of color in a leadership role.

This researcher proffers that this duality still exists, but has evolved into a different form as further evidenced not only by the professional responsibilities of African American principals working in suburban *and* urban districts, but also their personal responsibilities and connectedness to African American communities. From a historical perspective, specifically in terms of the pre-*Brown* era, the collective-consciousness, or ethos, of the community has always been an area closely associated to African Americans, and equally serves as an aspect of their practice that, at times, has guided their work as leaders. Henderson (2015) illustrates in his study that most educational leadership studies fail to acknowledge the reality of the leadership style of African Americans that encompass the social, racial, and cultural issues that are outside of the organizational boundaries, but affect leader-member interaction inside the organization (p. 39).

Henderson (2015) equally acknowledges the dual role of African Americans in terms of being a *bureaucrat-administrator* and an *ethno-humanist*, that is, having a commitment to the education of African American children; compassion for and understanding of African American children and their communities; and confidence in the educability of African American children (p. 49). This role is certainly evident in suburban and urban districts particular in regard to deficit thinking and colorblindness. In suburban districts, African American principals are viewed as

being able to relate to a growing minority population and serving as role models to emulate, whereas urban principals are equally viewed not only as role models, but in many instances, father figures and change agents within the communities in which they work. Regardless of the environment, this dual role and/or commitment places a certain responsibility on African Americans to acknowledge this reality, while working in a professional role and capacity in education.

African American Principals: Debunking the Myths, Assumptions, and Stereotypes

In a succinct manner, having worked in a suburban district, this researcher can, unfortunately, attest to the reservation and apprehension received from parents in terms of perceived stereotypes regarding ability, skillset, and competency. This area is important for a number of reasons as evidenced by the following: (a) it perpetuates negative stereotypes of African American principals' ability to lead in diverse schools; (b) it indirectly usurps the authority of principals as the school's leader, that is, negative impressions are transmitted to students, and (c) it is counterproductive to the responsibility of principals in general, and African American principals in particular, toward providing a safe learning environment for all students.

The best example of lingering images and stereotypes of African American leaders is that of famed Principal, Mr. Joe Clark. In short, Joe Clark is credited for having turned around Paterson, New Jersey's East Side High School, which (at the time) was a failing urban school. Although he produced much needed change to the school, it was Mr. Clark's tactics that were deemed punitive, authoritative, and irrational to tame the students of Paterson's East Side High School.

According to Gooden (2012), the image most people have of African Americans is that of a "Joe Clark," authoritative leadership style, noting that "Clark's model of leadership, though

largely celebrated but also criticized in pop culture in the 1990s, continues to have an effect on how people think African American principals lead [in general] or should lead in urban schools (p. 71). Consequently, such thoughts can generate negative connotations regarding the abilities of African American principals. Similar to the absurd prevailing thought of African Americans being “intellectually inferior” prior to the *Brown* case, one can easily argue that such false assumptions contribute to the negative perceptions some hold of African American principals and their ability to lead in diverse schools. In comparison with that of the “Joe Clark” leadership style, this assumption is not only false, but also counter to qualified and aspiring African Americans principals pursuing educational leadership.

To illustrate, this researcher can recall a vivid experience where upon starting his principalship in a suburban school, the school lacked organization and structure as evidenced by, but not limited to, the following: students running through the hall; students pushing their way out to the recess field during lunch and recess, and during school dismissal; and jumping several feet off the corridor steps, to name a few. During the initial efforts to structure these behaviors to provide a safe environment, this researcher instructed teachers to begin properly dismissing students at the sound of the bell; developed several centralized entry and exit points; and encouraged students to assume greater responsibility for their (and peer) safety.

Surprisingly, such efforts were met with resistance by external parent factions who questioned the researcher’s efforts, skillset and competency. To illustrate further, when it came to instructional matters within the building, for example math, this researcher was not provided the opportunity to develop a plan to address parent concerns. Rather, after this researcher had only been at the school for two weeks, complaints were made directly to the Superintendent. Despite efforts to establish a safe and supportive learning environment, it was further evident

that several parents had negative thoughts about the researcher before even starting the position as later discovered by a parent group's Face Book page.

Conversely, African American principals working in urban districts also encounter negative stereotypes, specifically in relation to being able to lead only in urban settings (McCray et al., 2007). As such, the lingering historical assumptions contribute to this narrow view of African American principals. Echols (2006) aptly states,

The historical context of race set the stage for the kinds of challenges to success that black principal face. Many researchers acknowledge that among ethnic minority principals' challenges including the task of demonstrating competency in the aftermath of a history that has often defined them as incompetent by race; guaranteeing that all students perform well, ensuring cultural responsiveness toward all their diverse students, and facilitating a workable means of communicating with parents, caregivers, and other community stakeholders. (p. 6)

The point to be made, however, is clear: the lingering stereotypes of African Americans working in leadership positions in suburban and urban districts are tinted by negative perceptions associated with that of a historical context, and, debatably, that of a "Joe Clark" approach to leadership. Therefore, efforts to combat this type of thinking and assumptions must be on-going, and addressed through various platforms within educational leadership.

Gender and Educational Leadership

Before concluding this literature review, it is necessary to dedicate this last section to the role which women in general play in educational leadership, specifically African American women. Although this research focuses primarily on African American principals working in both suburban and urban districts, it is necessary to give the topic of gender the appropriate

attention in terms of the under-representation and challenges that women, and especially women of color, confront. As such, this researcher acknowledges that this area requires additional exploration and further research, as information regarding African American female principals is limited (Witherspoon & Mitchell, 2009). In fact, the narrow research and studies available regarding African American female principals can be linked to the previous discussion on “muteness,” in what Bloom and Erlandson (2003) refer to as “institutional silencing,” or, in other words, “the pursuit of academically devalued research and the production of the disciplinary, universalizing feminist discourse” (p. 344). It is necessary, therefore, to frame this section of the review in the context of gender and race.

Moreover, data reported since 1987-1988 through 2015-16 has offered statistics relative to the overall number of women serving as principals. In terms of sheer numbers, since 1987, the number of female principals has increased tremendously over these years, but still remains inequitable in comparison to men. According to Hill et al. (2016),

Over the 24-year span . . . the percentage of female principals increased in public schools, from 25 percent of all principals in 1987–88 to 52 percent in 2011–12. However, private schools had significantly greater percentages of female principals than did their public counterparts in all years except 2007–08. In private schools, the proportion of female principals was 52 percent in school year 1987–88 and 55 percent in school year 2011–12. (p. 3)

What is interesting to note is that typically, women tend to serve in greater numbers as principals in private schools, versus that of public schools. Another interesting note is that in 2003, New Jersey reported the number of female principals as 32%, compared to 68% of men; in New York, 47% females, compared to 53% for men; and in the District of Columbia, 58.6 (59%) females,

compared to 41% male principals in 2003 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003-2004).

These statistics represent an interesting dynamic in terms of the imbalance between the numbers of women serving in principals' roles, in comparison to their male counterparts. For women in general, and women of color in particular, navigating in a predominately male dominated profession such as educational leadership, has always been underscored in relation to their historical struggles and challenges of competing in society. For African American women, they, like their male counterparts, endure an even greater pressure of being both African American *and* female. To this end, the reality of this must be included in light of the gap in literature and discussions on educational leadership.

African American Women and Educational Leadership

As previously indicated, the double-role that African Americans have to confront is equally applicable to the role women must endure with respect to being both African American and female. Borrowing from Bloom and Erlandson (2003), the concepts of "visibility" and "invisibility" are used in describing the absent role of African American women and the lack of diligence this group has been given in light of the scarce literature surrounding this area, "Using the metaphor of visibility and its counterpart, invisibility, throughout the article, this study attempts to characterize the world of African American women administrators as a struggle for equitable recognition—visibility—within the field of education" (p. 340). This lack of visibility within education reinforces and contributes to negative perceptions that tend to emerge regarding African American principal practice in both urban and suburban districts. As noted in the previous section, such false assumptions have the potential to create lingering images of African

American principals, male and female, which unfortunately becomes transmitted to the larger society in terms of professional and community stakeholders.

Spirituality

For African American women, their leadership can easily be viewed in the context of spirituality and social justice in relation to the communities in which they serve. Witherspoon and Mitchell (2009) illustrate that

The principals in our study indicated a strong commitment to social justice and identified this commitment as their mission. . . . For example, women in this study had a spiritual response to what they perceived as the needs of their schools and their students . . . although these women did not necessarily call social justice by name until specifically asked, many of their beliefs about schooling and the principalship extended to what they believed were fairness, equality, and equity. (p. 662)

Historically, the commitment of African Americans in general, but African American women in particular, to issues of social justice has been a long standing tradition, especially since the days of the Civil Rights Era. This commitment, however, can be viewed in a spiritual sense, given the reliance and deep connection to African Americans' belief that despite the inequity in society in terms of Civil Rights, there was a greater purpose and goal to be achieved with regard to education. Ensuring the education for all students, particularly students of color, represents a means by which they can attain success, and therefore, access the "American Dream." In effect, such thinking imbues principal leadership for African American women working in urban and suburban districts.

Summary

To summarize, the irony of the *Brown* decision is what makes its nuances that much more interesting and complicated in the realm of educational leadership. For African Americans, the researcher and reader see how this irony impacts the continuation and continuity of theory and practice as leaders, which consequently has impacted African American growth in the field.

CRT as a theoretical framework positions this research by ascertaining the lived experiences of practicing and retired principals who worked in a suburban district, in comparison to their counterparts working in urban districts. The need for educational leadership programs to begin revisiting how race, equity, and prejudice is present in education is necessary to counter the muteness in programs, but more importantly, to equip aspiring leaders to be prepared and brave in challenging inequitable practices in education, that is, in instruction, discipline policies, and language.

Moreover, it is necessary for graduate institutions of higher learning offering educational leadership programs to begin revisiting how muteness, colorblindness, and institutional silencing contributes to the demise in literature that adequately analyzes the impact of race among African American principals, both male and female. The role of gender in educational leadership presents yet another aspect requiring further research to reduce, if not eliminate, the negative perceptions and assumptions that tend to linger decades after the historic *Brown* decision. As we experience the 21st century, researchers and scholars still debate whether we, as a country and society, have fulfilled the promises of *Brown*. The fact that this question is still raised speaks to the intolerant vestiges of thought and practices that not only remain present in our educational institutions, but also speaks to the unfilled promise of the landmark case that was

meant to place American schools on a trajectory toward educational equity for all in American schools, and ultimately American society.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The aim and focus of this study is two-fold: (a) it seeks to analyze the role of African American principals working in suburban districts with rising minority populations in the context of race and leadership; and (b) it seeks to examine the lived experiences between suburban and urban African American principals in the context of their choice to work in either of the noted settings. Utilizing a qualitative design, this research further seeks to answer the research questions.

Research Questions

Central to this analysis are the lived experiences of African American principals working in both suburban and urban districts, and its impact on educational equity and achievement for students of color. Therefore, driving this research are the following questions:

Overarching question:

What are the lived experiences of African American urban school principals compared to those of African American suburban school principals?

Sub-questions:

1. How do African American individuals perceive stereotypes, challenges and work preferences in these respective locations?
2. In what ways do these experiences and perceptions influence the principals' decisions to stay, leave, or move within the profession of school leadership?
3. In what ways does gender contribute to inequity in educational leadership?

Since history has been clear in documenting the cultural relevance of African American principals (Hozien, 2016), a major piece of this study/research includes ascertaining the

perceptions of practicing and retired African American administrators from the lens of prejudice, choice/preference, and challenges as school administrators.

Research Design

This research utilized a qualitative design in the form of a narrative study based on the perceptions and insight of practicing and retired African American school administrators. As such, a qualitative design was selected because the researcher decided it was the best method to acquire information related to this aspect of educational leadership. Creswell (2005) states that qualitative research “is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.” (p. 4) Given the nature of this study, obtaining direct input of practicing and retired principals provided beneficial data and the most useful approach toward ascertaining the noted issues of prejudice, inequity, choice and preference within educational leadership. In terms of methodology, a Narrative Inquiry/Research was deemed to be appropriate given the researcher’s intent and aim to discover the reasoning associated with principal choice and preference to work within an urban and/or suburban district, in addition to the issue of race within educational leadership.

In addition to Creswell (2005), other prominent scholars have spoken to the validity of narrative study/inquiry within qualitative research, stating that “as a distinctive form of qualitative research, narrative [research] typically focuses on studying a single person, gathering data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and presenting the meaning of those experiences for the individual.” (Miller & Salkind, 2002)

Since this research will be exploring the attitudes, perceptions and thoughts of practicing and retired principals working in the noted educational settings, conducting a narrative study/inquiry into each principals’ experiences as school-based leaders allows the researcher to

not only obtain direct practice testimonies, but also allows this research to continue to build upon and add to this important topic of education as schools become increasingly diverse with students of color. In this sense, by utilizing a qualitative design to ascertain the lived experience of principals, the researcher was able to collect rich and meaningful data from those working directly in the field. Although a quantitative design survey was strongly considered, the researcher felt compelled to capture the voices and “stories” of principals who could articulate the issues associated with the proposed research questions that extends beyond the quantitative process. To this end, additional aspects of the qualitative process will be discussed in the succeeding sections.

Sampling and Participants

As a qualitative study, ten African American principals will be interviewed, that is, five in an urban district and five in a suburban district, to ascertain their thoughts on the noted analysis. Therefore, as a point of reference, the term “administrator” is being used to denote the work of practicing and retired principals, as well as former principals who may have left the district to assume a new role, but have agreed to be a participant in this study. Further, it should be noted that selected retired principals were used in this research primarily because all of them worked in the same setting/district. Having worked in the same district at varying points, the researcher thought the retired suburban principals’ perspective would add a certain level of balance and insight into the nuances of this study and the overall aim to delve deeper into how African American principals view their roles within educational leadership.

Additionally, because of these principals’ entry point into the district, it is further expected that this group can speak to the change in their district, and how educational leadership as a profession has evolved in relation to the noted issue addressed in this study. To this end, the

input of retired principals is expected to offer another perspective that could be compared to practicing principals still working in the field.

In short, participants were selected using a criterion-oriented sampling method. According to Creswell (2009), “criterion-oriented sampling is used when a person is deliberately selected based on critical information that only that participant can offer.” As a result, candidates for this study met the following criteria: (a) were of African American descent, (b) were practicing and/or retired principals (c) possessed a minimum of three years or more experience as a principal and, (d) worked in either a suburban and/or urban district.

Moreover, by analyzing African American principals working in both suburban and urban districts, this researcher further aims to identify and share factors associated with the following: graduate-level educational leadership programs are preparing aspiring principals, privilege and interest convergence within education, and meaningful silence. From a theoretical standpoint, CRT will be used to analyze how prejudice and privilege within educational leadership is manifested.

Although each principal has the experience needed for this study, it should be equally noted that two of them have ascended to a higher position within a district, both as Assistant Superintendents. However, while the two principals moved up in the ranks, it is further worth recognizing that three of the participants are all doctorate-level principal school leaders. Additionally, since the nature of this study focuses on distinct issues related to race and equity, choice and preference between urban and suburban districts, this researcher decided to interview five principals from each setting to obtain a balanced and diverse perspective on this topic. While the sampling could have easily been applicable to include a larger population of qualified

participants, this researcher deemed it sufficient in an effort to analyze a small fraction of practicing and retired African American administrators.

For the purposes of confidentiality, each principal will be referred to as “Suburban Principal – A,” or SP-A, and “Urban Principal – A,” or UP-A. For retired principals, they will be coded as “Retired SP - A.” For continuity, it should be noted that with the exception of one, each of the suburban principals has worked in the same district. Conversely, although an effort was made to interview participants within the same urban district, the researcher was unable to do so. Therefore, the researcher interviewed principals from two neighboring urban districts. To this end, a brief summary of their experiences is provided in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3

Suburban Principal Profiles

Participant	#Years as Principal	Gender	Setting & Experience (Urban, Suburban or Both)
Suburban Principal A (Retired SP – A)	30 years	Male	Suburban Retired SP-A has worked as an elementary principal in a diverse suburban district located within northern New Jersey. (Currently Retired)
Suburban Principal B (Retired SP-B)	20 years (Combined)	Male	Both Retired SP- B worked in a diverse suburban district as a high school principal and special assistant to the superintendent. Retired SP- B also has prior experience of working in an urban district as an administrator. (Currently semi-retired)
Suburban Principal C (SP – C)	9 years	Male	Suburban Serves as a Middle School Principal in a diverse suburban community located within northern New Jersey
Suburban Principal D (SP – D)	9 years	Male	Suburban Although this is SP-D’s first year in the noted role, he previously served as a high school principal for 9 in a diverse suburban district located within northern New Jersey.
Suburban Principal E (Retired SP – E)	22 years (Public School)	Female	Suburban Retired SP-E is a retired doctorate-level elementary principal who worked in the same suburban district located in northern New Jersey for twenty years. (currently semi-retired)

Note: With the exception of SP-C, all of the other noted suburban principals (retired and active) have worked in the same district at varying points, but within the same time frame as reported

Table 4

Urban Principal Profiles

Participant	#Years as Principal	Gender	Setting & Experience (Urban, Suburban or Both)
Urban Principal A (UP-A)	4 years	Male	Both UP-A worked as a secondary principal in an urban district in northern New Jersey prior to leaving to work as a vice principal in a suburban district in Northern New Jersey.
Urban Principal B (UP – B)	6 years	Male	Urban UP-B has worked in a large urban district as a vice principal for four years, then as an elementary school principal for six years before assuming a prominent central office position.
Urban Principal C (UP – C)	6 years	Female	Urban UP-C has a varied leadership career serving as a former Supervisor and Assistant Director of Special Education, a secondary assistant principal, and current elementary principal.
Urban Principal D (UP – D)	13 years	Male	Urban UP-D is a doctorate-level secondary school principal in a large urban district in northern New Jersey with direct practice experience as a middle school assistant principal and principal, elementary and secondary principal respectively
Urban Principal E (UP – E)	20 years (Combined)	Female	Both UP-E is a doctorate-level administrator who currently serves as an elementary principal in a large urban district located within northern New Jersey. UP-E started her career in a Suburban district in Katonah, New York, as an intern administrator

Moreover, it should be noted that in the absence of data specific to the number of African Americans applying for principal positions in suburban districts, this study will also solicit input from the selected principals regarding their perceptions on hiring practices within their respective districts. In addition, a limitation of this study is that of gender within educational leadership, specifically in relation to African American women. Although it is discussed generally, it is acknowledged and understood that in comparison to males, African American women are grossly under-represented within educational leadership and deserve further research outside of this study.

Further, the researcher opted to generally discuss the issue of gender due to the fact that a number of the participants selected in the study are female and of African descent. Though not a specific criterion for selection, the researcher was fortunately able to incorporate the insight of African American female principals. By interviewing several African American women, it is expected that their input will provide relative qualitative data that will contribute to the gap in literature, as well as add to this area within educational leadership. Finally, equally important in terms of limitations, is that of student-voices and perspectives on this matter. In this sense, the researcher acknowledges that the topics of gender and student perspective require additional research not included in this study.

Data Sources and Collection

In short, there will be three primary data sources used in this research: (a) pre-interviews from practicing and retired African American principals in urban and suburban districts, (b) information obtained from principals' participation in a mini-focus group based on setting, that is, urban and/or suburban, and (c) post-interview questions of each principal. To this researcher's benefit, participants were easily identified as a result of his practice experiences and professional relationships with other colleagues within educational leadership. Regarding data collection, the researcher will collect information obtained from semi-structured, pre-interviews of each participant. Once transcribed and coded, all information will be secured and safeguarded primarily with the researcher to ensure confidentiality and appropriate usage for analysis to this study only. It should be stated that although scripted, the researcher will allow for additional questions to organically emerge and be discussed based on responses from each participant interviewed in this study.

With the first data source, each principal will be interviewed face-to-face in their respective schools with an audio recording device lasting between forty-five to sixty minutes per administrator. After being transcribed, the notes/summary will be returned to each principal to ensure accuracy of responses; afterwards, the researcher will code information into specific themes related to this topic, then discuss each category within the *Discussion and Analysis* section of this research.

Secondly, all participants will be asked to participate in a mini-focus group comprised of two distinct categories based on setting, that is, urban and suburban, of the principals interviewed in this study. In doing so, it is expected that the principals can offer additional insight after listening to their colleagues who work in similar environments. Lastly, the researcher will collect information by having participants answer a brief, four-question post-interview not only to ensure the accuracy of the researcher in capturing their responses, but also to solicit any additional topics not covered but worthy of future research. As previously cited by Miller and Salkind (2002), by collecting the noted information, it will assist the researcher in capturing the “story” and “theme” of each principal in relation to the noted research questions. (p. 150)

As an additional note, in *Appendices A – C* are copies of the following: a copy of the ten-question interview protocol, a copy of the two-question protocol that will guide the conversation for the mini-focus group, and the post-interview questions respectively. The pre-interview serves as the basis of data that will dictate the focus group and post-interview conversations. It is expected that based on each principals’ responses, each person will be able to articulate and express how they view the proposed topic in relation to their practice and experiences. The focus-group allows each principal the space and environment to not only meet each other, but also *hear* their colleagues together and provide thoughts from a different lens outside of their

own practice experience. And finally, the post-interview provides each principal the opportunity to reflect not only participating in both the pre-interview and focus group, but also reflect on the collective responses from the vantage point of each phase of the research process. That said, the attached protocols will be used for each participant in assessing their perspective on issues related to the broader context of this research in terms of their successes and challenges as Africans American principals working in urban and suburban districts.

Data Analysis

For this study, this researcher utilized a system of coding to organize information obtained from participants. Creswell (2005) defines coding as “the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information. It involves taking text data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often a term based in the actual language of the participant.” (p. 186) The data in this study will be analyzed utilizing the Dedoose and Temi computer program for the purposes of transcribing, coding and categorizing information. The traditional method of reading each interview transcript will be conducted in order to identify the following: emerging themes; similarities in responses; differences in responses; consistencies in responses and challenging responses that posed further thinking to the researcher.

To determine the codes, the researcher will employ a deductive analysis since the premise that undergirds the deductive approach is that of starting with a *generalized* theory, to that of a *specific* theory in research. Given the nature of this proposed topic/research, it is expected that topics such as race, equity, gender, and class, in terms of social economic status (SES), will inevitably surface during the interviews. Therefore, these topics will serve as the basis for the

initial codes to be used, as well as to determine additional codes that will emerge from the interviews. By using this approach, patterns and themes will be identified among the administrators and applied to the research. Additionally, for the discussion, an inductive analysis will be employed to discuss the issues associated with this study in the broader context of the proposed research.

Once coded, the information will be categorized by level of importance in relation to the study based on the frequency of a response. In such instances, each code will be properly grouped into an overall emergent theme that evolved out of the interview process and shared in Chapter 4, Table - 3. Thus, once coded, themes embedded within each code will be identified and categorized accordingly.

Validity and Credibility

In order to ensure reliability and validity, two techniques as defined by Creswell (2000) will be used in this study: member checking and triangulation. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), “Triangulation is a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study . . . as a validity procedure, triangulation is a step taken by researchers employing only the researcher's lens, and it is a systematic process of sorting through the data to find common themes or categories by eliminating overlapping areas.” (p. 126) Since there will be a diverse group of principals interviewed, this researcher considered it necessary to conduct individual pre- and post-interview sessions, as well as provide a space where each group can meet and hear the views of other colleagues/participants in the study.

Additionally, this researcher deemed it necessary to conduct “member checking” to ensure the validity of information obtained from participants. By incorporating a member

checking, each participant will be able to validate the accuracy of the content in their respective interview, further validating the research transcriptions (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, participants will be asked to participate in a mini-focus group to review their responses, as well as to provide additional insight for suggested topics for future research.

To further ensure the validity of this research, each interview protocol used was distributed and piloted with a diverse group of educators, whose experiences include higher education and K-12 public education, and in the following capacities: as district-level directors, assistant principals, building-level academic coaches, and ranking collegiate administrators. As such, this researcher was able to solicit useful input to determine the feasibility of the protocols as evidenced by the consideration of using quantitative data, clarifying the origin of the questions, as well as providing more statistical background surrounding the African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian principals in New Jersey to name a few. As an aside, it should be stated that while this researcher initially considered a mixed-methods design to incorporate quantitative data, it was ultimately decided that a qualitative approach was more beneficial given the nature of this study to obtain direct insight from those working in the field. To this end, based on the noted feedback, the researcher was able to modify and adapt questions that enhanced the efficacy and validity of the pre- and post-interview process.

Moreover, to guard against this researcher's own biases, Reflexivity will be used to distinguish such bias in an effort not to influence the experiences of the selected participants. Again, Creswell (2000) observes that

in qualitative research, the inquirer reflects about how their role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experiences hold potential for shaping their interpretations, such as the themes they advance and the meaning they ascribe to the data.

This aspect of the methods is more than merely advancing biases and values in the study, but how the background of the researchers actually may shape the direction of the study.

(p. 35)

As indicated in Chapter 1, part of this research is born out of the researcher's own experience of working in both environments.

Therefore, it is necessary for the researcher to make note of his own bias so as to not influence the study, but rather share additional insight to findings that are relatable. In such situations where the researcher offers his input, it will be prefaced by the following phrase: "from the researcher's perspective." To this end, this qualitative research is intended to provide not only an in-depth analysis of educational leadership, but also offer recommendations that can inform practice and improve the instructional progress of students in general, and students of color in particular.

Researcher's Role

Before concluding this chapter, it is necessary to discuss the researcher's role within this study. As an African American male educational leader, the researcher discloses his own personal experiences of being subjected to unfortunate issues involving race and prejudice as a school principal within suburban districts. From those experiences, and having started in an urban setting as well, the researcher thought it necessary to conduct a research-based inquiry into the nuances of educational leadership from the lens of other African American principals who may or may not have encountered similar or different experiences. In a time where the tenets of the *Brown* case have yet to be attained 65 years later, and incidents of racial prejudice have heightened, this researcher sought to provide a platform to counter such bigotry, specifically within the ranks of educational leadership.

Obviously, there is a clear bias and a delicate balance the researcher maintained so as to not influence the selected participants. However, by developing succinct protocols for the pre-interview, mini-focus group, and post-interview, the ten chosen principals in this study have been given the referenced platform to provide their insights and perspectives on this topic. In this sense, the researcher was intentional in his efforts not to impose his thoughts on participants, in effect allowing each principal to answer and tell their story based on their experiences. Further, the researcher ensured that the validity and reliability of each interview was done with integrity and honesty to the research in order to yield the most accurate and true representation of each principal interviewed. To this end, in such instances that resonated with the researcher's own personal experiences, it is acknowledged and clearly stated within the study in an effort toward not leading participants to any coerced and/or pre-determined hypotheses.

Limitations of the Study

In this study, the researcher understands that certain limitations exist with regard to gender, student perceptions, and the perspective of non-White administrators, that is, principals and superintendents. More specifically, although discussed as a sub-topic, it is understood that more in-depth inquiry into the role and impact gender has in educational leadership is highly necessary, and long over-due. Additionally, since this researcher is an ardent proponent of student achievement, it is further understood that *student* perceptions on how they view the relevance of having an African American principal within their school environment is equally important to this study although it has not been included. Finally, the perspectives of Caucasian school leaders regarding this aspect of educational leadership adds to the conversation, as most districts are developing goals that address issues related to equity and diversity. Therefore, it should be stated that as with any qualitative analysis, the results are not generalizable to the

larger population and does not reflect, nor speak for, an entire group of professionals. Rather, it represents a small segment of the larger population of school-based and central office leaders of color and how they view the issues related to equity, race, and leadership.

Another limitation within this research is that of sampling, specifically in terms of having a wider pool of principals to interview, and even having a larger focus group for the study. By expanding the sampling pool to include principals in other geographic locations that is rural and mid-west, the researcher would have been able to present a more robust perspective of principals for this study. To this end, while it obvious that there are several sub-issues related to race, equity, gender, and student achievement raised in this study, it is important to the researcher that the focus remains on the analysis of African American principals working in urban and suburban settings within the context of educational leadership and how they view their roles as leaders.

Summary

To summarize, this researcher considered multiple options in determining the best research methodology to obtain the required data necessary to complete this study. However, to reiterate, the information received from the piloted group of professional colleagues regarding each protocol was beneficial in that the researcher was able to analyze each question for authenticity and validity. In the Research Results, it is expected that each participant will capture the intended purpose of the research, which is to provide insight on the emerging topic of diversity and equity in education, as our schools become increasingly more diverse. Given the varied background and experiences of each selected participant, the researcher is confident that the raw data obtained will contribute to a robust analysis and discussion on this emerging area within educational leadership.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH RESULTS

Since the inception of this research, there have been several articles written that have given attention to the glaring demographic shift in American schools with regard to the unfulfilled promises of the 1954 *Brown* decision, the challenges confronting districts regarding increased diversity, and issues related to segregation and inequities in public education. In an article written by Mordechay et al. (2019), they provide the context with regard to the changing demographics for minority groups:

- By the year 2045, demographers project that the United States will become a minority-majority nation—a country where those currently categorized as racial minorities will comprise the majority of the populace.
- Latino Americans are becoming a growing minority and its projected they will become the majority; however, they still are struggling and performing below average due to “triple segregation” – poverty, race, and language.
- Housing contributes to the issue of segregated schools because of families with means ability to move into areas with better performing schools (that is, suburban communities).

The noted figures speak to and reinforce the growing need for districts and school leadership programs to begin revisiting how to approach the needs of students from diverse backgrounds in terms of learning and instruction.

From the start, the researcher was not sure of the extent race and inequity would impact this research, but knew that in order for our schools to improve learning for *all* students, our school leaders (and teachers) must begin to not only acknowledge the reality of the changing

cultural landscape in education, but also embrace this reality in a way that enhances student learning, instruction, and leadership in a holistic manner and considers the norms and nuances of *all* students. To this end, as indicated by the figures above, it is imperative that districts begin to revisit how to educate students of color, that is, African Americans, Latinos, and Asians.

In the following discussion, the data extracted from principals interviewed provides additional context and insight on how this small group of school leaders' experiences in both urban and suburban districts shape their practice and address issues of race and equity in schools. As a point of clarity, each category was developed based on the coded themes that emerged in the study. That said, the researcher was able to organize information in a way to facilitate a larger conversation on the experiences of urban and suburban African American principals and educational leadership.

In an earlier part of Chapter 1, reference was made to this study being not an issue of Black versus White, but rather that of an issue of student equity among instructional and administrative ranks within education. It is evident that having more African American administrators adds to the diversity of a school and district culture. Johnston and Young (2019) observe that "the mismatch between the races of teachers and their students has real consequences for students, as numerous studies have found consistent benefits of racial congruence" (p. 3). This "congruence" extends to the administrative ranks as teachers, as a group, become a direct pipeline to the recruiting pool of school-based leaders. To this end, it is important to unpack what this means in the broader context of this research in light of the increasing numbers of students of color within suburban and urban districts.

In the succeeding sections, the information is organized in a way that for each research question, the emergent themes provided in Table 3 were derived directly from the codes

generated from the interviews, and listed so that the discussion is easily connected to the question. As a point of reference, it should be stated that responses from both the mini-focus group and post follow-up sessions will be used to facilitate the Discussion & Summary section of this research. In Table 5, each code has been defined as used in the research, and paired with the theme that addresses each code indicated. Therefore, starting with the initial overarching question, the three subsequent research questions are discussed in further detail in the Results, Findings and Discussion section.

Table 5

Codes and Themes

Codes	Themes
<u>Race/prejudice:</u> Discrimination based on one's ethnic and/or cultural affiliation <u>Privilege:</u> In terms of the rights and benefits of being affiliated with one's cultural and socioeconomic status in society <u>Equity and Inequity:</u> In terms of fairness in the hiring process, as well as being considered for positions in relation to their counterpart <u>Stereotypes:</u> In terms of how African American males are viewed in society as being more "assertive" and being feared, in comparison to African American women who are seen as more comfortable and acceptable	Race
<u>Dichotomy:</u> With regard to the "double standard" between Caucasian and African American male principals – for example, higher scrutiny; not being allowed the same privilege of Caucasian males <u>Access:</u> In terms of student privilege and one's SES and familial affiliation, which allows for families with the financial means to have access to opportunities beyond the traditional academic environment <u>Scrutiny:</u> The undue monitoring and oversight of African American principals <u>Informal Networks:</u> In terms of the innate obligation to provide support to newly employed African American administrators entering suburban districts	Unspoken Societal Norms
<u>Urban Politics:</u> In terms of the nuances related to affiliations, practices, and school/district culture within a district that tends to impact functioning <u>Suburban Politics:</u> In terms of the nuances related to affiliations, practices, and school/district culture within a district that tends to impact functioning (example, Earle being overlooked despite similar credentials to White counterpart) <u>Scrutiny:</u> The undue monitoring and oversight of African American principals <u>Nepotism:</u> The benefit and role personal affiliations have in attaining administrative positions	Unspoken Organizational Politics
<u>Role Models:</u> Serving as a role model for African American students so they can see themselves in leadership roles outside of custodial and lunch positions <u>Diversity:</u> Changing demographics in suburban districts inclusive of increased of Latino, Asian, and African American students	Mobility
<u>Silence:</u> The lack of bold and intentional conversations regarding prejudice and inequity within educational leadership programs <u>Mentorship:</u> providing on-going opportunities for aspiring, novice and veteran principal	Principal Training (discussed in Chapter 5)

Results to Research Questions

Overarching Question: What Are the Lived Experiences of African American Urban School Principals Compared to Those of Suburban African American School Principals?

Emergent themes: Unspoken Organizational Politics and Unspoken Societal Norms

Unspoken Societal Norms

The differences that emerged out of the one-to-one interviews centered heavily on socio-economic status (SES) with regard to access, academic preparation, and exposure within urban and suburban settings. As a result, these *unspoken* societal norms that exist within suburban communities contribute to a clear class dichotomy between suburban and urban families primarily in terms of wealth. It was interesting to uncover how each principal, regardless of environment, shared views that correlated to how students in their respective settings are educated with regard to resources and familial class affiliation, that is, families of economic means versus those families without economic means.

More specifically, given the socio-economic status of families residing in suburban areas, their children were provided and afforded different opportunities and access to luxury primarily because their parents/families had the *financial means* to do so. According to several of the suburban principals, examples of luxury included exotic vacations, access to a second home, having horse stables in their backyards, having beach houses, and/or student's having their own car while in school. For instance, SP - C recalled an experience where, because of their privilege, students were able to have a party without adult supervision in their parents' second home, where they were engaged in underage drinking:

. . . sometimes you have to worry more about student access. Some kids because they have more money, and are left to their own vice, they can get easily distracted and pulled

away from the positive things in their life because they have it [wealth]. I was speaking to one of my teachers the other day, who was informing me that one of her friend's children went to a party at their beach house and they were all drinking; you know, underage drinking. So, you're not going to see too many people that got more than one house, or a beach house. You step outside of the suburban atmosphere where the financial needs are different, and so the access becomes an issue too.

In contrast, UP-E discussed access from the vantage point of how such privilege translates and impacts the instructional process of her students and other students within urban environments. Recalling a lesson where some of her students were studying rain forests, UP-E indicated that her teachers had to display a video and/or pictures of a rainforest, whereas as suburban students may have actually *visited* a rainforest and can bring that perspective into the classroom. UP-E further indicated that “there's different levels of academic exposure out of the classroom experience, you know; I mean you have students that vacation and can speak to literally standing in a rainforest, whereas in urban districts, we may have to set up a video.”

Alana Semuels (2019) recalls an experience from her childhood that affirms what UP-E and SP-C discuss about the exposure and access suburban students have, in comparison to urban students:

Today, Eddie lives in France, where he's married to a French woman and works as an account manager for a French airline. Eddie's experiences with “code-switching” as a kid—moving back and forth between his Barbadian family and neighborhood friends in Boston and the WASP suburb of Belmont—prepared him for a life and career in which he needs to easily transition among languages and cultures, he told me. Going to school

in Belmont, where kids would casually talk about skiing in the Rockies over winter break or traveling to Europe for the summer with their family, piqued his interest in travel.

His parents already expected him to go to college, but being surrounded by kids in Belmont, where college was a given for just about everyone, made that path seem readily accessible. “I was exposed to a lifestyle that altered my perspective of how things should be,” he told me. Many kids who grew up in his Boston neighborhood didn’t go to college; among other reasons, they saw it as an expensive way to delay making a living.

The academic influence and experiences are therefore impacted by one’s SES. Adding to UP-E comments about the instructional impact, SP-D reinforces this reality, while raising an interesting point in terms of academic preparation. SP-D indicated that

What I found was the major difference is that students in suburban settings were better prepared for the traditional education setting. What I mean is that they were able to come into classrooms, sit down, take notes, take tests and you know, take state assessments really well, and urban students were not as capable in terms of doing that because I don’t believe we had the opportunity. And I say “we” because I’m one of those kids.

After hearing SP-D’s comment, it was evident that he reflected back on his experiences of growing up in the south, from humble beginnings, and not having the same access and/or opportunities as his peers in suburban districts. It was further evident that as a student himself, SP-D was able to relate to present struggles of students in an urban districts, but having served as a principal in both an urban and suburban setting, and now central office administrator in a suburban district, those experiences were still relevant and in effect impact how SP-D approaches his work in terms of effectuating change, that is, through policies, procedures, and hiring. In this sense, SP-D’s reflection illustrates his *innate* and *moral* obligation to not only

serve as a model for students, but to also ensure that, through policy, there is an equitable and level playing ground for all students, particularly students of color.

Another way to view what both SP-D and UP-E speak about regarding academic preparedness can be viewed in a context that, because suburban families may have the financial resources, then they are also able to provide their child with access to various academic supports *outside* of school such as enrollment in learning centers such as Sylvan and Hunterdon; enrollment in SAT/ACT prep courses, which typically tend to be expensive; and familial connections to admissions counselors of universities as we have seen in the recent, high profile case of Felicity Huffman, Lori Loughlin, and husband Mossimo Giannulli among others.

Conversely, in urban settings, families/students may receive additional supports, via Title I funding, that is, after-school and Saturday tutoring programs, may participate in college open houses and tours as scheduled by the school, and/or receive comprehensive support similar to that as provided in the Harlem Children's Zone. In this sense, in urban communities, much of the support is provided by a community-based organization or program, if not provided directly by the school. The "casual" experiences discussed by Semuels (2019) not only distinguish suburban and urban environments, but also distinguish how African American principals must cope and adapt, or "code-switch," in their professional settings. To this end, the shared examples further reinforce the unspoken societal norms that do exist and consequently contribute to inequities that both suburban and urban African American principals must confront in their leadership roles.

Unspoken Organizational Politics

The other theme to emerge from the interviews was that of politics within both settings in terms of hiring practices; being able to effectuate change in policy and/or curriculum; dealing with unions; and the level of scrutiny African American principals encounter, in comparison to

their male Caucasian counterparts. Extending the previous conversation about academic preparedness, Retired UP-E provided additional insight that not only supports the other principals, but also adds another layer per se, on how the “politics” of and in a district can influence how principals serve children.

Recalling the moment that eventually led Retired UP-E to leave for a suburban district, he disclosed the following,

Researcher: Why did you ultimately decide to leave the urban district?

Semi-Retired SP-E: Because it was time for a change! Things in my [urban] district were getting a bit out of control; with the school take-over, board meetings were going to like 3:00am in the morning, and they were always fighting, and I wanted to change the way the school was being run. [For example,] I wanted to go to 7:15am classes, but the [teachers’] union contract wouldn’t let me because teachers weren’t allowed to have contact with kids until 8:30; so, I said to myself, what is a school there for? Now in my suburban district, they could start school at 7:15am, so in my opinion, they [suburban districts] are about addressing kids’ needs man.

I remember the union president walked in with the contract book because I had changed the schedule for a year, and it was going fine; the union president came in and said: you can’t do that, so I said you mean to tell me you *we* can’t make kids better? See my thing was to get kids the skills they needed and have kids graduate and not be held back. And one of the things I noticed about districts like Millburn and others, kids are kids; why can’t we give our kids the same thing.

This level of unspoken organizational politics that exists tends to exacerbate inequities within both settings, as well as discourage qualified candidates from working in urban settings.

In addition to Retired SP-E's experience, the politics in urban districts is equally reflected in not being affiliated with the "in-crowd," in other words, those who socialize beyond the work environments. So consequently one is not considered for leadership opportunities because of both personal and professional friendships, whereas in suburban districts, it is reflected in how African American principals may be *viewed* in relation to perceived stereotypes, as well as the level of undue scrutiny African Americans endure.

Many of the principals in both settings provided succinct details of how the politics within urban and suburban districts contribute to the plight of African American school principals. Whether as an Athletic Director, head coach, and/or a school-based principal, there are obvious *unspoken* rules and norms that tend to exist as illustrated and discussed by the principals interviewed. The first illustration of this is with that of Retire SP-A's candid response, noting that "the first, can't be the worse," referring to the hiring of any African American in a prominent position, and always being "on point" in terms of dress, speech, and presentation.

More specifically, Retired SP-A acknowledged during his own tenure that he had to always be "on his game," because people were waiting for him to fail. On this topic, Retired SP-A spoke candidly, stating that:

I had to be guarded. I had to be guarded in how I behave, how I spoke. I was careful to be a professional in an urban setting as well, but it was multiplied when I got to the suburban district, particularly in [my district] where you had multi-millionaire parents and they were super highly educated. Many of them wrote the textbooks probably that we were using. So, I had to be conscious of my visual, how I dressed, how I spoke, how I related to children first, and then how I related to them.

Having worked in both settings, Retired SP-A and SP-D were able to compare their experiences of not only working in urban and suburban districts, but also recalling how it became a double standard or dichotomy between African American principals and their Caucasian male colleagues/counterparts. SP-C referred back to the time when his district hired an African American football coach:

When you've got people looking for you to mess up because they wanted somebody else; there's a lot of politics that's played, so you have to make sure all of your I's are dotted and T's are crossed because it will be forever before we get another one [African American]; doesn't matter his skillset, or his record . . .

This example adds another dimension to this discussion in that to the degree that African Americans as *professionals* are scrutinized, and in SP-C's example, as a head football coach, exacerbate the unfortunate prejudice that still exist. As such, referring back to Retired SP-A's comments about having to always be "guarded," speaks to an undue pressure African Americans in leadership endure primarily because, for this group, there is absolute *zero* room for error and/or mistakes. From the noted principal experiences, the slightest mis-step creates suspension and doubt in African Americans' abilities to perform the job, whereas Caucasian males are often given a pass. Consequently, the micro-aggressions that emerge tend to create a dichotomous scenario where African American principals and central office administrators are constantly in a position where they have to prove their value as competent and capable school leaders.

Providing another similar and more personal experience, UP-B also stated:

Yes, when I left a large urban school district and [was] hired in an urban school district, the comment from the Superintendent was the following: "you are the school district experiment; you got this job because we need more color. You have to do what you did in

the school that you turned around, and very quickly.” Now, those that did not look like me continued to have consistent failure and that was not addressed. Ultimately, I was able to turn my school around and received a proclamation from the city. The Superintendent aforementioned attended the proclamation ceremony and afterwards never spoke to me again. He came for the notoriety and pictures. I applied in his school district for the Assistant Superintendent [opening] and did not garner an interview.

UP-B’s reference to his counterpart being allowed to consistently under-perform alludes to the double standard and dichotomy that both SP-C and Retried SP-A were implying, with regard to making sure that all “I’s were dotted, and all T’s were crossed,” because despite African Americans’ skillset, there still exist an undue level of scrutiny and stereotype retained by some people.

For UP-E, she affirmed both UP-B and SP-C’s experiences, acknowledging:

I honestly feel as though it’s more of a connection, like who you know, and it’s really deep rooted more so with families, you know; passing on to my nieces, my nephews and my child. So, I think in suburban districts, those jobs [principal positions], are reserved for certain individuals and it’s very difficult because it’s deeply rooted because someone’s uncle is the superintendent.

In urban districts, I definitely think it is also who you know as well, so I’m not going to say it’s a difference with that, but I believe that there are more African Americans that are selected for the position [in urban settings] because the sense is that they will be able to relate more so with the community than a Caucasian person.

SP-C concluded his response by referring to what he called an “old school nepotism,” which essentially meant that people in positions of power “take care of their own, you know; there’s a

lot of nepotism going on, whether people are qualified or not. That old school nepotism just keeps people out.”

To summarize, the unspoken societal norms and organizational politics all speak to real-life dilemmas and challenges within both settings. Also of importance, it should be noted that the issues of nepotism and professional affiliations arguably exist within both settings, but it should not be confused with the obvious double standards and stereotypes African American principals encounter, which ultimately impacts their practice in a way that Caucasian males would never understand by virtue of their privileged status. To be clear, this is not to say that other groups do not encounter and confront such biases because they do, but rather to say that as educational leaders working in a changing society that influences the students entering our schools, districts must become intentional in efforts toward embracing and providing true equity in our schools.

Research Question 1: How Do These Individuals Perceive Stereotypes, Challenges, and Work Preferences in These Respective Locations?

Emergent themes: Privilege & Access; Unspoken Societal Norms; Race

Before starting with this question, the researcher should note that there were obvious intersections between some of the principal responses in terms of racial discrimination and privilege, with that of gender that will be addressed in detail in Research Question 3. For this question however, all of the principals' responses will be shared from their professional experiences, and how stereotypes impacted their practice as school-based leaders. Looking at the first two questions from the interview protocols, there was a general consensus that each principal personally decided to work within their respective environment. Unfortunately, there were some who encountered issues related to race as evidenced by UP-E sharing an earlier time when she applied to an affluent suburban district in Katonah, NY. UP-E stated,

When I went to apply, the superintendent said, you know, I would love to give you this position; but he said I'm going to be very honest with you, this community is not ready for that; you are a great administrator, but it wouldn't be well received.

While describing this time, UP-E noted that initially it did "hurt," but once she was hired in her current district, UP-E felt and knew she had made the right decision.

Speaking candidly about his experiences while reflecting on his thoughts about the question, SP-D noted that he experienced discrimination at every location he's worked. SP-D recalled:

I think I've experienced it in every location. I don't think I've been immune to it [prejudice] in any location. There's been, you know, a feeling, like I always felt like as an African American male or an African American *period* [emphasis added] that I had to do things differently. I've watched individuals who weren't African American be able to do things that I *never* [emphasis added] would've gotten away with!

Even when it wasn't direct, I could see it because people are able to [pause], I wasn't able to say or do things; you know, you make a comment, people would make insensitive comments that were able to just, you know exist. And I always thought, 'if I made that comment, that would bite me because someone was always paying attention to what I said! But I think it shows how stereotypical the world is. I felt like we [African Americans] have very little flexibility in how we manage ourselves, as opposed to someone who has *culturally* [emphasis added] been implemented [or recruited] into this profession [education/school leadership].

UP-D's response is significant for several reasons, not only because of the evident prejudice, but also because of the benefit of one's privilege, that is, of one's cultural affiliation to essentially do

and say things that begs the question: if it were an African American, Hispanic, or Asian would it be easily accepted?

In comparison, UP-B's response from the previous question in which he shares that his peers/colleagues were allowed to "consistently underperform," again reinforces SP-C's comments about the undue scrutiny African American principals endure, and the need to always "be on your game," as stated by Retired SP-A. SP-C further added,

I'm not saying everyone thinks like that or feels the way that I'm inferring [about prejudice], but a lot of times it is going to be a lot harder for someone to break into those roles, because you just don't see it. I mean there's still barriers that need to be broken; they're still pathways that need to be blazed because it's not equal.

After listening to the different and shared experiences of each principal, it became evident that each principal consistently spoke about the need to serve as resource in terms of supporting new African American professionals.

As indicated in SP-C's example with the African American head football coach, it was almost automatic and readily understood between SP-C and his administrative colleagues of color that, they have to make sure this coach is supported because it was inherently known that there would be a long time before another, that is African American, is hired in that position. In fact, there's almost an innate sense of responsibility that emanated from the principals, primarily because of the difficulty African Americans must compete with in relation to their male Caucasian counterparts. Two specific examples that reinforces this comes from both SP-C and SP-D, who reflect on similar, yet different situations:

SP-C: Race still plays a factor in a lot of people's comfort; it really does. I mean, it's not too long it's been accepted for Black quarterbacks to be in the NFL, despite being able to

prove [they can play], or head coaches for that matter. And I think that rings true in any field, any professional field, seeing Black males and females for the matter.

Just Blacks in general in leadership roles, though we might think that it is common place, it's still an uncomfortable area for some people to navigate. I mean, you find yourself cheering for the Black quarterback, because you know what it means. I had a conversation with the high school principal, when we [the district] hired the first Black football coach, and I was telling him, "you know what this means . . . we got to give this brother all the support we can to make sure he succeeds because they're looking for him to fail."

SP-D: So, I've had, you know, I've lost jobs because I was Black and I knew that, and was told later by people that I can trust, "yeah, you didn't get the job because you were Black." So, I've been through it and what you do is you understand that if you are in this profession, maybe you have an opportunity to grow so I can teach the next young man or woman, you're going to go through this because sometimes you get kicked out and you have no recourse. So maybe staying in it and trying to see if you can survive it too. You can teach the next person because if you get two or three more [African Americans] the next year, then eventually we have a mass where it's like, "you can't treat us like this."

And then, you know, you think about our ancestors, they, the African American principals who came before me struggled through this too, and they gave me an opportunity to be here. So, I have to make sure that I'm laying a foundation for the next group.

In each of the examples, both principals illustrate an unfortunate and glaring reality that confront African Americans, that is, that *some*, not all, people still harbor prejudice views about race in

terms of African American leadership. To be clear, this is not to say that other ethnic groups do not encounter race and prejudice, but rather to note that African American educational leaders are still under-represented as a group in schools, and are still continuing the struggle of their predecessors during both the pre- and post-*Brown* era.

In SP-C's example, the notion of having to always prove one's ability and skill set reinforces inequities that easily translates into education, that is as a school leader and always being questioned of one's decision, or not being given a fair opportunity to demonstrate effectiveness as a school leader. Conversely, for SP-D, his personal account of actually being told that he was not considered for a position because of his race further demonstrates how inequities are not only maintained, but are also present in education. The point to be made here is simple: if stakeholders and colleagues can discriminate against skilled and competent professionals without knowing or seeing African Americans' practice experience, then what does that say for the African American child, and other students, who encounter a principal, teacher or central office leader who reserves such prejudice views? Albeit rhetorical, this question must be posed considering how education has evolved in terms of race and prejudice in society.

Unfortunately, the existence of racial prejudice creates barriers for African American principals, which contributes to perceived stereotypes and negative perceptions regarding African Americans' ability to lead. In their study, Toure and Dorsey (2018) contend that one of the tenets of the White racial frame (WRF) is that of racial stereotyping, which recognizes that people normally discrimination toward ethnic groups based on historical and societal information, rather than personal knowledge and experience (p. 3). In educational leadership, such racial stereotypes are manifested and maintained by privilege, in terms of entitlement and position within the dominate group, and colorblindness, in terms of not seeing race in daily

interactions with students and in schools. Of the two, colorblindness is most detrimental because issues related to prejudice are often overlooked, and/or are not fully recognized.

As such, looking at how urban districts are negatively perceived, both UP-A and UP- D provide honest insight:

Researcher: Have you ever experienced any prejudice or discrimination in your role?

UP-A: People/educators seem to believe that educators in urban settings are less than [or inferior]. I let teachers and administrators in suburban areas know how well teachers in urban settings perform.

UP-D: Hmm, that's a really good question (pause) yeah, because it's been overt. It's not covert, you know. Sometimes you'll have other ethnic groups just make assumptions about [my] leadership style. About professionalism. Without, you know, communicating what their concerns are."

In effect, because of racial stereotypes and discrimination, many, if not all, of the principals interviewed reported that the role of informal cultural support groups become necessary to combat such discrimination, as these groups provide some degree of solace *and* encouragement. These informal groups/networks, which will be elaborated on in Research Questions #2, speaks to an *innate* responsibility expressed by each of the principals when it comes to the hiring of a new person of color, specifically in a suburban district.

However, getting back to SP-D's initial comments, Retired SP-A added another dimension with regard to how he operated within the "dominant culture,"

Retired SP-A: We serve at the pleasure of the power culture.

Researcher: What does that mean?

Retired SP-A: White! No matter what [setting], urban or suburban because Italians are in charge in Newark, thus you run the school. So, we serve at the pleasure, and it goes way back to slavery. A woman is more tolerated in the majority culture than a man. It was always my task to make them comfortable with me. That was my task.

After hearing Retired SP-A's comments, one of the researcher's immediate thoughts regarding this was that of knowing one's place per se, with regard to societal roles. In this regard, the notion of social roles also extends to women. Related to this in terms of specific perceived stereotypes and negative social perceptions, is how many of the African American male principals discussed how they were viewed in comparison to African American female principals. During SP-D's interview, he shared that

I spent nine years in a district and wasn't hired as a superintendent. Now, they hired a female, but I don't know what that said about an African American male, [or] what the fear was. And they seem more comfortable with women. And I think it had a lot to do with I wouldn't take any crap from them, I know that. And quite often we [African American males] come across as, um, we are assertive and sometimes because we're quiet and we don't get involved in a lot of foolishness, that just means we're cautious because we know our flexibility is limited in how we can engage. That may come across as, you know, he's tough, you know, he's mean, he's serious all the time. All it means is we have to guard ourselves because we can't make a mistake.

For a number of reasons, and on a number of levels, this was interesting primarily because of the relationship between African American men and women in leadership positions, and the unspoken nuances that aggravate tensions between these two groups, that is, inter-group discrimination. Again, as briefly alluded to, the African American women interviewed were not

only clear of the challenges associated with gender, but were equally clear of how society *and* their male counterparts, both African American and Caucasian, perceive women as a group. Although this topic will be discussed in the last part of this analysis, it is important to briefly note here due to the noted perception of SP-D, and the other African American male principals interviewed, of women in relation to prejudice and gender.

As an African American female, UP-E acknowledged that

Researcher: Do you think an African American female principal would be more accepted in a suburban district?

UP-E: I believe so. I believe females, if they were going to bring in anyone, I believe it would be a female as opposed to a male.

Researcher: Why so?

UP-E: Mainly because I'm thinking about those whom are most active in schools, which would be moms, mothers, you know. So, a mother would feel more comfortable in relating to an African American woman, you know, as opposed to an African American man. Just my thoughts, it may not be the case, but I do feel as though because the woman and the nurturing, I think that there would be, they would be more inclined to bring a woman in.

Whether viewed as “nurturers,” or as being more relatable to mothers, African American women struggle against the same, yet different, double standards as men. Further, as a group, women unfortunately are placed into this *maternal* box, which posits them, as UP-E disclosed, as not being “firm enough” to make the tough decisions and/or handle leadership roles beyond the school level. UP-D referenced the dominant presence of women in relation to being the most present pool of educators, indicating,

Well, it goes directly to teaching; there's not a lot of African American males in the classroom; there's more White females in the classroom than there are both Black females and Black males, and that's your pool of leaders. That's why there is a heavy effort to recruit Black males in the teaching realm.

Although gender will be discussed in the last research question, it was imperative to reference how African American male principals discussed how they were viewed in relation to African American female principals, specifically in terms of the perception of being seen as "less threatening," which, again, reinforces and creates undue barriers and inequities for African American male principals. It is also important to note that one of the major themes that will be explored in Research Question 3 is that of how the informal and professional relationships of African American men almost endorses sexism toward African American women, mainly in terms of behavior, despite African American women having to struggle equally, and similarly, against prejudice.

Finally, before concluding this section, the researcher must discuss what SP-E referred to and being intentional in stating not to let "others, other you," with regard to not letting anyone define your existence as a person or professional. Reflecting on her time while studying at Harvard, SP-E was extremely honest in admitting that although she has experienced racism, she has not let it define her existence of *who* she is as a person, nor define her practice as a professional working in education.

In her response, SP-E provided a simple example:

That's what I've been trying to do, that's why I mentor. Trying to get African Americans, or persons of color to stop seeing themselves in that lens of 'otherness.' Have I experienced racism, yes, but I do not let others, *other me*. Let's talk about the confidence,

the competence and skillset we see in ourselves in terms of positions we go after. Racism is here, but you don't lean in to it; that's what micro-aggressions are. It's like throwing a frisbee. I catch them before they come and use them as instructional moments.

Referring to the previous conversation of having an innate responsibility of providing an informal support base for African Americans who work as educational leaders, SP-E adds to this discourse by elevating this *innate responsibility* by adding to the informal network of support, the innate responsibility of maintaining one's integrity and humanity as being qualified and more than capable school-based leaders. To this end, because opportunities come few and far in between, emerging school leaders and programs for that matter cannot ignore this reality.

Research Question 2: In What Ways Do These Experiences and Perceptions Influence the Principals' Decisions to Stay, Leave, or Move within the Profession of School Leadership?

Emergent Theme: Mobility

In the aftermath of the *Brown* decision, there was a significant reduction in the number of African American principals and educators working in the profession. As indicated in the literature review, prior to 1954, African Americans were viewed and respected as pillars of their communities who were able to navigate both worlds in terms of the dominant culture of the south at that time. Unfortunately, despite the well-meaning intent that fueled the *Brown* case, it must be reiterated and clearly noted that the decision to integrate schools had the *opposite* effect on African American educators, specifically in terms of leadership and instructional positions.

Similar to the pre-*Brown* era, there was a general consensus among of the principals from both settings that, as educational leaders, they served as *models* to students. Morally speaking, just as there is this innate responsibility to provide new African American principals with an informal network of support and reminder of their ability to lead, there was equally an innate,

moral obligation of the principals to provide, and/or be that example, for students of color. It was almost an unspoken expectation and obligation for each of the principals interviewed that regardless of their position within the district, *they* wanted to ensure that as African American principals, they served a positive model for students in general, and in particular students of color, to aspire to. Despite the doctrine of “separate, but equal” reinforcing and maintaining a segregated class system for then African Americans in the south, the shared consensus of the principals interviewed countered this perception in the same manner their historical predecessors did in terms of how African Americans were viewed by serving as models for students of color.

In terms of mobility between districts, many of the principals interviewed shared that they remained in their current setting despite experiences associated with race and/or prejudice. An interesting point of reference to be shared is that the researcher was unaware of how many of the principals actually had a prior experience of working in both settings, and their intent to remain in urban districts. SP-D admitted that at the time he was working in an urban district, it was not his intent to leave; however, because of the “politics” and instability, SP-D eventually decided to apply in another district, ultimately leaving to work in a suburban district.

Another interesting point as far as how suburban districts are viewed with regard to the changing landscape of student demographics provided almost a reverse assumption in how suburban districts are perceived by potential candidates. SP-C provides insight on how this has impacted his district’s recruiting efforts:

Researcher: Are you aware of any efforts by your district to recruit/retain African American candidates?

SP-C: Yes, one of the major efforts is recruitment. That’s one of the initiatives. I’ve been at job fairs as far as Howard [University]

Researcher: Oh, so the district has gone to HBCU's (historically Black colleges and universities)?

SP-C: Yes, the district has made some efforts; it's not happening as fast as everyone would like to see, but I think there's other factors we can talk about.

Researcher: Like what? Give me an example.

SP-C: The family diversity for the past twenty years has changed in my district, and has become significantly more diverse than it has ever been, so with the teaching staff, their teaching career, you have people that's been here when it wasn't as diverse. Now they may be aging out in the next five, six, seven years or so, but they have been here for a long time, so without turnover, it's hard to pull people in, and so you're waiting for people to retire, so that's part it.

I've been on many job fairs, many recruitment visits, and things of that nature. People still view our district of how it *used* [emphasis added] to be, so people think, "oh, *they let you in there* [emphasis added]" (laughter) . . . and I'm like, "you don't know what it looks like over there anymore."

So, they look at the landscape when people are applying for jobs, a lot of young African American men and women, they'll apply first, to some of the urban areas, thinking that's who will give them a job, and because that's where they think they are needed and desired, not realizing there's a need and desire in a lot of other areas that may not be an urban area. And that's one of the things I learned when I took my first teaching job because again, I told you, I wanted to go to Harlem and teach, but where did I end up. (Laughter)

But there was a significant number of brown faces that needed to see, you know, themselves reflected in the staff. Not as janitorial staff or cafeteria staff, but as coaches and as teachers and things of that nature. And the role I ended up playing for so many of them and their parents would speak to that.

Whether hiring more African Americans, Hispanics, or Asians, the diversity that is happening and projected in years to come must signal a shift that district staffing needs to reflect the students entering our schools. Additionally, SP-C was equally candid in stating his role in serving as a model to both students and their families.

Another point raised in SP-C's response that is worth exploring further is the change in family and instructional dynamics in his district. More specifically, SP-C mentioned that for those teachers who may have started their teaching career directly out of college, has witnessed the evolution of the district during a time where it *was not* as diverse as it has become now, which is to say, according to SP-C, that these teachers (and administrators) were in the minority, specifically in terms of the number of teachers/faculty of color. In fact, SP-C stated that at one point, there was maybe "one or two" African American principals at the time prior to his entry into the district. Although this has progressed in SP-C's district, it is important to note in light of how suburban district are sometimes viewed by potential African American candidates who may bypass applying because they do not think there is a "need" in suburban district. To this end, continuous efforts to recruit and promote the diversity in suburban districts is highly necessary.

Moreover, in urban districts, this unspoken moral obligation also extends to principals as they lead in schools, as evidenced by the need of urban African American principals to also serve as an example of the possibilities, despite their SES, for their students to aspire to. This exchange with UP-E demonstrates this point:

Researcher: When you applied, did you choose an urban setting, did you cast a wide net?
How did that evolve for you?

UP-E: I was used to an urban setting because I've worked in Bed Stuy [Bedford Stuyvesant] for 10 years. Now, I grew up in Westchester County, which is very suburban and uh, plush; so, I definitely could have gone there to get a job. However, I wanted to go where (pause), and I don't want to sound, you know common, but I really wanted to go where I knew that I was making a difference, and where I would have an impact on *my* kids.

Researcher: when you say "my" kids, I think I know what you're talking about, but what does that mean?

UP-E: Children of color, you know. And I'm not just talking about African American kids, definitely Hispanic, um, to be able to plant those seeds within them is what's most amazing. And, you just had an opportunity to see it when they [students] say, "wow, you're a doctor," you know, because they're able to see themselves in me, just as I see myself in them.

As indicated in another section, SP-D was very frank in acknowledging that he was "one of those kids," which resonates with this part of the discourse, as well as provides additional perspective to how African American principals relate to students of color because they identify with their resiliency to learn, to receive an equitable education, and more importantly, see themselves in the students of color African American principals serve. UP-B's decision to work in an urban district was equally rooted in this reality,

The principalship in an urban setting was vital as I was raised in an urban setting. I wanted to ensure that the children received a high-quality education from someone that

understood how they think and lived. In addition, urban sectors need principals who believe in the children and who are committed to the community in which they serve. In this sense, regardless of environment, African American principals, male and female, wanted to serve as a model for *all* students, but in particular for students of color. The unspoken moral obligation can easily correlate to how African Americans in the south prior to 1954 were respected and viewed. In fact, many, if not all of the principal responses reflected this communal and cultural connection precisely because many of the principals viewed themselves in their students, in effect having a shared experience either because of similar upbringing and/or, as SP-C indicated, “we know what it means” to root (support) African American success, that is, as professionals and as leaders.

The mobility, therefore, of many of the principals was predicated upon some of the district “politics” discussed in the previous question, that is, dealing with unions, contesting discrimination, the impact of personal and professional affiliations, and the decision-making processes impacting curriculum and learning to name a few. SP-D indicated that by staying to “fight” against such politics and prejudice, the hope is to create more opportunities that will allow the next young African American male or female, Hispanic, and/or Asian professional to continue and inspire the next generation. Although politics influenced SP-B’s decision to leave his urban district at the time, he was clear in stating that

We have to provide opportunities for young candidates of color to want to come and do this work. If you look at Newark, where they have the Teachers Village, why not create an Administrative Village, you know what I’m saying. That way, you make it [educational leadership] more attractive, and hopefully retain people because we lose a lot of good people man, because of the politics.

To this end, although specific recommendations will be elaborated on the succeeding chapter, SP-B, as well as the other principals, all articulate in their own way the inherent, moral *and* unspoken obligation to pick up the mantel in breaking down barriers to be catalyst of change and, as SP-E described, “catching the frisbee before it hits you.”

Research Question 3: In What Ways Does Gender Contribute to Inequity in Educational Leadership?

Emergent Theme: Gender Inequity

As indicated in the beginning of this research, any discussion regarding African American progress must be inclusive of the role in which African American women are impacted. In terms of educational leadership, this researcher has made it clear that African American female leadership is a subtopic and deserves further research to address the gap in literature regarding this group. The researcher was fortunate to have interviewed three African American female principals, that is, two from an urban setting, and one from a suburban setting, as opposed to the two initially proposed.

Although efforts were made to interview a fourth African American female principal to balance out the responses, the other participant was still out on maternity leave. However, the three female principals interviewed provided relative insight into how they view leadership, in addition to the other male principals used in this study. During the interviewing process, the female principals were able to weigh in on how they are viewed in comparison to their male counterparts, as well as leaders within education.

Each female principal offered her perspective on this area, noting that there’s a clear dichotomy between how they are seen in terms of leadership style/practice, and are considered for leadership roles. The male principals equally shared their perceptions, noting that there is a

certain level of “comfort” with African American female principals in comparison to their male counterparts alluded in the previous question. As recalled by SP-D, he questioned what it meant by the hiring of an African American female in the context of women being perceived easily as “more comfortable” and less-threatening than men.

UP-C shared her experiences with previous superintendents in her district, and how African American male principals are almost given “a pass” in their schools,

Researcher: From your experience, does gender in terms of female principal leadership contribute to inequity in educational leadership?

UP-C: Yes! And it does in the sense that men principals, male principals, get more support from central office than female principals, and that’s whether it’s a male superintendent or female superintendent . . .

Researcher: Really, even with a female superintendent?

UP-C: Yes, that’s what I come to realize, at least that’s been my experience, men are allowed to, at least in the experience of male and females I’ve worked under I should say, when it’s a male superintendent, it’s like the “ol’ boys’ network”! Where, you know, there’s this camaraderie, “oh man, I got you, don’t worry about that,” kind of thing; so, the men are allowed to get away with anything. When it’s a female, it’s more like, not an “ol’ boys club,” but, “oh you know how he is,” type thing, and so a lot of things tend to slide, and I’ve experienced that first hand.

Although the female principals’ comments cannot be generalized to the general population with regard to African American female leadership, the researcher must be consistent and fair in stating that this level of reverse discrimination toward women in general, and women of color in particular serving in leadership positions, speaks to inequities, not only pertaining to gender, but

also sexism. As seasoned principals, both UP-E and Semi-retired SP-E acknowledge the sexism within the profession, adding:

So, for me, and this is just my thoughts and from what I've seen, you find that more female principals remain in the role of a principal as opposed to moving up to the role of superintendent longer, I would say, than the average male principal. Um, I think that a male is looked upon, or expected, and doors are more so open for males to step into roles as superintendent. And I think that that's evident if you look at the data, you know, you see the numbers; and I'm not even going to put into motion African American females.

Researcher: Well, that was going to be my next question, what about African American females?

UP-E: So, I can only speak from what I feel my role as principal is, and it's not just to be the overseer of the building. Um, I think as a woman, there is a nurturing side that you feel that you have to bring; but I believe it's what sets us apart from the male principals. And not just nurturing the student and parents, but staff also, so you may find more of a family rapport within a building underneath the female administrator, opposed to a male administrator. Now, I do think that that's a double edge sword, because when it comes to be[ing] a superintendent, you may be viewed as not firm enough."

As briefly alluded to in an earlier part of this discussion, women unfortunately are placed into this maternal box, which clearly speaks to the limitations placed on them as a group to lead beyond the school level as indicated by UP-E. However, similarly with African American men, African American women too encounter the same challenge with regard to being falsely stereotyped about their skills and abilities to lead. When asked the same question regarding gender, SP-B further shared his thoughts in relation to a global perspective, indicating,

Oh absolutely! I mean, I think it's clear, and it's no different than when you look at race in terms of equity. I think organizations have to be *conscious* to include women. If, if, gay, lesbian, straight, you have to be conscious to include people who mirror our students. And quite often because education, in terms of leadership, has been [a] male dominant profession, and more *White male* dominant, it's harder for women to maneuver in an organization that's been [male] dominated.

When you look at our institutions, particularly where there's high salaries, women don't exist quite as much. So, I think it's, it would be certainly wise for us whenever organizations are making decisions about leadership to look at balance and be able to say that, we have 50% minority, 50% majority, 20% Asian. Can we create a staff that looks that way? And when you're conscious, you're going to get closer because you want the best qualified candidates.

For UP-D, he did not see it as an inequity because African American women are generally more represented as principals in urban settings, which UP-C also acknowledges in terms of representation. This does not, however, negate the struggles women encounter despite being overly represented in education, up to 77% as of 2016-17, in comparison to men. (Wong, 2019; NCES, 2019). But it does highlight that as a group, there is still obvious inequities related to salary and biases. SP-C added that

Gender plays a factor, whether it's African American or not, (pause) based on what I've seen in the sense of you see more female principals on elementary levels, you don't see many of them in secondary level and vice versa. I'm not going to pretend that it's an equal playing ground, but I really think it depends on the district and the people who are making the hiring decisions. The ones I've seen in high numbers, again will be in

elementary, and in the urban areas. I haven't seen necessarily high numbers in any other areas.

Further, once district's become more "conscious" as SP-D states, of staffing imbalances, that is, in terms of gender and ethnicity, it becomes a priority and focal point that dictate recruiting efforts geared toward address diversity gaps among both minorities and women. This level of awareness, therefore, is essential to keep in mind as districts prepare students for the global 21st Century workforce, where diversity is becoming more promoted and encouraged in various professions.

Equally relevant to this part of the discussion, is the double standard that's applicable to women in general, and women of color in particular, as educational leaders, specifically in regard to having to prove their skillset and ability to lead. In her response, UP-C noted,

Researcher: So, let's flip that question in terms of female leadership, and let me ask is there a difference with African American female leadership in comparison to other groups?

UP-C: Yes, (pause), there's always a question of your credentials and credibility, and you always have to prove what you say and what you know.

Despite having more African American women principals working in urban schools, the presence of sexism and prejudice still exists. Although a review of the data may support this, many of the male principals interviewed also acknowledge the blatant inequities in terms of salaries and double standards. Semi-retired SP-B recounted the experiences of one of his former African American female colleagues, who received all forms of undue pressure and scrutiny because she was female:

Researcher: Do you think there's inequity when it comes to women in leadership?

Semi-retired SP-B: Absolutely, because in terms of salary, I don't think women make the same . . . like, in today's world, women are still fighting for that. You know, they [women] make 80% of what we [men] make, and they're doing the same job man!

Researcher: So, what about women of color in leadership?

Semi-retired SP-B: Oh, they [African American women] catch it both ways. They catch it from central office and believe it or not, they catch it from their own people, particularly Black females.

Researcher: When you say "catch it"?

Semi-retired SP-B: They give them hell (laughter)! Not from Black males or White females, but Black females; and from, from what I saw, if it was a White female vice principal or principal, staff would accept it!

Researcher: So, is it a double standard?

Semi-retired SP-B: Double standard! They dealt with a lot and they had to be more prepared!

UP-B and Semi-Retired SP-B both acknowledge the salary gap between male and females, stating that:

UP-B: There are gender inequalities. I have seen in several districts in which I have worked, women and those of color make less than their male counterparts. Those that are not of color tend to make more money than those that are considered minority.

Moreover, the perception and challenges of African American women is similar to that of men in that, Black women are unfairly depicted as having a strong and dominant personality, whereas Black men are seen as intimidating as illustrated by SP-D and the other principals. In their research, Bloom and Erlandson (2003) posit that there's a certain level of "*invisibility*" when it

comes to African American female principals, stemming from exclusionary practices within educational leadership, and the feminist movement, that is, in terms of what they refer to as the “institutional silencing” in most higher education programs and leadership theories.

More specifically, and equally relative to the principals’ response, Bloom and Erlandson (2003) acknowledge both racism and the underestimated influence of sexism in their study of three African American female principals who endured backlash because of their ethnicity and gender:

Each woman’s story suggest that sexism is probably a more powerful and personal agent of discrimination in the work world than racism. Although Claire, Grace, and Rose understood how racist practices functioned to constrain and maintain their career advancement, they were not so sophisticated about how sexist discriminatory practices operated in the workplace and community, even with the African American race. (p. 355)

What is interesting to note is the competing struggles between African American women, and African American male principals in that as men, many of the principals interviewed reported and affirmed that African American women were viewed as being more accepting and less-threatening in leadership roles, in comparison to how they, African American men, are perceived to the contrary, that is, as being mean, aggressive, and/or unfriendly. Conversely, and consequently, for African American women, the unfortunate sexism within their own cultural group not only reinforces prejudice, but also adds another dimension to female struggle as educational leaders.

Regardless of inter-group prejudice, reverse discrimination, or double standards, it is fair to say that as a group, African American female principals encounter inequities rooted in both racism and sexism. In terms of gender, the struggle of women continues to evolve and must be

considered in the same context of equity just as race has been, specifically in relation to education and educational leadership as a profession. In the next chapter, the researcher discusses how the intersection of gender and race further contributes to the invisibility of African American female leaders in education.

Summary

Based on the collected responses, it appears that it was a personal choice/preference of all the principals interviewed to work in their respective settings. This is not to say that a number of the principals did not make efforts to apply to suburban districts, but rather to note that at the time of each interview, every principal expressed their satisfaction of working in their respective setting, as well as shared their own respective journeys of becoming school base leaders in both settings. As such, before concluding this chapter, it is necessary to revisit and highlight several key findings that will be explored theoretically in Chapter 5 of this research, as indicated below:

- The moral and innate obligation to serve as models for students of color – specifically in terms of the cultural ethos that connects African Americans as a people
- The informal networks to support newly recruited African American principals with regard to providing new colleagues with guidance rooted in and based upon professional experiences of working in suburban districts.
- The existence of double standards, negative stereotypes, undue scrutiny, and obvious inequities in educational leadership within the context as serving as competent and skilled school-based leaders.
- Continued sexism and gender biases that reinforce and maintain inequities for African American male and female principals

To this end, we look at each one of these findings using the theoretical lens of CRT in educational leadership.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION, AND SUMMARY

Since the initiation of this study, the ASDC in April 2019 published a series entitled *Separate and Still Unequal: Race in America's Schools*, where several leading scholars and educational leaders weighed in on the issues of racial inequity, and segregation, in American schools. In many of the articles, the authors made the historical connection to the *Brown* case, as done similarly in this research, specifically with regard to the reduction of African Americans teachers and administrators in the pre-*Brown* south, as well as the impact racial prejudice has had in education in general, and educational leadership in particular. However, in this issue, many of the authors reflect on the unfulfilled promises of *Brown*, which, 60 years later, continues to impact and haunt American schools in terms of segregation and increasing inequities within education. Renowned author, scholar, and educator Pedro Noguera (2019) aptly notes that

Even as we acknowledge the historic significance of *Brown*, we must also acknowledge its decreasing impact on public education. Any objective appraisal of where we stand as a nation today with respect to progress in racial integration of schools reveal that *Brown*—and the Court's call for it to be implemented with “all deliberate speed”—clearly has not lived up to its promise or potential. (p. 20)

In this sense, the study presented here is not only timely, but also pushes the conversation in educational leadership regarding the instruction of students in general, and for students of color in particular, in terms diversity, equity, and racial prejudice. As schools/districts with increasing minority populations continue to emerge, the need to have both an instructional and principal leadership staff that reflects its student body, be it African American, Asian, Latino,

female, etc., is highly necessary, given the status of schools in terms of the changing demographics of students and equity.

As a point of clarity, it should be stated that the objective should (and is) not to just hire a person of color for the purposes of meeting a goal, but rather to hire highly skilled and competent educators of color who are valued as educated professionals who can lead across settings, and contribute to *all* students in their educational pursuits. Therefore, as indicated, while it is true that having diverse leadership adds to the overall experiences of students, it is equally important that having such diversity adds to the manner in which we as educational leaders approach student learning and social-emotional development.

To facilitate this discussion, three of the tenets that undergird the theoretical framework of CRT will be used to analyze the qualitative data of this research as provided by the principals interviewed. CRT, therefore, is used to provide context for not only how the principals in this study view themselves as school-based and central office leaders, but also how the principals perceive issues of equity, prejudice, gender, and diversity in the realm of educational leadership as a profession. To this end, the tenets that will be used are as follows: interest convergence, colorblindness, and permanence of racism, specifically with regard to privilege and access.

The key findings of this research were summarized in the preceding section, but are again listed below:

- The moral and innate obligation to serve as models for students of color
- The informal networks to support newly recruited African American principals
- The existence of double standards, negative stereotypes, undue scrutiny, and obvious inequities in educational leadership

- Continued sexism and gender biases that reinforces and maintain inequities for African American male and female principals

Each of the findings will be discussed in a separate section using data obtained from both the mini-focus groups and post-interviews with the principals used in the study. Further, the researcher will provide some of his own reflections as they relate to some of the conversations with each of the principals, accounting for his own experiences on this topic. In this sense, each of the noted findings will be given its own respective section and discussed in the context of the initial over-arching question of this study, which simply asks the question: *What are the lived experiences of African American urban school principals compared to those of suburban African American school principals?* Finally, after each finding has been discussed, the researcher will provide a number of recommendations for future study, as well as provide possible recommendations for school districts and educational leadership programs to consider as we move forward into the global 21st century of educational leadership. Thus, we now look at the first key finding in this research: the ethos of African American principals.

Research Finding #1: The Ethos of African American Principals: The Moral and Innate Obligation

In the Literature Review, the researcher provided a succinct narrative of how African American principals were viewed during the time of the pre-*Brown* era. Speaking from a historical lens, many of the segregated schools that existed in the south encountered significant discrimination, which resulted in African American communities to forge and develop communities-within-communities so to speak, to support and provide resources to its most precious resource: its children. As a result, there was a significant value placed on education and learning in order to be successful in society, hence the role of African American principals prior

to the inevitable Civil Rights movement. The African American principal therefore, became more than just an educational leader in that they *were* the model and example for African American students to aspire to.

According to Savage (2001), education was one of the few vocations open to middle-class Blacks in the pre-Brown era and, because of their profession, Black principals served as models of “servant leadership,” [which] . . . demonstrated an ethos of service which obligated those who acquired literacy to transfer this knowledge to others in the Black community. (p. 173)

This speaks to the collective will, or ethos, among African Americans. Merriam Webster defines the term ethos as “the fundamental character or spirit of a culture or disposition of a community, group, or person.” Viewed in this context, this “spirit” easily translates into what is also considered in this research as the *inherent* and *innate* obligation of African American principals, historically to the present, to serve as role models who influences African American students.

Since education, as a profession, literally served as one of the most prestigious fields to work in during the pre-*Brown* era Tillman (2004), African American principals maintained the balance of being culturally connected, as well as navigating a segregated class system that regulated southern African American communities in general, and African American students in particular, as culturally inferior to the dominant group of the 1950s. In this sense the cultural relevance cannot be underscored in the education of students of color, as customary and cultural traditions distinguish students similar to other ethnic groups who are ethnically connected linguistically and historically. Tillman (2004) adds that

Culture appeared to strongly influence the leadership of pre- as well as post-*Brown* African American principals. Tillman (2002) defined culture as “a group’s individual and

collective ways of thinking, believing, and knowing, which includes their shared experiences, consciousness, skills, values, forms of expression, social institutions and behaviors.” (p. 4) The research reviewed here reveals that in the closed system of segregated schooling, as well as in post-Brown re-segregated schools (Orfield & Lee, 2004), Black principals considered the cultural norms of the Black community in their leadership practices. (p. 103)

Within the focus group of the suburban principals, there was a collective response that indicated the moral and ethical obligation to not only inspire, but also encourage African American students to always present with their best. There was an innate responsibility that each of the principals articulated with passion and pride. As a group, it was stated that

Suburban Focus Group - Ret. SP-B: “All I see is a kid; you have to learn who they are, so our role is very much important because you know, you have student who come back years later and say, “man, you were my principal in middle school,” and at the time you may not have known what kind of impact you have, but you can’t put a value on that.”

SP- C: “To piggy back on that, it is very important for our minority males to see African American males, and females for that matter, or what’s considered a minority, in leadership positions. As I reflect, even in my own experience where I grew up in a diverse community, there were very few Blacks, I mean, you may have had some [African Americans] in custodial positions, or in the cafeteria, and maybe a teacher here or there, and that certainly didn’t stifle me any way shape or form, but to what Ret. SP-B was saying, it’s not until you’re in a leadership position that you realize the impact.

When you have children coming back and they look at you and they regard who you are; I had a kid come back to me two years ago and said you were a Black superhero

to me because before that, throughout his education until middle school, he had never seen a male Black teacher or principal, so realizing how children look at us from a leadership role, a minority role, it's important. And even when you look at the other side, a lot of times we're breaking barriers in these roles because we are sitting in leadership roles, and we're leading positively, with love and embracing the kids because we see kids for who they are.

After listening to the group, it was evident that each principal understood what it meant, *not* to serve as role models, specifically in terms of the potential impact it can have on students if they didn't take on this mantle of obligation. Further, it was also indicated that the traditional understanding of leadership in terms of what is learned and theorized in educational leadership programs obviously addresses the theoretical foundations of what it means to be a principal. However, the suburban group appear to articulate and further understand that leadership is contextual and takes on many different facets, depending on the context.

In other words, just as principals must be adept in so many areas, that is, as instructional leaders, disciplinarians, and building managers, they must also be equally adept as leaders who have a critical role in developing the whole student, both academically and socially. Given the rise and attention to social-emotional learning (SEL) impacting schools, the traditional lens through which teaching and learning has been viewed is drastically changing to not so much incorporate, but rather consciously address the needs of students as they confront issues related to cyber-bullying, social media, anxiety, and depression to name a few. It is understood then, that principals in general serve beyond the traditional school-based/authoritative role as we know, to now as maternal and paternal figures – and for African American principals in particular, as

cultural conduits who not only connect with students, but also who promote (and represent) the positive possibilities of what students of color can aspire to.

Taken a step further, in the urban focus group, this moral and innate obligation is reflected in their practice as principals, specifically in terms of the maternal and paternal role many urban African American principals assume. It is important to state that the noted roles of urban African American principals extend beyond the narratives that tend to characterize urban environments, that is, high poverty, limited resources, dilapidated facilities, etc. (Gooden, 2012) While in many instances these attributes may be present, the urban African American principals interviewed voiced a certain degree of pride knowing that they are developing students with whom they can relate, mainly because for a few of the principals, they *were* those students. In the urban focus group, one of the statements that came up adds to this,

UFG – UP-B: The principalship in an urban setting was vital as I was raised in an urban setting, [and] I wanted to ensure that the children received a high-quality education from someone that understood how they think and lived. I would also add that that urban sectors need principals who believe in the children and who are committed to the community in which they serve.

As history would dictate with the subsequent Civil Right Era of the 1960s, there were numerous competing interests, specifically related to discrimination, voting rights, and the education of students of color that culminated in an amalgamation of groups seeking to advance the cause of both civil and human rights in the United States. Such competing interests speaks to one of the tenets that undergirds CRT, which is interest convergence. By definition, interest convergence can simply be summarized as when “the racial equality and equity for people of color will be pursued and advanced when they converge with the interests, needs, expectations,

and ideologies of Whites [or the dominant group].” In other words, the needs of people of color will only be met, to the benefit of the dominant group.

Interest convergence is relevant in this research for the following reasons: the growing number of minority students entering districts, the projection that Latinos (as a group) will be the future majority group, *and* the projected number of the students expected to enroll into more affluent neighborhoods (Mordechay et al., 2019). Because of this anticipated projection, it is arguably necessary for schools/district to establish more aggressive efforts to recruit and retain not only African American principals, but also Latina/o, Asian, principals as well. In fact, during the suburban focus group, particularly since a few of the principals worked in the same district at a time where African American principals were increasing, they acknowledged that it was in the *interest* of the district to ensure the progress of African American administrators at the time.

They noted,

Suburban Focus Group (SFG): The superintendent wanted to make sure that the Black principals was successful, whether she wanted to or not because it became politically expedient in our district for the Black principal, [especially] the Black male principal who was the second wave of men, had to be successful.

Thus, according to the suburban focus group, we see an illustration of how the intersection of the suburban community’s *political climate* at the time converged with the interest of the district, inevitably to the benefit of African American principals at that juncture, to receive additional supports according to the suburban group. To further understand interest convergence in the context of this accepted change in student demographics, specifically in terms of minority-majority group dynamics, Milner et al. (2013) discusses the notion of a loss-gain binary, which essentially relates to the potential loss within the dominant group, subsequently to the benefit of

the minority group. In effect, this means that school boards and district superintendents, particularly suburban districts, must begin the process of assessing the nuances of their respective districts to determine such needs in terms of developing a diverse administrative and instructional staff that reflect its student body. Therefore, to the benefit of administrators of color, more opportunities to work in diverse settings inevitably will increase.

Under the premise of interest convergence, specifically with regard to the suburban focus group used in this study, as a collective the principals all appeared to be keenly aware of not only their role, but also their position with the district in terms of cultural representation, and the push in each respective district to recruit and diversify its administrative ranks. For the urban focus group, although the dynamics and demographics differed from those of their colleagues, they (as a collective) articulated the need for diversity in educational leadership.

This speaks to diversifying administrative and instructional staffing in both settings, as urban districts must also take note of other ethnic groups just as suburban districts. Additionally, it should be clearly stated that interest convergence *is not* an extension of Affirmative Action, where a specific quota must be met in terms of representation, but rather it is to point out and note the reality of how professionals of color are able to benefit from societal interests of the dominant group. During the focus group, it was universally stated and reinforced that having an African American male in leadership roles is critical to the education of African American students. To this end, as indicated, with the projected surge of other ethnic groups in the near future, it will become a necessity for districts to develop a working population that reflects its student body.

Research Finding #2: Informal Networks

In a succinct manner, just as there was/is an innate obligation to serve as models for African American students, there too was/is an innate obligation to provide some degree of mentorship, via informally, to newly appointed African Americans serving in leadership positions. SP-C's comments stand out most as he articulated what it meant for a new leader to do well, that is, inherently knowing that "it would be a long time before another one (African American) is hired." Even though the number of African Americans in leadership positions has grown since 2007, this "one-and-done" approach in terms of opportunities for African American administrators speaks to the undue scrutiny they encounter.

Moreover, such informal networks extend beyond educational leadership to different professions as well, particularly in the corporate sector. In her article, Downey (2019) shares the experience of an African American professional Morehouse College graduate (John Wilson) who, upon attending Harvard, questioned his status in terms of whether he belonged:

At Morehouse, they held a crown over my head and expected me, challenged me, to grow tall enough to wear it. When I came to Harvard, they held a question mark over my head.

I felt the institution was causing me to ask do I belong here.

Further, Downey notes that Wilson credits having informal networks as a vital source in aiding him in his Harvard experience: "Often, students of color seek out each other to carve out safe places where they can be honest and be heard. Acknowledging the "sub family" he relied on while at Harvard grad school, Wilson said those informal support networks don't absolve universities of fostering a welcoming environment campus-wide" (Downey, 2019).

The "connection" Downey notes, illustrates and speaks to the innate obligation that almost becomes necessary for African Americans to have while serving in leadership positions.

Reflecting on the individual interview process, the suburban principals even acknowledged the importance of this research in providing a “platform” to discuss this important topic,

SFG – Researcher: Has this changed your perspective on how African American principals are viewed?

SP-C: I would say that is hasn’t necessarily changed, but it definitely has given me the opportunity to finally have the conversation, you know; you and I sat and talked for a while, so by having this conversation, it’s giving me a platform to speak with others colleagues, you know, where normally you would just speak with family and friends.

Ret. SP-A: You know SP-C, in our district we had about five of us [African American principals] and we would have these talks to support each other, and it helped, especially in a town like ours [where we worked].

These informal networks are something that dates back historically to the slave communities of the south, the abolitionist movements, the pre-antebellum period, and the civil rights era respectively. In each period, whether as slaves and/or freedmen, African Americans collectively forged their own communities separate from the power structure. For example, during the nineteenth century Levine (1996) documents that

Slaves had forged their own semi-independent societies within which they developed rules, values, a sense of self-respect, and a spirit of solidarity that helped them to survive both physically and psychologically. And in doing so, the slaves did not simply draw on the culture of the dominant white society. Rather, they blended American and West African practices and values, so that by the early nineteenth century they had created an African American culture that met their needs. (p. 62)

It is in these “societies” that we see early forms of informal networks for African Americans to develop, which inevitably has transcended and morphed into an on-going moral and innate practice that can be found among many African American professionals who understand the need to provide support and guidance to new administrators of color. The other aspect of these informal networks includes knowing and understanding the surroundings with which they work, that is, the nuances of other ethnic groups.

During the suburban focus group specifically, there appeared to be a clear understanding of what being “aware” meant in relation to other cultures. Initiating this part of the dialogue, Retired SP-A shared that

SFG: . . .how you respond to people who are not of your village, because our comfort zone is in our village; when we step out of our village, we’re not as comfortable. So, you’re very comfortable in your, your village. So, you talk to people, you respond to people who are in your village [comments of “that’s correct” from other members in the group]. But if I’m not in your village, you got to understand who I am and how to respond to me.

Ret. SP-B: That’s right, because you have to know what you’re dealing with because people can tell if you’re not being upfront with them.

Ret. SP-A: He’s correct because you’ve got to hear their music, you’ve got to know how they worship. You have to even know how they die as a culture. You have to attend funerals. I went to a Muslim funeral for the first time and I didn’t know the protocol and everybody was Black. They were Black Muslims, men over there, women over there (group laughter) . . . and so from that experience, I told these teachers, you got to even

know how they [ethnic groups] die; not so much who they are, but also their community, their culture, and how they do things. You got to know it all.

Moreover, because of *de facto* segregation, African Americans during each historical era not only maintained a cultural connectedness, but also cultivated an intergroup network that provided familial support, guidance, and assurance in the wake of intense racial aggression. Although as a society, we are far removed from the noted periods, the impact of such networks for African Americans principals should not be minimized. More specifically, African Americans at each moment were able to develop their own faction that supported the collective with regard to how to operate and maneuver in different settings.

In terms of CRT, the tenet permanence of racism aptly applies here in that despite the progress in terms of being years removed from slavery, segregation, and civil rights, we are still as a country grappling with the lingering effects of prejudice and bigotry in society that, unfortunately, has impacted education, learning, and leadership within schools. Though not formally discussed (or labeled) in the interviews, it is imperative to note how many of the principals indirectly discussed micro-aggressions in both urban and suburban settings. As such, micro-aggressions are simply, “comments or actions that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group (such as a racial minority [or women]).”

Throughout the interview and group processes, all of the principals recounted and shared numerous examples based from their respective experiences where micro-aggressions were present, but not just labeled as such. Referring back to Retired SP-E, her position was very clear in not allowing “others” to “other you,” which implied not allowing such micro-aggressions to go unchallenged, but rather confronted directly. As SP-D mentioned, being

denied opportunities because he was Black, the football coach being scrutinized and questioned, and comments made within professional settings are all micro-aggressive behavior that, unfortunately, are rooted and based on false stereotypes.

Research Finding #3: Double Standards, Stereotypes, and Inequity

During the recent September presidential democratic debates, the following question was posed to each candidate: how do you plan to address issues of racism among young Black voters? Former Texas Congressman, Beto O'Rourke initiated his comments by speaking to the "foundational" reality of racism, specifically noting how it permeates in society, providing an example in education, via the inequity in discipline policies for K-5 students in Texas, where students of color are more likely to be suspended than their same aged peer. South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg further added that because of racism, we have "two worlds," noting that as a federal government, more needs to be done to support historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

After listening to each candidate, I am left with a simple and widely-known, yet unmentionable, fact: we cannot get away from racism and prejudice. Given the climate in this country regarding hate crimes, racial injustice and insensitivity, community and police relations, we as educators must keep in mind that students are being exposed to an entirely new society and culture that, arguably, incites the racial divide in different parts of the country. Regardless of setting, that is urban or suburban, our role as educational leaders is clear: we have to lead with equity in mind to equip our students for the realities of society. Additionally, as practitioners, since we have the ability to influence policies and practice, we have to also keep in mind our *own* biases that potentially impact our work as district and school-based leaders. Therefore, aspiring and seasoned principals of all ethnicities must be willing to answer (and keep in mind)

the question of *how* do we inspire and educate our students when they do not see themselves reflected in districts and schools – in other words, how do we balance staffing to reflect our changing student population.

As we embrace the 21st century, we know that we are entering a period where skilled and talented labor will not only require a certain skillset, but also demand diversity in the workplace as many companies compete internationally with other countries. While each of the presidential candidates spoke of the ills of racial prejudice, what must be thoughtfully considered is was the reference to the critical role which education will take both on a national and international stage as the emphasis on STEM based learning is growing rapidly. In this context, the CRT tenet, *permanence of racism*, is used to explore how African American principals are unfairly perceived, as incidents of racism, prejudice, and micro-aggressions still linger and impeded facets of educational institutions and districts in terms of the negative perceptions some people still have of African American principals.

Although briefly referenced in the previous section, McCray et al. (2007) provide an additional context for understanding the basic premise of *permanence of racism*, which acknowledges that racism is a reality in today's society deeply rooted in the historical trauma and nuances of America's past that have produced racist thought, ideology, and policies (p. 250). By understanding the concept of permanence of racism, CRT seeks to remedy situations where racism is present and impedes facets of society. Within this research specifically, the researcher acknowledges the impact of racism and prejudice as evidenced by the data collected from the principals interviewed in this study. As such, several of the urban and suburban principals have shared moments and incidents where they were either discriminated against and/or denied other opportunities, that is, being promoted despite having the appropriate skills and experience.

Additionally, many of the principals, in particular SP-D, provided an example from his experience where he later was told that he had been denied a promotion because he was Black.

McCray et al. (2007) provide a concise understanding of permeance of racism in relation to educational leadership, specifically in regard to the assumption of African American and their ability to lead,

The permeance of racism is rather evident in the placement of African Americans principals immediately after the *Brown* decision by virtue of the sheer number of reductions of black principals juxtaposed with the feeling of superiority by many southern Whites towards African Americans before, during, and after the decision of *Brown*. Today, this permeance of racism could also possibly be reflected in the lingering practice in reference to where African American and White administrators are hired and placed. (p. 251)

Many of the principals, particularly in the suburban group, acknowledged the double-standard and scrutiny they, as African Americans, experience in comparison to their counterparts. However, despite such instances of discrimination and micro-aggressions, both urban and suburban principals articulated that their purpose, or work as African American principals/administrators, is to challenge, if not eliminate, practices and policies that, and people who, reinforce inequity and prejudice in education.

Moreover, the experiences shared in many of the principals' responses speak to the earlier discussion in the literature review regarding the duality of African Americans battling against the negative stereotypes non-African Americans have of their skillset, inevitably creating a dichotomous reality, or as Mayor Buttigieg describes it, as "two-worlds." The personal examples shared by Retired SP-A, SP-C, Retired SP-B, UP-E, and UP-D all highlight an

unfortunate reality confronting African Americans, that historically, still lingers, that is, constantly having to prove one's value and ability to lead not only in diverse settings, but across professions as well. During the Urban Focus Group, the principals collectively agreed that

Urban Focus Group (UFG): There's still challenges within and outside of urban districts. When people hear that you work in an urban setting, there's this look of 'oh,' as if working in our district is less than.

Researcher: does anyone else agree with that?

Urban Focus Group - UP-E: yes, I think there's definitely a sense of arrogance because we [urban principals] are looked at differently.

UP-B: Because suburban principals don't have the same struggles that we have ...

Researcher: what struggles?

UP-B: I would say funding primarily, because even though some would argue that urban districts and communities may receive more in Title I dollars for example, there's still so many strings attached that you have to be very critical in programming; but what I was saying earlier is that in suburban districts, they [principal and administrators] have different struggles as far as appeasing rich, or upper-class parents.

In this researcher's own experience, he can certainly attest to not being given the opportunity, or benefit of the doubt, regarding his leadership ability before even starting in his principalship, which led to being mis-judged and mis-characterized. However, even in the midst of such realities, it was evident and equally clear from the principals interviewed that even though there has been tremendous progress in terms of African American presence in educational leadership, additional work needs to be done. To this end, this research is a step in that direction.

Finally, on the challenges of being a Black principal, a current middle school principal in the Oak Park area of Chicago, LeeAndra Khan (2016), wrote an article entitled “The Challenge of Being a Black Principal in Today’s Racial and Political Climate.” In this article, Khan shared her experiences in the Chicago school system, noting that the duality and struggle of being African and American in society, and particularly in education where one can be viewed as “not black enough” and/or criticized for positive relationships with White staff/stakeholders were critical areas for her. Khan also added that the lack of cultural understanding of students of color that reinforces negative perceptions when viewed in the context of their peers, for instance, clothing and attire, or “horse playing” being perceived as an actual fight, is something that she challenges constantly and directly.

When dealing with and addressing cultural biases and norms of students of color in the context of how they are viewed by others outside of their race, African American principals lead differently in comparison to their counterparts (Henderson, 2015). Whether negative perceptions and/or biases, such thinking and treatment leads and contributes to unfair and inequitable practices in terms of educational policy and instruction, that is in terms of curriculum, discipline policies, etc. This also provides a glimpse into what African American principals, as well as other ethnic minorities, must navigate in order to be valued and perceived as skilled educational leaders. For women, there is an added layer of having to not only deal with racial prejudice by virtue of their ethnic affiliation, but also the added layer of gender. In this regard, we continue the conversation by now looking at sexism and gender biases.

Research Finding #4: Sexism and Gender Biases

From the onset, the researcher must point out that gender and sexism both have been separated in this part of the discussion primarily because of the un-expected issues that emerged

related to that of gender biases articulated by the female principals, specifically in terms of gender and inter-group discrimination, that is, the struggle between African American male and female principals. As consistently stated thus far, even though gender is a sub-topic of this research, and deserves additional research, the researcher was able to interview three African American female principals, who, in so many words noted the inter-group struggle between their African American male counterparts. Just as the “ol’ boys” club was raised by the male principals interviewed, so too was this “ol’ boys” club further referenced by the women interviewed with regard to African American male principals and their relationships/associations among each other. In this regard, we further discuss this dynamic in terms of sexism and inter-group discrimination between African American males and females.

The inclusion of African American women in educational leadership is something that is often minimized, if not rarely acknowledged in a lot of the research literature on educational administration (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). However, after interviewing and speaking with the three African American women used in this study, it was evident that their role and voice as competent and skilled female leaders of color must be heard. In particular, UP-C provided the context and platform in which sexism was materialized based on her experiences and interactions with several of her male colleagues. During one of the questions about discrimination, UP-C shared with the researcher how one of her male counterparts and colleagues had a long history of sexual harassment complaints, and the money paid out by the district, and yet this male principal of color was still allowed to practice for years,

Researcher: I’m going to jump down that question, does gender, in your opinion, contribute to any inequities in educational leadership?

UP-C: Yes, and I have experienced that first hand under previous superintendents. There was [Dr. Principal] who basically pulled his pants down, and showed his royal ass (laughter); I mean, the *amount* of money that's been paid out because of that man is ridiculous, and he never received a reprimand, a write-up, nothing! And not only that, but over the years, he had so many sexual harassment claims, unfounded or not, that finally one of the Board members asked, "how much money have we paid out because of these cases against [Dr. Principal]?" I think the last settlement the district had to pay was \$486,000.00; and I wouldn't have believed it but I saw the check on the accountant's desk! So yes, absolutely there's discrimination!

Although this story illustrates a clear example of sexism, as well as lack of moral integrity, the researcher and UP-C further discussed the underlying double standard between UP-C's male colleagues of color being allowed to exhibit such behavior that obviously is unacceptable in any professional, and the level of "camaraderie" the male principals in UP-C's experience have had. This type of reverse discrimination from male African American principals creates not only an inter-group conflict among African Americans, but also strains the progress of African Americans in general, and women in particular, in effect causing a counter-productive relationship when such instances/treatment occur.

After listening to UP-C, the researcher felt obligated to highlight this finding, given the level of societal discrimination and prejudice various ethnic minority groups encounter. Despite such insensitivity from UP-C's counterparts, as the field of educational research grows and expands, scholars and experts must take note of the growing issue of sexism against women in general, and women of color in particular. In their study on African American female principals,

Bloom and Erlandson (2003) adds in their study on the theology of CRT for African American principals, male and female that,

Topics by and about African American women are not easily categorized within the disciplines of ethnic studies, African American studies, feminism, gender studies, or critical theory. Moreover, epistemological research about African American women conducted by African American women is deemed unremarkable in mainstream academia. Findings presented from a minority insider's perspective are regarded as dubious and unlikely to be published in professional journals. Suspect conclusions are summarily ignored or dismissed, seldom becoming a part of administrative leadership theory. The pursuits of academically devalued research and production of disciplinary, universalizing feminist discourses have been characterized as "risky business." (p. 344)

To the degree that more studies and stories by and about women of color in educational leaders increases, it is expected that their work as African American female principals can equally be regarded and relevant to the field of education, particularly as we see the diversity in student demographics on the rise. To this end, while the perspectives of the women used in this study do not speak for an entire group, it does highlight, again, the problem within educational leadership as a field of study and practice that women of color are still combating similar, and in many respects, additional, challenges as their male of color counterparts.

Moreover, based on several of the responses of the male principals, they appear to understand that women of color endure a dual challenge in terms of their ethnicity *and* gender affiliation. Further, the male principals in this study supported the notion that women of color have been discriminated against, just as much as they as Black men have been unfairly scrutinized and treated unfairly. However, what is equally interesting is that the male principals

also knew that for them, African American women were perceived as being more “acceptable” in the eyes of White families and educators. Both, SP-D and Retired SP-A, provided clear examples from their experiences in which, at the time, African American female principals had a greater chance toward being accepted by the White majority. Retired SP-B provided additional context in understanding the disparity in treatment of African American female principals, specifically in terms of salary and treatment in comparison to their White counterparts, which adds to the struggles of women in general, and African American women in particular. Thus, as we continue to move in the 21st century and the push for diversity and inclusion becomes emergent, we as educational leaders must recognize that gender is a part of the effort to provide students with a balanced reality of society that *is* becoming more diverse.

Summary

Throughout this research, many of the topics presented here supports the need to recruit and retain more African American principals. However, to reiterate, this research not only supports the case of increasing the numbers of male *and* female African American principals, but also supports the claim that students of color benefit most when they *see* themselves reflected in the curriculum, *and* in leadership positions (Johnston & Young, 2019). As such, it should be said that this equally applies to other ethnic groups, as *true* equity extends beyond just one cultural group, as our student populations in schools are becoming just as diverse. As a marginalized group, yes, African American students have historically struggled academically, but this researcher cannot ignore the reality that *all* students benefit when there is an authentic blend of cultures in the learning environment.

Each of the principals interviewed for this study, working in two distinct settings, provided candid insight into their practice as principals as evidenced by incidents of

discrimination, the existence of double standards, sexism, and professional challenges of working in both an urban and suburban setting to name a few. Obviously, given the small sample size used in this study, the researcher certainly does not generalize the principals' experiences to the entire population, but does recognize that there is a distinct set of challenges for African American male and female principals, which were presented and discussed throughout this research. The principal experiences provides insight into a larger issue equally related to this study, that is, training in graduate leadership programs. This is not to say that graduate schools can teach or change something that is inherently innate for some in terms of prejudice and biases, but programs can expose aspiring administrators to the nuances of working in culturally diverse settings, via field practicums.

Moreover, as our schools become more diverse, the researcher would caution district leaders to be clear in their intent and approach toward addressing the issues of cultural inclusion within education so that such well-meaning efforts are not trivialized and reduced to numbers. The intent, therefore, of this research is to state the obvious: we cannot promote the illusion of having diverse schools that are culturally inclusive in terms of both ethnicity *and* gender when the demographics of our leadership and instructional staff do not reflect the students we serve. To be fair, many current school-based and district level leaders receive minimal training upon fulfilling their leadership program, and many districts are now making equity, diversity and inclusion a part of their district goal. Unfortunately, this does not negate the fact that principals, at least in this study, participated in very few, if any, courses, forums, and/or seminars related to race, equity and diversity.

In a recent study conducted by the Rand Corporation, education analysts William Johnston and Christopher Young (2019) conducted a study of 12,954 principals from the

American School Leader Panel (ASLP), and 28,954 educators from the American Teacher Panel (ATP) respectively, during which these principals and teachers were surveyed about their principal-teacher training received while in graduate school. The study distinctly notes that

As only one in five educators in the United States is a person of color, preparation programs must support all educators' acquisition of the skills necessary to educate diverse students. However, these programs fall short at preparing principals to lead diverse schools in a culturally responsive manner or even to conduct meaningful conversation on diversity in their schools. (Johnston & Young, 2019, p. 3)

More specifically, of particular interest were the results to the question asked of principals and teachers regarding working with culturally diverse students, that is, Black, Latino, and low-income students. Reportedly, principals indicated that they were *least likely* to agree that they were prepared to work with Black, Latino, and low-income students, which was 60%, whereas teachers expressed lower levels of agreement at 68% (Johnston & Young, 2019, p. 9). Although the report explored additional areas in terms of the relevance of the field experience/practicum, pre-service training, and being able to support aspects of the school system, the results further appeared to indicate that there were fewer instances of agreement with regard to statements about “training to use data and support a diverse student body, and lower rated responses for preparation in working with Black, Latino, and low-income students” (Johnston & Young, 2019, p. 7). Although Johnston and Young address the level of principal and teacher preparation in working with Black, Latino, and lower economic students, the notion of working and being prepared to lead in a culturally diverse setting, inclusive of other ethnic groups, still presents as a challenge for many principals.

As stated before, this research is meant to be intentional in stating that as educational leaders, we have to confront issues of inequity in policy, curriculum, and staffing. In addition to the prejudice and bias that is still prevalent in many schools/districts, educators have to continue to push the conversation beyond talking, to more concrete ways they can improve the instructional condition for all students, and in particular, students of color. It should be noted that several of the principals in this study highlighted their work and participation in their respective districts with specific regard to diversity efforts. In short, districts cannot settle on increasing the diversity within administrative and instructional ranks. Rather, as educational leaders and graduate schools, academic institutions have to continuously assess and monitor systemic issues that effectuate policy and practice, and begin leading with the mindset that education for all, *means* education for all, and not at the exclusion of any ethnic group. Additionally, educational leadership programs have to revisit this area, particularly as there is a shift in demographics where districts are now enrolling more African American, Latino, and Asian students. Outside of its usage as a theoretical framework, one of the primary missions of CRT is that of action, with regard to challenging prejudiced-based practices and White privilege (McCray et al., 2007). To this end, we as educational leaders have to be intentional in this work toward challenging racial biases in education.

In this context, educational leadership programs are important to this discussion primarily because they are the main vehicle through which teachers become school-based and district-level leaders. For leadership programs, this is imperative as districts become more increasingly diverse, and incidents related to race and equity impact the future landscape of education. This researcher is of the mindset and belief that it is in the best interest for graduate leadership programs to revisit course offerings, programming sequence, and the field-practicum experience

to determine potential areas where culturally relevant instructions, leading in diverse settings, and identifying biases in education could be explored for aspiring administrators.

Much of the data obtained from the principals used in this study reinforces that there needs to be a revamping of programming within graduate schools, as most departments lack diversity. If the Johnston and Young (2019) report is any indication, then aspiring administrators will need such training and exposure to diverse academic settings. López (2003) aptly summarizes,

School leaders must be prepared to work with individuals who are culturally different and help create learning environments that foster respect, tolerance, and intercultural understanding. They must also have an awareness of the effect of racism and how it intersects with other areas of difference such as gender, sexual orientation, disability, and class oppression. (p. 71)

This level of “awareness” only comes when educational leaders and scholars acknowledge the limited conversations about race in schools and leadership classes, or what Diem and Carpenter (2013) refer to as “meaning full” silence, which refers to the absence of race-based conversation in pedagogy. As we enter the 21st Century, the global presence of countries requiring a diverse and skilled talented labor force in STEM based careers speaks to a necessity that requires districts to take note of as we prepare students for post-secondary careers.

Finally, it has been nearly 60 years since the *Brown* ruling and the United States is still grappling with the lingering issue of race and equity in American education. Since the Brown Case (1954) and the Little Rock Nine (1957), American schools are still battling the vestiges of segregated schools. Though very different times in terms of the racial turbulence of the 1960s, public schools are still surprisingly segregated in many areas. In many suburban districts, the

demographics in more affluent schools are shifting and witnessing more students of different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. This is not to say that issues of inequity do not persist, but rather to note that some schools are becoming more diverse. Many states are seeing the need to create more diverse schools by integrating students of various socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Brown (2005) succinctly observes that, “given the increasing number of schools in large, urban districts with majority African American student populations, leadership theory, preparation, and practice must be approached from a broader perspective—a perspective that includes the scholarship and knowledge of African Americans.” (as cited in Henderson, 2015, p. 585) The silencing of conversations within educational leadership programs has to be acknowledged and challenged to include the voice and perspectives of not only just African Americans, but other ethnic groups as well.

Therefore, educational leadership programs must be meaningful and “contextual” in considering the various social economic, political and situational nuances that impact education as a field, and educational leadership in particular (Brown, 2005, as cited in Henderson, 2015). It is this “context” that programs must include and revisit as societies and demographics change, and politics influence educational policies, programming, and funding, all trickling down to how we as educational leaders educate all children. To this end, the researcher offers the following recommendations for districts and implications for future study in the succeeding section.

Recommendations and Implications for Future Study

Green (2019) discusses the “silent crisis” in education, in which he recalls his early years as a student being educated in an urban environment and not really being “taught” as his peers in nearby suburban districts. It was not until he entered into college that he realized how ill-equipped he was, in effect causing him to teach himself how to learn. The “silent crisis”

described implies that students suffer in silence because they are not provided an appropriate education that supports the learning and growth as a child. Reinforcing and supporting this, the researcher is reminded of SP-D's response to one of the questions, in which he indicates that as a profession, "education is always dumped because we [educators] don't make it attractive." After collecting and reviewing all of the data, this researcher is convinced that if we are to make significant gains in addressing the achievement gap for marginalized students, the social-emotional needs and various learning needs of students, we need more than just a diverse pool of teachers, principals and district leaders. Rather, districts need to implement concrete initiatives that will provide on-going support of our students, staff and administration as we approach the global demands of the 21st century and diverse workforce. Thus, the researcher offers the following for both urban and suburban settings:

- Intentional Leadership: Since principals serve a critical role in the education and development of students (Johnston & Young, 2019), it is necessary to start here by stating that there is a need for bold and courageous leadership to address issues of bias, inequity and SES in education and make concerted efforts to hire administrators of color.
- HBCU Recruitment: Though the researcher did not attend an HBCU, many of the urban and suburban principals credit their experiences to attending an HBCU. As a viable option, a concerted effort must be made and/or initiated to recruit and encourage HBCU students to not only major in education, but also provide incentives and commitment to employment upon graduation.
- Administrative Village: In addition to tuition-reimbursement, more attractive incentives should be created to encourage principals to remain in administration. In

Newark, teachers were offered housing opportunities, which made recruitment efforts more compatible and appealing with other districts. It is suggested therefore that districts consider creating an “Administrative Village,” which could provide housing opportunities for school-based administrators. Given the numerous *after-school* events and meetings often required, this certainly can be an option worth exploring.

- Administrators Forum: Outside of the traditional cabinet meeting to discuss latest updates, districts should consider monthly networking meetings to discuss issues related to leadership and the instructional and professional needs of administrators where guest speakers, and/or colleagues from neighboring districts, are invited to present current trends in educational leadership and/or to discuss similar struggles to enhance professional practice and provide space to support each other.
- Community Lecture Series: To promote diversity, districts should consider offering community forums by partnering with local community-based organizations and/or colleges/universities whose mission aligns with district goals/objectives on diversity.
- Listening and Learning Circles: As districts grow in student diversity, schools should be implementing structures within buildings that support diverse children in terms of mentoring, providing a space to voice their concerns and add to the conversations within the district. In this sense, “Listening and Learning Circles” offer students a community of care, free from ridicule.

Although this is a relatively small list of recommendations, the researcher wanted to identify feasible options that districts can explore and seek to implement without a financial burden. As for graduate schools, it is clear that many educational leadership programs should

revisit its' programming to identify potential areas where offerings related to race, diversity and instruction can be added into the program, as all of these areas emerge with education.

In terms of implications, as indicated in the limitations section of this study, this research did not ascertain student perspectives regarding this issue, nor did it ascertain the perspectives of non-White administrators, namely superintendents, to weigh in on this issue regarding the role of African American principals and other principals of color. Further, the topic of gender certainly needs and deserves additional research into the nuances and dynamics that impact female principal's leaders in terms of race and sexism. Although the women interviewed in this study provide a glimpse into some of the challenges they face, it is understood that this topic warrants more discourse and research, particularly as districts seek to diversify the staffing in schools. Thus, given each of these noted topics, future studies can certainly expound upon the ideas put forth in this research, as well as those that are not, with specific regard to student and superintendent perspectives. In the end, this researcher believes that the content presented in this study revisits and further highlights the lingering issue of race, but also the relatively new issue of diversity and inclusion of principals of color as a valued asset in the education of all students.

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Appendix
IRB Approval



June 4, 2019

Edward Wilson
[REDACTED]

Dear Mr. Wilson,

The Research Ethics Committee of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board office has reviewed and **approved as submitted** under expedited review your research proposal entitled "Perceptions: A Comparative Case Study of Urban and Suburban African American Administrators."

Enclosed for your records is the signed Request for Approval form.

Reflecting the process for federally funded research, there will be no longer be a continuing review. Informed Consent documents and recruitment flyers will no longer be stamped.

Thank you for you cooperation.

Sincerely,

Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.
Professor
Director, Institutional Review Board

cc: Dr. Daniel Gutmore

Please review Seton Hall University IRB's Policies and Procedures on website (<http://www.provost.shu.edu/IRB>) for more information. Please note the following requirements:

Adverse Reactions: If any untoward incidents or adverse reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to immediately notify in writing the Seton Hall University IRB Director, your sponsor and any federal regulatory institution that oversees this research, such as the OHRP or the FDA. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn.