EMPOWERED INTERSECTIONALITY AMONG BLACK FEMALE K-12 LEADERS:
A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Carla McNeal

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Liberty University
2017
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ABSTRACT

Black female school leaders remain underrepresented as educational leaders in the K-12 context as marginalizing factors persist in the field. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black female school leaders through the lens of intersectionality. For this research study, intersectionality was defined as the intersecting realities of oppression. For the Black female, it is her race and gender. The following research questions were addressed: How do Black female school leaders describe their experiences with the intersectionality of race and gender? How (if at all) do participants’ experiences w/intersectionality influence their leadership practices? How do Black female school leaders describe their awareness of intersectionality as it relates to their decision-making? The theories that guided this study were critical race theory and Black feminist theory as they each affect and inform the career trajectories of the Black female school leader, how she leads, and how she is viewed and perceived by society. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, journaling, and document analysis. The analysis of data entailed a meticulous review of information, to include transcription, which revealed themes through coding methods. These themes include a) having to prove one’s self, b) having to deal with assumptions, c) having to be questioned by others, d) having to present concepts carefully, e) having their decisions challenged, and f) having a dedicated commitment to students.

Keywords: phenomenology, intersectionality, school leader, Critical Race Theory (CRT), Black feminist theory (BFT), and intersectionality theory
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Dedication

To my Faithful Heavenly Father: none of this would have been possible without You, for You are always doing “new things” (Isaiah 43:19).

To my husband, Cedric: your love, encouragement, and support has helped me to “see it through”. The sacrifices you have made for our country afforded me this amazing opportunity.

To my parents, Walter and Lois Morris: as I grew up, you listened to me as I dreamed and comforted me when I failed. This accomplishment is just as much yours as it is mine.

To my brothers, Johnathan and Justin: being your big sister is one of my life’s greatest joys. Our hilarious group texts came at the perfect time and gave me the comic relief that I desperately needed to help me regain my center.

In memory of my Grandmama, Bertha Baldwin Moorer: Every time I thought about giving up after September 23, 2014, I thought of you: “As ’tis once begun, never leave until it’s done. Be the labor great or small, do it well or not at all.” I miss you dearly, but the legacy of excellence that you left behind has been my motivation.
Acknowledgements

Many hands make light work and while I worked through many tears and frustrations on this beautiful endeavor, there are many people whose help made it possible.

To the sweetest circle of sister-friends: Christine, Traci, Dyan, Genevieve- your encouragement to push through with the help of prayer and cute emojis via text messages gave me life and were so appreciated!

To my prayer warriors: Norine, Rose, and Melissa- you were always just a text away and I knew that as soon as you saw my request for prayer, you would be entreating the Lord on my behalf.

To my Liberty colleagues: Dr. Lawrence Randolph, Dr. Bunnie Claxton, and Dr. Dimetri Richardson- you knew what the journey would look like and you offered prayers, advice, your ideas, and your eyes. Thank you for helping your fellow Flame make it!

To my committee: Thank you Dr. Sharon, for agreeing to guide me, Dr. Milacci, for showing me what to do with the bricks, and Dr. Townsend, for being available all times of the day and night for questions.

To my 15 wonderful and amazing participants: Your pseudonyms are the names of some of the most important women in my life, my family members who were and are the strongest and most beautiful women I know. You embody their courage, their tenacity to survive, and their commitment to excellence. Thank you for trusting me with your stories.
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List of Abbreviations

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Black Feminist Theory and Thought (BFT)

Critical Legal Studies (CLS)

Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Black women remain in the minority in the ranks of the school administration in the K-12 context (Horsford & Tillman, 2012; Jean-Marie, 2013; Nichols & Nichols, 2014; Reed, 2012). The purpose of this research study was to examine the complexity of intersectionality and how it has contributed to the Black female’s struggle to become leaders in America’s schools, but also how she can wield it in her favor as a positive force. Intersectionality is defined as the “manner in which multiple aspects of identity may combine in different ways to construct social reality” (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010, p. 176). This chapter will introduce the underrepresentation of Black female leaders through the lens of intersectionality; however, this cannot be done without first examining several notions: (a) the nature of race as it has played and continues to play a large role in America’s schools, starting with the desegregation of schools in the 1950’s, and (b) the marginalization of Black women in educational leadership due to the duality of their identities.

This transcendental phenomenology sought to uncover the lived experiences of Black female leaders in the K-12 context as they relate to intersectionality. These experiences are important in understanding how the Black female school leader’s awareness of intersectionality influences her leadership practices, how she engages with those around her, and how she can use it to her advantage. This research is important as it can inform educational practice, literature, and policy and it can also lead those who are in the position of hiring to choose Black females for leadership roles with confidence. This chapter will provide a foundation for the problem which necessitated the research that was carried out by the researcher. Additionally, situation to self and delimitations and limitations of the research were addressed. The chapter will also
provide the research problem and purpose statements, research questions, significance of the study, and definitions of the research study.

**Background**

As American society grows increasingly diverse, the government engenders an obligation to ensure that the nation’s schools are inclusive and work to embrace that diversity openly (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2014; Hossain, 2015; Tegeler, 2014). Since the Supreme Court’s ruling on integration in 1954, the teaching profession has attempted to follow this movement and has included individuals of all races as the profession needs to have its workforce reflect the demographics of the individuals it serves; however, the role of school leader has tended to remain dominated with individuals who are either male or White (Gooden, 2012; Jean-Marie, 2013; Reed, 2012). An exception to this norm is the Black female school leader.

The challenge for the Black female is that she has been socially marginalized and her ability to assert authority diminished because of her race and gender. Historically, her perspectives as they relate to school leadership have been left out (Alston, 2012). According to Babbit (2013), “Black women experience more prejudice, because both their race and gender are devalued” (p. 792). She is at the mercy of a concept called “intersectionality” which is identified as the intersection of systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination, and this oppression is not a singular or dual system, but an evolving structure that is more than just race or gender by themselves (Carastathis, 2014; Reed, 2012; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

As the Black female is a minority twice, and the recipient of what Essed (1991) coined as “double jeopardy,” she must overcome multiple barriers, as well as the implications of those barriers. In fact, some theorize that Shirley Chisolm, the first woman and first Black American to seek the presidential nomination of the Democratic party, experienced double jeopardy as she
was discriminated against doubly because of her race and gender (Mohr & Purdie-Vaughn, 2015). For the Black female school leader, she must find ways to overcome or transcend these barriers in order to be seen as competent and able to serve in a leadership capacity as school leader and facilitate learning in her building. Horsford and Tillman (2012) asserted that intersectionality warrants additional study as it enlightens Black women’s ability to lead. Consequently, many Black female leaders feel the need to prove themselves in the face of various marginalizing experiences that seek to strip them of the opportunity to be seen in society as representatives of knowledge (Jean-Marie, 2013).

The Black community and others saw the ruling of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) as a monumental victory for their race. It also dealt a crushing defeat of sorts with an unexpected consequence in Black schools: Black principals, who for a long time had served the Black schools with distinction as leaders, were all of a sudden without jobs as the Black segregated schools closed and the Black students integrated the White schools (Karpinski, 2006; Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014). Some of these principals were Black females, and whatever advances they had previously made in terms of rising up through the ranks of the educational field were abruptly negated as they lost their footing in the most ironic way.

The effects of the Brown (1954) decision reverberated throughout the Black community as the marked decrease of Black principals alone, with as much as 84% in one Southern state over a three-year period, also meant a loss of social justice advocates and living symbols of progress who were highly regarded and respected (Karpinski, 2006; Tillman, 2004a). These individuals led their schools and communities with distinction. While some gains have been made to return the Black educational leader to the position of school leader, the progress has been slow for
Black women as they remain underrepresented, specifically in positions of school leadership (Horsford & Tillman, 2012; Jean-Marie, 2013; Nichols & Nichols, 2014; Reed, 2012).

The literature expounding upon this underrepresentation is slowly increasing; in fact, there has been a distinct demand that Black female leaders, their challenges, and positions as leaders within a sometimes hostile context, warrant additional research and study (Horsford & Tillman, 2012; Reed, 2012). Even though there is literature that exists outside of that which recounts information about the White male school leader, more often than not, that literature has hinged on race and gender as two isolated concepts within the framework of gaining and maintaining school leadership positions. For example, Gooden (2012) indicated that literature about educational leadership within the last century “essentially came about without the voices or perspectives of African Americans” (p. 68). Furthermore, Dowdy and Hamilton (2012) purported that women still “remain underrepresented in leadership roles” (p. 190).

Potentially, there is a plethora of reasons for this underrepresentation, but what is more troubling is the lack of pertinent literature that exists which relates to the experiences of Black females. Several researchers have purported that although the study of race and race relations has become more prominent in the United States, Black women and their experience as school leaders remain largely overlooked in research (McClellan, 2012; Reed, 2012; Santamaria; 2013). In the ways that the research community has begun to address the disparities in leadership positions, it has been completed under a broad scope with little specificity, so one could argue that no real groundwork has been laid. Reed (2012) posited that any study completed on Black female leaders is usually “shrouded in the term women and minorities” (p. 42), and while some may argue that this is enough to bridge the gap, the research of the Black female school leader that expounds on and validates her unique place in society remains inadequate. The Black
female leader is justified in building a body of information that gives her voice credence in attempt to lead against the many disadvantages within the literal and figurative confines of public schools in the United States

**Situation to Self**

I am a Black female who has been in education since 2004 and has served as teacher, department chair, assistant principal, and executive director/principal. During my time as a teacher and administrator, there have been many opportunities to develop my personal ideas and thoughts about school leadership and what school leadership means. Through these opportunities, which have included the cultivation of relationships with Black female school leaders with whom I have a great deal in common, I realized that being a school leader means something very different depending on one’s skin color and race. There is a distinct need to add to the limited literature and research that informs educational communities on the influence that the intersectionality of race and gender has on Black female school leaders. Nevertheless, the goal is to discover that although the concept of intersectionality has historically exuded negative aspects, it can also be seen as something positive.

I went into this study with several biases, and had to account for those as the research was completed through an extensive bracketing process, which is known as epoche. According to Moustakas (1994), epoche involves eliminating “prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas” about concepts and theories (p. 85). As mentioned above, this is achieved mainly through a bracketing process. Bracketing allows the researcher to control his or her natural attitude as it relates to the focus of the research. Moustakas (1994) further purported that employing epoche in research allows the individual to view concepts and events from different perspectives as if
seeing “them again, as if for the first time” (p. 85). Engaging in this form of self-checking makes the study more valid and adds an additional layer of credibility.

In order to understand my reason for conducting this research, the philosophical assumption that I injected into the research is an epistemological assumption. Epistemology is a theory of knowledge which investigates the relationship between the participant and myself (Lee, 2012). Individuals are more than the experiences that they have had and more than the challenges that they encounter; however, they can use those experiences and challenges to make meaning of their lives and develop their own way of engaging with them and interpreting them. As such, the paradigm in this research study was social constructivism (Patton, 2002). It was necessary to utilize the constructivist approach in this study because it “assumes that reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single, observable reality” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 8). I currently work with one of the individuals who volunteered to be my participant and I also maintain personal and professional relationships with some of the other participants as they are my mentors and colleagues.

**Problem Statement**

There is an underrepresentation of Black female school leaders in public schools in the United States (Horsford & Tillman, 2012; Jean-Marie, 2013; Nichols & Nichols, 2014; Reed, 2012). The problem specific to this research study is that the literature in educational leadership that contains the voices and recounts the experiences of the Black female school leader is narrow and limited (Santamaria, 2014). Primarily, this is for two reasons: there are not enough Black females who serve as school building leaders and historically, the literature has usually supported and included the voice of the dominant majority (Gooden, 2012). Furthermore, the
intersectionality of her race and gender frequently defies the norms that have been established by the dominant group (Horsford, 2012).

In a review of the literature, intersectionality is not observed through a positive lens as a means of helping Black females in general in a constructive way. The mere fact that intersectionality is defined as an “oppressive” system speaks to the nature of how it is perceived (Reed, 2012). Furthermore, Warner and Shields (2013) found that intersectionality could actually create both oppression and opportunity for the person that experiences it. These facts alone necessitate more research into viewing the careers of the Black female school leader through the lens of intersectionality and how she can use it to inform her practice.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black female school leaders through the lens of intersectionality; in particular, the study investigated the phenomenon of being Black and female in a career field that is dominated by individuals who are either male or White. For the purposes of this research, intersectionality was generally defined as the intersecting realities of oppression (Reed, 2012). For the Black female, it is her race and gender. The theories guiding this study were critical race theory (Bell, 1973), Black feminist theory (Hill-Collins, 2009), and intersectionality theory as they each affect and could positively inform the career trajectories of Black female principals and how she is viewed and perceived by society.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is significant in contributing to the gap in the literature that focuses specifically on the Black female school leader through the lens of intersectionality. The majority of research that exists focuses on leadership from the perspective of individuals who are either...
male or White (Gooden, 2012; Jean-Marie, 2013; Reed, 2012). In addition, there is research that attempts to illuminate the Black female school leader’s overall experience, but that literature is glossed over using the terms “women” and “minorities” (Reed, 2012). Therefore, this study fills in some gaps by providing qualitative data detailing how Black female school leaders can benefit from their intersectionality, and can use it to improve their practice and give credence to their experiences with direct focus and specificity. The study also contributes to additional understandings about critical race theory and Black feminist theory as they relate to educational administration and Black females.

This study was significant to all education stakeholders and it especially appeals to those in positions of hiring and to those concerned with the performance of schools led by minority leaders who are female. The findings show them that Black females are competent and are more than their race and gender. The findings from the study appeals to teachers in the classroom as it will allow them to locate and reconcile their own personal thoughts and presuppositions about minority female leaders. Since the findings from the study provide more positive perspectives on Black female school leaders, teachers may be more willing to see beyond race and gender and support these leaders more. Lastly, it appeals to community leaders and members, including parents and guardians of students. If they are confident in the leadership of Black females, they may direct more of their efforts towards assisting them with school-based needs and initiatives, and spend less time challenging or questioning their efforts and motivations. By taking a concept such as intersectionality and illuminating it through the lens of positivity and optimism, this study changes how race and gender are viewed in terms of leadership capacity in public secondary schools.
Research Questions

What role does intersectionality play in the careers of Black female school leaders and how can they use intersectionality in a positive way to improve their careers? The following questions addresses the topic and the research:

RQ1: How do Black female school leaders describe their experiences with the intersectionality of race and gender as they serve in various capacities of school leadership?

This question is significant as it allows them to personally define their experiences in their own words. Horsford and Tillman (2012) noted that “when articulating the challenges of Black women principals or superintendents, one must carefully consider whether the challenges are due to their Blackness, womanhood, neither, or both” (p. 2). The lived experiences of Black female school leader begin with the “things themselves” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41) and they are able to construct their understandings from their own experiences.

RQ2: What specific challenges do participants face and how do they engage with and resolve them?

Black female school leaders must contend with the negative stereotypes that are evident because of identities placed on them by societal constraints. For example, in their study, Hirshfield and Joseph (2012) noted that women of color often have to deal with stereotypes that portray them as “maternal or nurturing”, which negates from their being seen as powerful and capable of making decisions that are not based on feeling or emotion (p. 220). Additionally, when Black women are decisive or use assertive measures in their leadership, their assertion may be mistaken for aggression (Cook, 2012).

RQ3: How (if at all) do participants’ experiences with intersectionality influence their leadership practices?
Reed (2012) posited that good leadership practices are often attributed to men. Furthermore, since Black females still experience and encounter challenges in securing school leadership positions, there has to be a conclusion that Black females are still seen as less than competent in terms of leadership in this field (Horsford & Tillman, 2012; Jean-Marie, 2013; Reed, 2012). Essed’s (1991) theory of “gendered racism” has multiple implications for Black female administrators because in some arenas, her race and gender can play in her favor, while in others, particularly in that of educational leadership, they work against her in many ways.

RQ4: How do participants describe their awareness of intersectionality as it relates to their decision-making in their leadership roles?

Black female administrators are aware that when they make decisions about their schools, there are those who will question her decision-making and wonder if her race and gender have anything to do with the decision. Because of the complex nature of school administration and the growing expectations that society demands of schools, all decisions will be scrutinized; however, the decisions of the Black female school leader will encounter more scrutiny. Because of their race and gender, it is assumed that they lack credibility which leads to their decisions being checked instead of supported (Cook, 2012).

**Definitions**

1. *Black* - According to the US Census Bureau, “Black or African American” refers to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. (US Census Bureau, 2010).

2. *Intersectionality* - The “manner in which multiple aspects of identity may combine in different ways to construct social reality” (Sanchez-Hueles & Davis, 2010, p. 176).
3. **Critical Race Theory (CRT)** - A theoretical framework derived from Critical Legal Studies (CLS) that was established to provide a critical analysis of race and racism. Within education, this framework analyzes how race impacts behavior and relationships. (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Gooden, 2012; Santamaria, 2014).


5. **Intersectionality Theory** - A theory developed from the various concepts drawn out of marginalized women’s experiences that were different from experiences contained within Western feminism (Cheshire, 2012).

6. **School Leader** - A term that defines a “principal, assistant principal, or other individual who is employed at a school and who may be responsible for the daily instructional leadership and managerial operations in the elementary school or secondary school building” (NAESP, n.d.); may be used interchangeably with “administrator” or “instructional leader”.

7. **Counter-storytelling** - A tool that CRT scholars employ to dispute racist portrayals of social life. According to Martinez (2014), counter-storytelling is “a method of telling stories by people whose experiences are not often told” and works “to expose, analyze, and challenge stock stories of racial privilege and can help to strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance” (p. 38).

8. **Master narrative** - According to Woodson (2017), “the social mythologies that mute, erase, and neutralize features of racial history and struggle in ways that reinforce ideologies and practices of White supremacy” (p. 319).
Summary

The first chapter introduced this research study. There is an underrepresentation of Black female school leaders in public schools in the United States (Horsford & Tillman, 2012; Jean-Marie, 2013; Nichols & Nichols, 2014; Reed, 2012). A synopsis of the applicable literature demonstrated the fact that Black females are still underrepresented in the United States’ public schools. In addition, there is a large gap that, if filled, will also allow researchers to understand and illustrate the experiences of Black female school leaders from their perspective and how the intersectionality of their identities can be used in a positive way. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black female school leaders through the lens of intersectionality and show how intersectionality could be used to inform educational practice. The researcher’s motivation for conducting the research, relationship to the participants, and paradigm beliefs were delineated.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

There is an underrepresentation of Black female school leaders in public schools in the United States (Horsford & Tillman, 2012; Jean-Marie, 2013; Nichols & Nichols, 2014; Reed, 2012). The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black female school leaders through the lens of intersectionality and show how intersectionality could be used to inform educational practice and as a positive tool for Black female school leaders. The purpose of Chapter Two of this research plan is to provide a theoretical framework for the study and a review of relevant literature pertaining to Black female school leaders and the potential influence of intersectionality of their race and gender.

In addition, the chapter includes relevant literature that gives historical context to the underrepresentation of Black female school leaders in public schools. It also outlines intersectionality in terms of what it is, how it works, and how it affects them in their career paths. The literature also highlights the Black female school leader’s unique place in society and how this place, if examined properly, can assist other marginalized minority groups.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework includes interrelated concepts that guide and direct a researcher’s study. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a theoretical framework is the “underlying structure, the scaffolding or frame” of a study (p. 85). This research study was grounded in Bell’s (1973) critical race theory (CRT), Hill-Collins’ (1986) Black feminist theory (BFT), and intersectionality theory, developed largely by Crenshaw (1989). Together, they provide a foundation that allows the study to illuminate the identities of the Black female for the purpose of analyzing and exploring her experiences as they relate intersectionality and serving as
school leaders. Carter (2013) noted that through the first two theories, Black women and others can see that Black females’ work is simply a “continuation of a legacy of racial and gender struggles” (p. 39). All three theories together show the various intersections of identify and can clarify the specific oppressions or empowerment that a Black female school leader may feel at any given time.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory (CRT) was introduced in the 1970s as a response to the perceived failure of the jurisprudence concept *critical legal studies* (CLS). According to some researchers, CLS did not appear to sufficiently provide racial reform that could address the race problems that persisted within the US justice system (Khalifa, Dunbar, & Douglas, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Although the construct endeavored to question the existence of a true “meritocracy,” CLS did not completely and comprehensively address and engage the troubling nature and complexities of race (Cook & Williams, 2015; DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016). In understanding the plight of people of color, scholars wanted something more to implement when understanding the nuances of various disparities that persisted in American society.

To address these disparities, legal scholars Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado are credited with developing CRT as a concept to better respond to racial disparities in American society (Gooden, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Historically, those who are White have had the upper hand in means and opportunities simply because of their race. CRT addresses this presumption as it utilizes analytic structures and methods that not only question the presumption, but challenge it, as well (Gooden, 2012).

CRT provides a method by which Black people, as well as other races, can move towards liberation by creating their own truths grounded in their own unique experiences. Woodson
(2017) postulates that CRT’s “framework is specifically concerned with limitations of majority-rule democracy and post-racial philosophies in addressing racial inequality” (p. 318). Most researchers list five tenets of CRT that join together to reveal what it means to be marginalized and disenfranchised in a White-dominant society. These tenets are counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism (Gooden, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Capper (2015) also lists intersectionality as the sixth tenet of CRT and this tenet will be highlighted further in this section. Understanding how these six tenets are almost imperceptibly woven into American society can explain the multiple ways that race continues to be a challenge in the 21st century. The development of this theory has done much in the way of unpacking race and its complexities. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) stated “critical race theorists have built on the everyday experience with the perspective, viewpoint, and power of stories” (p. 38).

Unlike CLS, which was mostly developed to address the needs of jurisprudence, CRT can be used in all facets of American society and its implementation in education has been attributed to Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate as they introduced it as a means of addressing racial disparities in education (Anderson & Dixson, 2016; Capper, 2015; Howard & Navarro, 2016; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Particularly, Ladson-Billings and Tate theorized that schools and educational entities become the place where White people implement policies and initiatives that marginalize Black students (Dumas & Ross, 2016). Additionally, according to Howard and Navarro (2016), Ladson-Billings and Tate understood that individuals of color brought different perspectives, experiences, and ideas with them to school and those concepts were largely ignored in those schools. Since the concept of race is so multifaceted, it cannot be comprehended one-dimensionally. There are many presuppositions, both positive and negative,
that come with the words “Black” and “White”. As such, it becomes necessary to be much more
cognizant and aware of how these terms impact life in everyday society.

Ladson-Billings (1998) explained how certain characteristics are connected to certain races
and how those characteristics influence societal thought. Specifically, as whiteness is postulated
as the norm within American society, those character traits that are seen as good and those that
exude superiority are attributed to whiteness regardless of the race of the individual embodying
the character trait. CRT contests this notion of White privilege (Gooden, 2012) and makes an
appeal for an active interrogation of its pervasiveness in society. Ladson-Billings (1998) stated
that:

It is because of the meaning and value imputed to whiteness that CRT becomes an
important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction:
deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourse, reconstruction of human agency,
and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power. (p. 9)

Thus, CRT becomes the means that can be used to uncover the multiple complexities that define
the Black experience.

Understandably, the experience of one’s race being diminished because of the presumed
higher status of another can cause an extensive impact on a Black person’s place in society. For
Black women in particular, CRT is appropriate for analyzing her struggles as Santamaria (2014)
noted that it is used to “challenge conventional accounts...of social processes that occur as a
result of multidimensional oppressions” (p. 352). Those oppressions lead to marginalization and
CRT becomes the tool by which conversations can start that may bring these experiences of
marginalization to light and focus on reconciliation. Berry and Dixson (2015) indicated that an
essential component of CRT holds that White superiority is retained within laws, policies, and
structures by way of methodically standardizing whiteness or standards of White culture. When it comes to education, Dumas and Ross (2016) state that CRT is basically an effort to process and counter institutionalized racism as experienced by Black people.

In American society, there are many stories of implied truth and authenticity that the majority holds as a central part of its identity, even if that truth subjugates and stereotypes others. Counter-storytelling gives individuals a choice to consider alternate possibilities of the story (Martinez, 2014). With counter-storytelling, those who employ CRT in an attempt to balance the playing field in equity and opportunity can contest the norms held within the stories of the privileged majority (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Counter-storytelling is the way that CRT defies the master narrative by discrediting the “validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 144). The whiteness of that majority gives them credibility; counter-storytelling lays the gauntlet down at the feet of that credibility, challenging its purity and accuracy.

For Black female school leaders, their voice has been inaudible because the stories of the majority have outnumbered theirs. Their stories are not being told from their own perspectives, which renders their experiences non-existent and unimportant. Ladson-Billings (1998) noted that stories of experience provide context for understanding and interpretation, and allows people of color to name their own reality. In this way, Black female school leaders are able to share their experiences that refute the familiar, yet inaccurate, themes present in the “privileged discourses…therefore serving as a means for giving voice to marginalized groups” (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 27). As long as Black women’s experiences are left out of the master narrative, stereotypes will continue to feed the inequities that exist and produce arduous obstacles for them to overcome as they try to gain access to leadership positions in educational fields (Grant, 2012.)
The permanence of racism encompasses the idea that racism has always been and will always be as a perpetual facet of American life, never to end albeit sometimes an unconscious act (Capper, 2015). This system, steeped in a historical, social, and experiential context “remains true even with seeming societal gains and persons of color occupying positions of power and prestige in U.S. society” (Capper, 2015, p. 800). Nevertheless, this system can also be employed in a positive way to allow an individual to confront racism head-on without prevarication. As such, it makes sense when marginalized groups (read: Black people) make progress only to be then subjected to repercussions as the White majority emerges to reaffirm and reassert its dominance (Bell, 1992). Hegemonic practices by the majority are a burden to Black people and perpetuate a system of institutionalized racism (Decuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016). Thus, the permanence of racism, according to Drakeford (2015), continues to be preserved by the notion of “white privilege” because it is not a conscious act like overt discrimination.

In educational leadership, the permanence of racism can help White leaders, in particular, understand that they “themselves are racist…all leaders regardless of race are complicit in racism” (Capper, 2015, p. 800). School should be the place where students learn and are prepared to face society with the appropriate tools for success; however, the leaders in some of these buildings continue to grapple with an age-old construct that denigrates and marginalizes minority students as individuals that may essentially threaten their academic success.

Understanding and analyzing the tenet of the permanence of racism shows that people have belief systems, conscious and unconscious, about race and this is where honest conversations can begin (DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016).
Whiteness as property may be, without question, the most pervasive and dominant tenet of CRT. As a person’s whiteness carries along with it opportunities that may include benefits which come “from privileges granted to them as a result of, or in response to, their White status” (Hossain, 2015, p. 53). Thus, this whiteness as property may act as a medium through which they receive everything good that society has to offer. This includes their being seen as the ones who will most likely be honest. Ladson-Billings (1998) wrote of a story of a White woman who went shopping for groceries, but once her items were rung up, she then realized that she had forgotten her checkbook. The cashier allowed the woman to take the groceries home and said she could bring the check back later on. As this woman relayed this story to a male friend who was Black, he assured her that he would not get the same treatment. The White woman countered that he would and he suggested that they test her theory. He went to the same cashier as his White female friend (after having had the friend point her out to him) and shared that he had forgotten his checkbook; however, he was told that “he could push the grocery items to the side while he went home to get his checkbook” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 16). The woman’s whiteness was collateral, a guarantee of her honesty and evidence that she could be trusted. The Black male was not treated with the same regard.

As stated several times in this review of the literature, the role and positions of educational leader and administrator in schools has been reserved for mostly White males. This is their right and according to the tenet of whiteness as property, this right is appropriate. Hiraldo (2010) noted that whiteness as property affords White people the right to possess, use, and enjoy any interest that they wish, professional and personal. For this reason, it can be concluded that since White males (and the White majority, to include females) have significant interest in the position of educational leader because of their property rights, then they also have the right to exclude
Black females or any other minority without any real reason. While abstract, the concept of whiteness as property speaks to the intangible, yet significant, act of denying Black females the position of school leader.

Interest convergence is a concept which hypothesizes that most advances made by a minority race have been because of the self-interest of Whites and this tenet of CRT supports the argument that Blacks only made gains in the Civil Rights struggle when those gains would also place Whites at an advantage (Gooden, 2012). This suggestion is immensely echoed by Ladson-Billings (1998) as she stated that “although under attack throughout the nation, the policy of affirmative action has benefited Whites, a contention that is validated by the fact that the actual numbers reveal that the major recipients of affirmative action hiring policies have been White women” (p. 12). According to Gooden (2012), Derrick Bell often questioned why the Supreme Court finally agreed to side with the NAACP in the pivotal Brown case after years of forced school segregation. He eventually concluded that it was more important for the United States to finally take steps that would secure its domestic and economic position as a world superpower; it really had little do with advancing the progress and eliminating the marginalization of Black people (Gooden, 2012).

When placed in a position of school leadership, Black females have to wonder if they are being placed there because of their abilities or if they are being placed there because it is in the best interest of the dominant majority. According to Moore (2013), Black women are often placed at schools that are predominately Black, as if that is the only place that they can be effective. In this, Black females are placed in a situation that may contradict their allegiances. They have risen to the rank of leader; however, their full potential may not be fully realized or utilized because that placement may be because of her race and not her capabilities. On the other
hand, Black women may be hired simply to fulfill an initiative, i.e. affirmative action. This is not the answer, either. Simply put, without a complete overhaul of hiring practices that address inequities in leadership based on race, the hiring of Black females as educational leaders will “only fall victim to negative societal perceptions expressed as incompetence” (Wallace, Moore, & Curtis, 2014, p. 47).

The critique of liberalism is perhaps the most complex of all of the tenets, but understanding its complex nature can shed much needed light on CRT and American society. In addressing Blacks’ rights and the drive to achieve social justice, the methods used are often slow and painstaking, much to the dismay of individuals who envision a more aggressive approach. Ladson-Billings (1998) wrote that the liberal perspective of the Civil Rights Movement was greatly flawed as that perspective did not take into account the inability of the legal paradigms of that time to implement social change. Liberalism asserts that colorblindness, the neutrality of the law, and incremental change work together to ensure the progress of marginalized groups. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) challenged this assertion when they stated:

Given the history of racism in the U.S. whereby rights and opportunities were both conferred and withheld based almost exclusively on race, the idea that the law is indeed colorblind and neutral is insufficient (and many would argue disingenuous) to redress its deleterious effects. (p. 29)

When White leaders in education place Black females in school administrative positions, it sometimes is an attempt for equality and it is believed that this is appropriate and noble. They do this under the auspices of colorblindness for the greater good of society. However, DeCuir and Dixson (2004) indicate that colorblindness allows people to ignore racist procedures that actually preserve social inequality. Instead, these researchers stated that there should be a push
for equity, which recognizes the fact that the playing field is unequal. If done equitably, the placement of Black female school leaders will occur based on qualifications and ability and not simply to level the playing field.

CRT has some critics; those individuals may argue that the concept does more harm than good as a methodical tool for improvement and understanding race relations. The five tenets of CRT have been identified not to place anyone at a disadvantage or to point fingers, but to instead encourage racial progress and identify specific encounters and situations that stifle that progress. In fact, Howard and Navarro (2016) argued that although CRT has been growing, there remains an uncertainty among researchers on how to use it concretely. CRT brings to the forefront what the majority race cannot see, whether that inability is by accident or by design. Delgado (2013) reaffirmed the need for the analytic model of CRT as he stated, “Whites rarely see blatant or subtle acts of racism, while minority people experience such acts all of the time” (p. 407).

For the Black female school leader, CRT discloses outlooks and beliefs purported as the norm by mainstream and White culture (Stevens, 2014), which impacts her leadership and her leadership opportunities. CRT is a framework through which the Black female school leader can explain her experiences that are, essentially, a reflection of “the epistemological worldview of a group of people that have experienced racism, discrimination, and marginalization” (Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009). CRT gives her the platform to stand and make her voice heard and recognized as a credible contributor to the field of leadership and educational research. When she knows and understands the institutionalized and systemic challenges that she faces because of her race, she is able to better navigate the somewhat tenuous waters of educational leadership.
**Black Feminist Theory**

The words “Black” and “feminist” used together may invoke thoughts of hostility and opposition; however, in the context in which this literature is situated, it is quite the opposite. Amoah (2013) and McClellan (2012) hypothesized that Black feminist theory may have possibly existed before many other contemporary theories, but it was given a specific name and face by Patricia Hill-Collins (2009) in her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. This theory originated out of Black women’s desire to have a concept dedicated to their specific and very uniquely different place in society and culture (Amoah, 2013; McClellan, 2012).

The Black female experience is rich with an abundance of distinctively separate encounters within the framework of American life and society. As a result, Black women, by and large, do not feel that there is anyone with the authority or right to speak on their experiences or even try to quantify them (Amoah, 2013). Simply put, since Black women experience life through multiple means of identity, they also “experience life through various lenses of interlocking forms of domination” (McClellan, 2012, p. 91) and as such Black feminist thought recognizes Black women as “agents of knowledge as well as agents of change” (p. 91).

In their article “Conquering the Black Girl Blues” Jones & Guy-Shefthall (2015) conceded that Black women face both an inquiry into womanhood and a challenge related to their race. By using existing research, they identified five commonalities within Black feminist thought: (1) Black women’s experience with the oppressive nature of racism, classism, and sexism; (2) the implications of this triple threat that affect Black women differently than Black men or White women; (3) the struggle for liberation (being Black) and gender equality (being female) at the same time; (4) the absence of an immediate move to address the many *isms* that
place some groups at a disadvantage; and (5) Black women are intricately connected through their lived experiences as they dedicate their efforts to rescuing Blacks and women. For the purpose of this study, the first two points are being addressed.

Black women have a wealth of experiences with the oppressive nature of racism, classism, and sexism. Those experiences have taught them a plethora of lessons and McClellan (2012) found that positioning those experiences at the heart of analysis engenders a different way that oppression is understood. According to Alinia (2015), Black feminist thought does not only concern itself with that oppression, but it also highlights the possibilities within “resistance, activism, and the politics of empowerment” (p. 2334). Black women have the ability to use their experiences in constructive ways that lend themselves to other uplifting causes. Despite this ability, Black women are still relegated to a place where society thinks they should be and are usually vulnerable to experiences that seek to contain them to that place, being typically not a place of high regard (Jean-Marie, 2013). If and when Black women challenge this treatment in an attempt to break free from the constraints imposed by society, they are potentially viewed as hostile or aggressive- the infamous “angry Black woman” (Tillman, 2012).

The experience of navigating the multiple isms that are related to being a Black female can place Black female school leaders in the perfect place for leading efforts to address and eradicate the negative implications attached to each one. McClellan (2012) noted that Black women’s experiences place them in an ideal position to impact intellectual thought about how intersecting forms of oppression affect “educational opportunities, economic freedom, and political disenfranchisement” (p. 90) because of their familiarity with them. As the United States continues to flourish as a melting pot, so will the potential for racism and classism. Schools are
not immune to these negative occurrences, so Black women, as school leaders, can implement procedures and constructs that encourage dialogue and address these challenges.

Civil rights icon Dorothy Height said that “a Negro woman has the same kind of problems as other women, but she can’t take the same things for granted” (Horsford, 2012, p. 19). To go further, a Black woman may have the same kind of problems as Black men, but again, the implications are different. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) framed these two assertions together by stating that Black women share their gender with White females and their race with Black males, but unfortunately, they do not benefit from the camaraderie that sometimes develops through shared struggles. The Black feminist stance on racism, classism, and sexism has revealed a system of overlapping oppression. This speaks to the “intersectionality” of that Black women have to contend with on a daily basis. Currently, race and gender exude more of a need for study as class can, in some ways, fall under both as her race and gender may automatically place her in a lower class by default.

Black females remain the minority in the ranks of school leadership (Horsford & Tillman, 2012; Jean-Marie, 2013; Nichols & Nichols, 2014; Reed, 2012). As noted in several locations of this review, those positions are mostly held by individuals who or White and or male. As an anomaly and outsider in the position, Black females are given the opportunity to use their status to address disenfranchisement. Although being the outsider can promote isolation, Wilder, Jones, & Osbourne-Lampkin (2013) stated that Black women “bring a multitude of diverse perspectives, talents, and ideologies to the academic classroom and workplace” (p. 33) which actually serves them, and can serve others, as well. Black female school leaders can utilize this capacity to transcend the perceived disadvantages of not being White or male.
Black women often struggle to locate themselves within the paradigms of social identity. Indeed, the unique sets of circumstances defining who they are, as well as who they are not, carry with them disparaging perceptions by society. One’s social identity can fall into one or more categories and these categories carry with them meanings on the micro and macro levels in society’s collective understandings (Wilkins, 2012). The unfortunate consequence of this is that if that collective understandings swing negatively, the entire group is subjected to that negativity. Horsford and Tillman (2012) identified the Black woman’s reality as a place where she is unseen in society and not worthy of being a recipient of the opportunities linked to being male, White, or a “lady”. Black women, in the 21st century, are still yearning to break free of the negative identities that society has bestowed upon them.

As for Black female school leaders, they experience, what Reed (2012) noted as a “double portion of disparity” (p. 42) because they are members of two subordinate groups which may lead them to be keenly aware of both identities. When the additional layer of school leadership is added to the existing multiplicities of their identity, their reality becomes even more complex. Because of these complexities, Hill-Collins (2009) asserted that Black women need to work towards developing their own body of knowledge that includes another perspective which counters any that may be proposed by the dominant majority. She noted:

Black feminist thought reflects the interest and standpoint of its creators. Tracing the origin and diffusion of Black feminist thought or any comparable body of specialized knowledge reveals its affinity to the power of the group who created it. Because elite White men control Western structures of knowledge validation, their interests saturate the themes, models and epistemologies of traditional scholarship. (p. 251)
Thus, the separate identities that Reed (2012) wrote of become powerful tools of construction that allow Black female school leaders to become agents of knowledge that speak directly to their unique stations in American society.

**Intersectionality Theory**

There are some varying opinions among researchers about whether or not intersectionality is an actual theory or just a means for the examination of situations. Some texts list it as an “analytical tool for studying, understanding, and responding to the ways in which gender intersections with other identities” (Symington, 2004, p. 1); however, several researchers have identified it as a theory. Else-Quest and Hyde (2016) explained that it is indeed a theory because “researchers who adopt critical theory are concerned with empowering individuals and groups to transcend the constraints imposed by the constructed inequities of social categories” (p. 158) and implementing intersectionality into academic discussions does just this. For the purposes of this research, intersectionality will be identified as a theory.

While multiple research articles propose multiple definitions of the theory itself, the most cohesive and comprehensive definition of this theory states that “the concepts that form the foundation of intersectionality theory grew out of women’s experiences of marginalization and struggle within Western feminism” (Cheshire, 2013, p. 6). Cheshire based this definition on the works of several feminists, to include Kimberle’ Crenshaw and bell hooks. It was Crenshaw (1989) who is credited with the development of intersectionality itself in her article, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”.

As a law professor, Crenshaw was concerned with the inequities that existed in court systems as it related to Black women and their inability to gain justice in certain cases,
specifically discrimination cases. She believed that in these cases, decisions were usually decided on in terms of gender or race as two exclusive concepts and these two groups typically only included Black men or White women. She theorized that “this focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). From this, Crenshaw endeavored to develop a paradigm that transcended feminist theory and antiracist policy because these two concepts tended to exclude Black women from the discussion as Black women were not a member of any majority group.

As a result, intersectionality has become a powerful component of analysis for understanding the experiences of those who are not members of any majority group. Bright, Malinsky, and Thompson (2015) wrote that “social theory concerning gender and race has tended to proceed as if ‘all the women are white, all the blacks are men’” (p. 60). This reiterates Crenshaw’s assertion that Black women are often left out of conversations that include addressing inequities in society. A salient example of this is Sojourner Truth’s speech “Ain’t I A Woman?” In it, Truth decried the inability of the abolitionist and suffrage movements to address her specific challenges:

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about? That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman?
Truth brought to the forefront the hypocrisy in the suffrage movement as it was, because it did not embrace the Black woman’s struggle. In fact, Crenshaw (1989) indicated that “Black women were something less than real women, their experiences had no bearing on true womanhood” (p. 154). In deconstructing the tenets and ideologies of intersectionality theory, the researcher will denote three types of intersectionality, two approaches to intersectionality, three complexities of intersectionality, and three main themes of intersectionality.

Crenshaw conceptualized three types of intersectionality: structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, and representational intersectionality. Structural intersectionality “attends to the ways that the experience of membership in a category varies qualitatively as a function of other group membership one holds” (Cole, 2008, p. 444). More simply, structural intersectionality lends itself to the meeting of unequal social groups and has been recognized as the most employed type of intersectionality in literature (Carastathis, 2014). Political intersectionality refers to the positioning that an individual, who is a member of two or more subordinate groups, may find himself or herself in. The challenge is that these multiple subordinate groups sometimes have conflicting agendas. For example, a lesbian Black female may find herself a member of three subordinate groups: homosexual, Black, and female. These three groups have three separate social affiliations and as such, this individual may feel the need to prioritize political intersectionality over structural intersectionality; however, Walby, Armstrong, and Strid (2012) caution against this. They noted that although they appear to address separate components of identity, both types of intersectionality are related to each other and should “not be conflated, or reduced to each other” (p. 229). Representational intersectionality involves the development of images that are based on women of color; these images often build upon sexist and racist descriptive metaphors. These instances of
intersectionality perpetuate the objectification and marginalization of Black women (Carastathis, 2014).

The two approaches of intersectionality are unitary or additive and multiplicative or categorical. According to Dubrow (2008), additive intersectionality occurs when demographic variables have additive effects. For example, the implications of being a poor Black woman would be seen as the “sum of the effects of these three demographic variables” (p. 88). Instead of viewing the variables as singular concepts, multiplicative intersectionality instead “begins with an analysis of the elements [of the intersections] first because each of these is a sizable project in its own right” (McCall, 2005, p. 1787). With these two approaches, it requires the researcher to decide which approach will best suit his or her focus. The former appears to be more concerned with the effect of the multiple inequities while the latter seeks to instead focus on what happens at the intersections of those inequities.

In her article, “The Complexity of Intersectionality”, McCall (2005) specified three complexities of intersectionality. She listed these as antcategorical, intercategorical, and intracategorical. Antcategorical intersectionality deconstructs analytical categories. Intercategorical intersectionality requires that individuals “ provisionally adopt existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequity among social groups and changing configurations of inequality among multiple and conflicting dimensions” (p. 1773). The last, intracategorical intersectionality, endeavors to pay special attention to groups who are at disregarded points of intersection as a means to expose the intricacies of the lived experiences within the group.

In terms of identifying specific themes of intersectionality theory, Ghavami and Peplau (2012) noted three. The first is the concession that every individual belongs to several social
categories at the same time and these categories are equally essential. Crenshaw co-founded the African American Policy Forum and the first theme identified above echoes a statement purported by the organization in that since “we are simultaneously members of many groups, our complex identities shape the specific way we experience” situations. The second theme asserts that group characteristics established on the intersection of ethnicity and gender are distinctive and cannot be comprehended by merely adding together the components of each separate identity. The final theme contends that social categories contain historical and ongoing associations of “political, material, and social inequality” (Ghavami & Peplau, 2012, p. 114) which means that not only identity, but context also plays a key role in accessing an understanding of intersectionality.

A challenge within intersectionality theory may be that some categorical identities are so closely related that it becomes difficult to analyze where the intersections converge, which may cause the individual to be unsure of which minority status has caused an oppressive experience. For example, the Combahee River Collective, a Black feminist lesbian organization, issued a statement in 1977 which stated that they found “it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most experienced simultaneously” (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 234). Additionally, in a particular discrimination case, the court stated that “some characteristics, such as race, color, and national origin, often fuse inextricably. Made flesh in a person, they indivisibly intermingle.” (Jeffers v. Thompson, 2003).

**Related Literature**

**Black Public Schools Pre-Brown**

Segregation was a blemish on American society that extended from all expansive public areas into the intimate confines of the classroom. While inappropriate in moral theory, this
practice was upheld by law in many states as the *Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537* (1896) ruling had formed the “separate but equal” doctrine (McCarthy, 2015) and postulated segregation as the norm in American everyday life. A positive outcome of this unfortunate result, however, was that Black educators were forced to be even more tenacious and dedicated in providing Black students with a quality education, even with little to no resources.

At the helm of this charge were Black women, who, according to Tillman (2004b) “played exemplary roles in the education of Blacks in the pre-Brown era” (p. 108). These women served as teachers and administrators and contributed greatly to the cause of educating the country’s Black students. Tillman (2004b) further stated that Black educators’ tradition for excellence began in the 1860’s, long before *Brown*, and so striving through lean times was not new to them. In this, they had multiple roles to fill: they led the schools, led instruction, developed curricula, disciplined and corrected the students, and secured the resources that they could. They also became social justice advocates for their communities, which sometimes put them at odds with the Whites who were in power (Karpinski, 2006). One example of this was Ethel Thompson Overby, the first Black female principal in Richmond, Virginia. According to Randolph (2012), Overby “created vehicles for change and resistance for her students, her community, and herself through her democratically underpinned educational theorizing, implemented through her pedagogy and curricular innovations” (p. 239). She was a Black female educator who altered the lives of many Black children around her by transcending beyond the socially-implemented confines of her race and gender.

Challenging segregation could have dire consequences for Black educators. Unlike other poor Blacks, those who held positions as educators enjoyed a middle-class lifestyle as the pay was respectable and their positions reputable (Tillman, 2004b). This alone caused some Black
educators to think twice about potentially sacrificing such a life of comfort. Those that did, however, had the support of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) who provided monies for the impending litigation that could possibly follow (Karpinski, 2006). It was worth the risk to those individuals who saw the larger picture and who valued the potential for equality more than they did the assurance of security. Walker (2013) wrote at length about the various NAACP chapters and other Black-led organizations that worked to ensure that Black students would receive education, and that their teachers and principals would be compensated along with having the resources that they needed.

In her piece “Hope and Despair: Southern Black Women Educators Across Pre- and Post-Civil Rights Cohorts Theorize about Their Activism”, Tondra L. Loder-Jackson (2012) introduced readers to a Birmingham, Alabama right before and immediately after the rise of the Civil Rights Movement and the role that Black women played in educating the students of both eras. She described the schools as having “endurance, excellence, and rich heritage” (Loder-Jackson, 2012, p. 267). Loder-Jackson (2012) goes on to explain that these women were activists in their own right as they encouraged their students to engage in self-love and pride by instilling positive images of Black people and expand their opportunities to be freed from the confines of poverty by becoming literate. Loder-Jackson correlated Black female educators’ tenacity to have Black students reach excellency to that of a kind of activism; this is perhaps more evident considering the fact that these educators “leveraged their limited resources and power to establish program (e.g. adult education) that went well beyond teaching the city’s children” (p. 269).
The Implementation and Unintended Consequences of *Brown*

On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court issued its decision in the matter of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483* (1954) (Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014; Rothstein, 2014). The landmark decision desegregated public schools and “set in motion a broad-based policy agenda where the United States would ultimately strive to live up to its standards of equality for all people under the U.S. Constitution” (Lopez & Burciaga, 2014, p. 799). Most people in the Black community and even some Whites saw the ruling of as a monumental victory for Black people and for American society. Jim Crow laws had mercilessly subjected Black people to the humiliating treatment of segregation, especially in the South, since Reconstruction.

With the *Brown* decision, the Supreme Court had finally agreed that segregated schools were, in fact, unequal. When initially enacted, however, the courts did not indicate specifically how the integration of the nation’s public schools was to be done; some of the justices wanted it done immediately across the board, some of the justices wanted it done a grade at a time, and others wanted to leave the facilitation of desegregation up to targeted (read: southern) states (Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014). Such ambiguity created confusion for Blacks and Whites alike, which caused the latter, mostly in southern states, to respond based upon their own interpretations.

As expected, the ruling elicited a strong negative reaction from various states and school districts. McCarthy (2015) stated that “southern states continued to fight the public school desegregation mandate” (p. 971) and some even implemented provisions that excused their White students from having to attend integrated schools at all. Other school districts were even more defiant. For instance, officials in Prince Edward County, Virginia opted to close public schools for five years rather than integrate the White schools and allow the Black students to
attend (June-Friesen, 2013). In Alabama, some of the school boards responded to the ruling by developing new schools for Black children to prevent them from integrating White schools. Furthermore, even some Black people were somewhat unsure about integration because in their minds, separate but equal was acceptable and bearable simply because the schools in their communities benefited from public monies (Karpinski, 2006), so for them, things would have been fine had they stayed the way they were.

Eventually, the Supreme Court issued Brown II (1955), which required that schools desegregate with “all deliberate speed”. According to Bond (2015), this ruling complicated things a bit more as the language “added to the lexicon of ignominious judicial pronouncements” (p. 1676). Inevitably, this ruling finally gave Black students the opportunity to be educated alongside White students without legal and structural opposition from resistant Whites; however, the decision also dealt a crushing defeat of sorts as there was an unexpected consequence in Black schools. Black school leaders, who for a long time had served the Black schools with distinction as their leaders, were all of a sudden without jobs as Black segregated schools closed and Black students integrated the White schools (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). White school superintendents of the school districts unashamedly and hurriedly notified Black educators that it was expected that the majority of the population in towns and cities, which were made up of mostly White people, would not want their schools led and children educated by Black people (Tillman, 2004a). As some of these school leaders were Black females, whatever advances they had made previously in terms of rising through the ranks of the educational field were abruptly negated as they lost their footing in the most ironic way.

The effects of the Brown decision reverberated throughout the Black community as the marked decrease of Black school leaders, as much as 84% in one southern state over a three-year
period also meant a loss of social justice advocates and living symbols of progress who were highly regarded and respected (Tillman, 2004b). The individuals who had guided the Black communities and taught the community’s children were suddenly gone and with them went decades and decades of educational and social progress. Karpinski (2006) succinctly and emotionally captured the magnitude of this tragedy when she stated that “more than two generations of African American students have borne the consequences of this employment crisis, deprived of their example, and subjected to treatment and policies that inadequately embodied the principle of Brown” (p. 239). One could argue that the purpose of Brown and even the basis of the case should have extended beyond the integration of schools, but perhaps should have also included the dismantling of discriminatory practices of school systems to also encompass equitable hiring processes and the appropriate placement of school leaders.

Along with the loss of Black educators as leaders of schools, some researchers also cite a damaged self-concept of Black students attending the new desegregated schools (Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014). While under the watchful eye of Black teachers and principals, Black students were encouraged and supported. Their educational development was encouraged and they felt a sense of belonging; however, with integration, this often changed as those Black students became outsiders in a world that they were not accustomed to, and one that was equally unaccustomed to them. Lash & Ratcliffe (2014) further noted that desegregation led to Black students not having “a teacher of color to encourage them, and the pride that the educators instilled in the students slowly faded with the decades” (p. 335). It seemed that the Black community and field of education experienced a challenging dilemma with the desegregation of public schools, one that most certainly was not anticipated.
In a situation such as this, individuals faced with a daunting challenge can either go along with the blow that has the potential to cause severe damage to their communities, or they can mobilize and take actions against the challenge in an effort to diminish or at least counteract its negative effects. Karpinski (2006) stated that Black educators rallied around the cause of education after the implementation of *Brown*. Specifically, they strengthened their professional teacher associations and increased the number of organizations that benefitted their cause, to include developing legal defense funds in the event that it was needed. Even though their worlds were different and the students that they had worked hard to educate were now integrated with White students, their passion for them did not waver.

**Intersectionality**

In the article, “Colorblind Intersectionality”, Carbado (2013) indicated that Black women are “too similar to be different and too different to be the same” in terms of being able to be representatives of other races and genders (p. 813). The truth is that Black women have had to maintain multiple identities reserved for multiple roles that they have to fill. Carbado (2013) further stated that the more marginal categories one belongs to, the more disadvantaged one is. Intersectionality speaks to these multiple identities and Capper (2015) actually listed intersectionality as the sixth tenet of CRT. She explained that recognizing and researching intersectionality in education is key as it shows the “importance of surfacing hidden oppression when examining the intersection of race with other identities” (Capper, 2015, p. 796).

As stated above, intersectionality was first given a face and name by Kimberle’ Crenshaw (1989) in her article, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”. Above all else, Crenshaw (1989) noted that at the time, discrimination experiences that had been written
about and recounted seemed to mostly correspond to those of White women and Black men. The experiences of Black women were absent and were only recognized if they happened to overlap with those of White women or Black men. What she noticed was that in many circles, discrimination based on race and gender were categories that were mutually exclusive from one another and were rarely ever considered together. Black women, therefore, have had their unique experiences largely ignored, having experienced both categories simultaneously. Hankivsky (2014) captured this reality succinctly when she stated, “Human lives cannot be explained by taking into account single categories, such as gender, race, and socio-economic status. People’s lives are multi-dimensional and complex. Lived realities are shaped by different factors and social dynamics operating together” (p. 3).

In actuality, it may not be possible to separate experiences individually based on race or gender. For instance, Haslanger (2014) theorized that people’s experiences cannot be simplified into discrete concepts because those individuals, while possibly in the same relevant group, will not share the same experiences. In other words, Black women and White women are both women, and they are both a member of the relevant female social group. However, their race is the separator, the thing that will cause their experiences to greatly vary. Despite this glaring revelation, Black women’s experiences, in many arenas, remain largely uncovered and concealed. Grant (2012) surmised that Black women “have been invited into places where the dominant group has assembled, but they remain outsiders because they are still invisible and have no voice when dialog commences” (p. 106). Furthermore, some Black women who think that they may have been mistreated or experienced prejudice may have a hard time determining if the bias or mistreatment was due to their race, gender, or the intersection of both (Remedios & Snyder, 2015).
If intersectionality is, as Capper (2015) indicated, the sixth tenet of CRT, it brings the notion of gender into the conversation and it adds another layer of necessary analysis. Capper (2015) surmised that if researchers do seek to eliminate subordination based on race and gender, doing so can also do a great deal in eliminating subordination in other identity groups (i.e. sexual orientation, etc.). As such, intersectionality simply intensifies critical race theory’s usefulness in addressing disparities based on identity. Crenshaw (1989) admitted that she used the word “intersectionality” as a metaphor for “demarginalizing” in order to highlight the inadequacy of research simply based on race or gender as isolated concepts.

As Black female school leaders experience intersectionality at the leadership level, they are in a position to help create more effective learning experiences for marginalized student groups who also experience some form of intersectionality. According to Schmitz, Nourse, and Ross (2012), “studies indicate that in less than three decades, a majority of children will likely belong to race-ethnic minorities” (p. 181). The United States is rapidly changing in terms of race and ethnicity. Unfortunately, mindsets are not changing as swiftly. Thus, the Black female school leader has the opportunity to be at the helm of a shift in mentalities and ideologies as they relate to perceptions of student ability regardless of race.

The term intersectionality has a negative connotation and subtext as its definition includes the word oppressive (Carastathis, 2014; Reed, 2012). In showing how the Black female school leader can actually use her intersectionality to inform leadership practices in a positive way, other marginalized groups could become empowered to do the same (Horsford, 2012). Being able to understand how concepts that have historically been known to keep groups subjugated is also vital to understand how viewing the concepts through an alternate lens can lead to success. As the Black female school leader has to overcome many stereotypes and
negative presuppositions to do this, she is the one who can lead the change. This is all the more important because she is in a position of leadership and high visibility. At the secondary school level, particularly high school, this is increasingly imperative, as high schools are generally in the spotlight more and carry multiple layers of risk in leadership (Brouwer, 2014).

**Black Women and the Role of School Leader**

Eventually, as time progressed, Black school leaders began to resume their roles in the main office as administrators; however, it has proven a slow return for Black women as they remain underrepresented in these positions (Nichols & Nichols, 2014). The literature expounding upon this underrepresentation is finally increasing; yet, there still has been a distinct demand that Black female school leaders, their challenges, and positions as leaders within a sometimes hostile context, warrant additional research and study (Horsford & Tillman, 2012; Reed, 2012).

Even though there is literature that exists outside of that which recounts information about the White male educational leader, more often than not, that literature has hinged on race and gender as two isolated concepts within the framework of gaining and maintaining leadership positions. For example, Gooden (2012) indicated that literature about educational leadership within the last century “essentially came about without the voices or perspectives of African Americas” (p. 68). Furthermore, Dowdy and Hamilton (2012) purported that women still “remain underrepresented in leadership roles” (p. 190). This shows that the research community has begun to address the disparities in Black male school leaders and White female school leaders, but not necessarily the disparities of Black female school leaders. Santamaria (2014) completed research from the perspectives of those who are members of groups who have been
underrepresented and underserved; that research provided insights into their leadership practices that are qualitatively different from that of mainstream groups.

Despite the concession that the voice of Black women in leadership is almost silent, the gap in literature addressing the disparity of Black female school leaders persists. The research that has been completed on the Black female educational leader has been done so in a narrow scope. The groundwork that has been laid has been done so mostly from the perspective of Black female leaders in general as they fight for credibility and respect. Reed (2012) and Peters (2012) posited that any other study completed on Black female school leaders is usually shrouded in the term women and minorities, and while some may argue that this is enough to bridge the gap, the research of the Black female educational leader that expounds on her unique place in society remains inadequate. The building of a comprehensive body of information that gives her voice credence as she attempts to lead against the many disadvantages within the confines, literally and figuratively, of public schools in the United States is highly justified.

Even when Black females rise to the position of school leader, they are often still at a disadvantage as they have to adapt and conform to the traditional standards of leader. According to Jean-Marie (2013), Black women encounter marginalizing experiences that are a result of working and persisting in a White and male-dominated field. Along with these experiences comes negative stereotypes and these stereotypes are based on years of socially-constructed identities perpetuated by the media and other entities that are neither warranted nor accurate (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Understanding these realities only begins to extract the multiple layers of challenges that Black women face in position of school leader.

In addition, there are vast differences in how Black women lead in comparison to those of the dominant majority. Newcomb and Niemeyer (2015) found that Black women have different
leadership styles than their White counterparts because they have been left out from the conventional and customary power structures. Being left out caused them to become more resourceful and engendered problem-solving as a means of survival and leadership. As they were left out of the various arenas that may have given them information on how to be a leader, they were left to their own devices and developed their own ideas.

**Intersectionality and the Black Female School Leader**

With the diverse nature of American society, the government continues to feel an obligation to ensure that the nation’s schools continue to be inclusive and should work to “achieve a diverse student population” (Tegeler, 2014, p. 1024). With this diverse population, one can argue that those working in the schools should also be of a diverse nature. In fact, Karpinski (2006) theorized that a lack of diverse teachers in diverse schools could actually harm students. As a response to this, the teaching profession has welcomed and included individuals of all races as the profession should have its force reflect the demographics of the individuals it serves; however, the role of school leader has tended to remain dominated with individuals who are either male or White. Black females who become school leaders go against this norm. The challenge for the Black female is that historically, she has been socially marginalized and her ability to assert authority is often diminished because of her race and gender. She is at the mercy of a concept called “intersectionality,” which is identified as intersections between systems of oppression, domination or, discrimination (Reed, 2012).

As the Black female is a minority twice, and the recipient of what Essed (1991) coined as “double jeopardy,” she must overcome multiple barriers, as well as the implications of those barriers, in order to be seen as competent and able to facilitate the education of many students as principal. The challenge is that the Black female has multiple identities that create novel
experiences that are unique and cannot be separated into separate identities that may have several outcomes, both positive and negative (Parent, DeBlaere, & Morardi, 2013). Horsford and Tillman (2012) asserted that the intersection of these multiple identities warrants additional study as it supports Black women’s ability to lead. Consequently, many Black female school leaders feel the need to prove themselves in the face of marginalizing experiences that seek to strip them of the opportunity to be seen in society as representatives of knowledge; it is an unfortunate fact that most images of Black women in society have been developed and controlled by sources outside of the Black community (Jean-Marie, 2013; Wallace et. al., 2014), thus part of the master narrative.

The Black woman in any leadership position faces numerous challenges. Several researchers have cited a “concrete ceiling” that Black women encounter when attempting to advance in the ranks of leadership (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). At the educational level, this challenge is more daunting because the position of school administrator has been described as “scary work” that is overwhelming because it is the administrator’s job to shape the school’s climate and be responsible for its overall success (Brouwer, 2014; Moore, 2013; Price, 2012). For the Black female school leader, the nature of this task can be even more difficult to tackle. Not only does she have to lead the school, but she also has to face the dual burdens of racism and sexism that perpetuate cultural and stereotypical expectations, which, according to Jean-Marie (2013), endeavors to “keep them in their place, excluding them as agents of knowledge” (p. 617). There are many challenges that make navigating the landscape of educational administration difficult for the Black female because of unspoken and cultural assumptions (Cook, 2012). Yet, in dealing with these challenges, researchers have not quite identified how to address them
because in terms of leadership literature, the voice and perspective of Black men and women have been left out, so there is little certainty in where to begin (Gooden, 2012).

Because of this, the voice of the Black female school leader, in explaining her specific set of challenges, is virtually inaudible. As mentioned earlier, they are the recipients of “double jeopardy” which Essed (1991) also identified as “gendered racism.” They are often subjected to expectations higher than those of other administrators around them who are male or White (Jean-Marie, 2013). Black female school leaders, by and large, face most of the same challenges of other leaders who are male and White, but their cultural identities cause them to be affected by these challenges differently. Intersectionality refers to the correspondence between identities and the ways they “reflect specific relations both to dominant or hierarchal power structures and each other” (Hine, 2014, p. 13). In a field that has been dominated by the majority race (White) and gender (male), Black women are seen as outsiders, and as a result, do not receive the same support as the majority race and gender when transitioning to and maintaining the position of administrator. Some studies have purported that a cultural discord exists in America that heavily impacts a community’s confidence and trust in women and people of color (Tillman, 2012). The sum of these encounters places Black female school leader at the apex of conflict within their schools and communities.

Particularly, as the Black female school leader attempts to engage with staff members, students, and parents, she has to keep in mind her gender and racial minority status, as well as every negative perception attached to it. This is where intersectionality plays a huge role in her success or failure. Horsford (2012) completed research that intended to highlight the fact that intersectionality can actually serve Black women well in that they can assist other marginalized groups who also experience the effects of intersectionality. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010)
stated “multiple aspects of identity mutually construct one another—being female influences one’s experience as an African American, and being African American influences one’s experience as a female—thus emphasizing the importance of understanding the intersection of multiple identities” (p. 176).

A Black woman, by nature of her race and gender, cannot interact with those around her as freely as she would like. She has to somehow develop a keen sense of awareness and remain mindful that when the world looks at her and the decisions she makes, they are seeing an individual who is Black and who also happens to be a female, not necessarily a leader (Jean-Marie, 2013). Unfortunately, embedded within these the intersecting identities of her race and gender, both minority in nature, are inherently negative presuppositions that are historical, economic, and political (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

In this, Black female school leaders have to make a decision about their leadership style. This style should engender a positive reflection of their capabilities while encouraging their audience to see past their race and gender; however, considering the nature of their historical subjugation, this may be a difficult task. Jean-Marie (2013) noted the challenge in this as she stated, “African American female principals not only deal with internal and external pressures to effectively lead schools, but also have to navigate through the scrutiny that they sometimes encounter because if their race and gender” (p. 618). Yet it almost seems as if the Black female school leader barely even has time for this navigation. They cannot loose sight of the fact that they are in the position to lead a school where children are educated and cared for as their chief responsibility.

Unfortunately, Blacks in education were often regarded as inferior educators, and as such, their capabilities are considered as less than promising (Tillman, 2004a). However, as time
progressed, Black leaders in education began to be seen as agents of social justice, sent in to serve as those who could right the wrongs for Black children in public schools (Horsford, 2012). A more unfortunate reality, however, is that some Black principals are recognized and lauded for reasons that are not remotely correlated to their potential as academic and instructional leaders. Gooden (2012) wrote of a Black male principal who was the focus of a documentary on his school. While there was evidence that this principal played a fundamental role in managing teachers, building their capacity, and establishing a rich instructional program, the documentary only focused on his efforts to reduce gang-related tensions in the building and make the students feel good about themselves. Sometimes, the sum of a Black principal’s worth is enveloped in his or her capacity to be a hero for the Black students, and this is unfortunate because his or her ability to be an overall good leader is not recognized. So instead, he or she is essentially a hero for the White cause of providing a seeming solution for an ailing school.

In terms of women leaders, Reed (2012) indicated that “women school leaders have been described as being able to display their emotional and compassionate sides within their leadership” (p. 41) while also being discouraged from displaying qualities that could be perceived as feminine. In fact, Nichols & Nichols (2014) noted that some women “have not made significant gains in educational administration because their ‘femaleness’ appeared to be problematic in an area dominated by men” (p. 28). So the Black female school leader has to manage a fine balance in her leadership because she is supposed to appear in charge; however, if she embodies the caring and feminine nature that society has ascribed to her, her position is actually at risk (Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012; Jean-Marie, 2013). Black women are supposed to exhibit restraint, while also exuding power (Hill-Collins, 2009). This presents quite a conflict for her as she attempts to find a balance in conducting herself as a leader.
Black women school leaders defy the widely-held notion of who and what school administrators are supposed to be. There are multiple assumptions about leadership and within these assumptions are deeply-rooted ideologies and expectations that relate to the dominant majority and Black female school leaders face an uphill battle in earning respect in this position because they cannot be located within these ideologies and expectations. Sometimes, this places the Black female in a token status as central office personnel seek to even the playing field or fulfill some community-based demand. In this case, their talents and positive leadership attributes are ignored and disregarded just so that they can be the one to fill a central office role to deal with troubled schools (Moore, 2013). There are multiple problems with this and one of the most glaring is that while they stand out and satisfy the request, they also have to simultaneously play their stereotypical role while operating under non-stereotypical conditions (Jean-Marie, 2013; Moore, 2013). This conflict of interest further complicates the experience and life of the Black female school leader as she seeks to “see and feel both sides of things while still having to then explain herself to everyone else” (Horsford, 2012, p. 13).

Black Females as Principals

As stated earlier in this review, the number of Black administrators, particularly principals, in America’s public schools plummeted with the Brown decision. Those cited earlier were an overall number; however, Rousmaniere (2013) cited a more specific number for secondary principals, for example. Between 1964 and 1971, the number of secondary principals in Alabama fell from 134 to 14. Unfortunately, this number remains low for Black principals, and is especially low for Black females. Gray (2014) stated that research recounting and exploring the experiences of Black female principals is quite limited. This limited perspective has multiple implications; the most glaring is that since Black females are not chosen for the job
often enough, it narrows researchers’ abilities to study reasons why they are not chosen as well
disallows the researchers to identify steps that Black females can take to be chosen for the job.
Several studies show that women dominate the field of education as classroom teachers, so the
pool from which principals can be pulled is there (Bourke & Brown, 2014; Nichols & Nichols,
2014).

While the voice of the Black female principal is already limited, there exists even less
information about her as it relates to the secondary public school. Furthermore, the fact that she
is Black and female may be the sole reason why the information is not there. It is a cycle of
sorts: the Black female is rarely hired at secondary schools and as a result, her voice never gets
any stronger. According to Sanchez-Hucles & Davis (2010), Black female school leaders
experience a triple jeopardy of sorts due to the “multiple stereotypes associated with race,
gender, and ethnicity that they trigger in others. They are required to display leadership
competence while simultaneously conforming to European American prototypes representing
traditional ethnic, racial and gender behavior” (p, 174). To add to her challenges, Gray (2014)
wrote that Black women who want to become principals of secondary schools often lack mentors
who can expose them to such opportunities.

Reconciliation

The intersectionality that Black female school leaders contend with can most definitely
place them at a disadvantage as they try to reach success while balancing multiple identities;
however, their uniqueness in society can be used as a means of empowerment to fling the doors
of the research on educational leadership wide open. Black female school leaders’ outsider-
within status affords them a first person glimpse into the structures and strategies of
marginalization (Wilder et. al., 2013).
This is the precise reason that there should be more in-depth research into Black female school leaders and their intersectionality. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) posited that:

Consideration of the intersection of multiple aspects of identity provides a richer and more nuanced understanding of diverse leaders. Intersectionality is an analytical tool for studying, understanding, and responding to how gender intersects with other identities and how these intersections contribute to the unique experiences of oppression and privilege. (p. 176)

Black female school leaders have to develop a sense of resolve and resilience as they reconcile within themselves that their duty is to ensure the effective education of students, regardless of the students’ race, and in spite of the challenges that the Black female school leaders face themselves. This sense of self-efficacy allows the Black female administrator to combat adversity and keep her eyes locked on the larger purpose of leading staff in the education of the school’s students.

Part of this resilience can be found in the Black female school leader’s tenacity to defy the stereotypes placed on her by a society that cannot comprehend her subjugation (Collins, 1986). Locating her own identity inside of a sometimes hostile and unforgiving society is not a defined and fixed moment. Hill-Collins (2009) further stated that for the Black woman, self-definition involves a consistent movement toward changing the nature of her reality by denying the stereotypical images that society has forced on her and going beyond the restraints of intersectionality. In this, the Black female school leader can seek reconciliation of her intersectionality and her position, not at the invitation of society, but at the acute recognition that the job must be done. She must systematically debunk and challenge the master narrative by telling stories that seek to unite rather than divide.
Summary

The outline of the literature review in Chapter Two offered insight into the challenges that Black females face in the role of school leader because of the intersectionalities of their race and gender. The chapter first laid a comprehensive foundation of the study as it identified critical race theory and Black feminist theory as the appropriate frameworks for the qualitative inquiry. The review provided a historical overview of the reasons behind the disparity of Black female leaders in the United States and how it the disparity came to be. This chapter also provided background information into the role of school leader and the history of Blacks and women in the role. The research is lacking in terms of exploring the specific experiences of Black women through the lens of intersectionality and how this construct can inform their practices and careers in a positive way. This positive perspective can have far-reaching effects with regards to building a canon of literature that gives the Black female school leader voice, and thus pave the way for other members of marginalized groups to have the same opportunity.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black female school leaders through the lens of intersectionality. The opening of this chapter discusses the design, setting, and participants of the research study. The chapter then continues with an examination of the procedures, the role of the researcher, the methods of data collection, and data analysis. Finally, this chapter discusses the trustworthiness of the research study, which includes its credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. The researcher will be sure that all ethical considerations will be addressed, which includes ensuring that confidences are kept and that all measures will be taken to protect the participants’ identities and their statements. The purpose of this chapter is to provide important information about the methodology of the research study to include all of the various processes.

Design

This research study was qualitative in nature and utilized a transcendental phenomenological study methodology. The qualitative approach was appropriate for this study because as Creswell (2013) stated, there was a need “to study a group or population, identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or hear silenced voices” (p. 48). Because of the disparity of Black female school leaders, there was a disparity in their collective voice, as well. The qualitative method allowed for a full exploration that could cover a variety of perspectives and not be relegated to a single dimension.

A transcendental phenomenology design provided the researcher with rich and descriptive analyses of the participants’ experiences. Transcendental phenomenology requires individuals to look at concepts openly, uninterrupted by the behaviors of the natural
world; however, the challenge arises when it is time to define things as they are through understanding meanings and essences in the light of intuition and self-reflection (Moustakas, 1994). This phenomenological design was selected because the research study required an in-depth exploration of the realities of race and gender and their intersectionality as experienced by Black female school leaders. A transcendental phenomenology extracted their voices, singly and collectively, and gave their perspectives without the researcher adding an additional layer of interpretation. This design related how the participants remembered and made sense of the phenomenon that they experienced (Patton, 2002). This method was chosen because the researcher understood that a certain process was needed that would fit the framework of the study to “manage and analyze vast amounts of collected data and generate concepts and theories to help explain the studied phenomenon” (Hodges, 2014, p. 14).

Additionally, bracketing or the epoche was imperative in this design (Moustakas, 1994). When an individual has experience with a concept or is close to the focus of the research, the research itself may be tainted with his or her judgement. As such, bracketing is a central part of transcendental phenomenology. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that epoche “is the process through which the researcher brackets or isolates biases in order to be open to the experience itself” (p. 227). This method is a way that the researcher can confidently ensure that the study is unbiased and pure without embedded assumptions or conclusions.

Along with the above reasoning for the design, it was necessary to utilize the constructivist approach in this study because it “assumes that reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single, observable reality” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 8). In exploring the experiences of all of the participants in the study, there was a realization that there may be some similarities in what they said; however, overall, their responses were steeped in their own
realities, regardless of the subjectivity of their responses. Creswell (2013) indicated that it becomes necessary for the researcher to seek out the various intricacies of multiple views as opposed to limit them into a few concepts. Doing this widens the scope of the possibilities in terms of results. For this study, in gathering multiple experiences of Black female school administrators, the researcher was able to view the phenomenon of intersectionality from various vantage points, thus strengthening the richness of the results.

Data collection sources included interviews, journal prompts, and relevant documentation. This data was collected from the participants in an attempt to explore their lived experiences as they related to their being a school leader who is also a Black female. Each of these participants serve as a leader of a school. These individuals were selected obviously because they are Black female school leaders, but also because the researcher felt that they would be open to sharing their unique experiences without restraint. The three types of data collected spoke to the phenomenon of intersectionality as it related to Black females in a leadership role that is usually reserved for individuals who are either male and/or White. The three types of data were triangulated to reinforce the trustworthiness of the executed research.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that basic qualitative design consisted of how people interpret significant events in their lives, how they develop their perceptions of the world and how they fit those perceptions to their reality, and what sense they make of their experiences. In terms of this research study, there was an assumption that the Black female school leaders who participated have engaged in the above actions. The interview data extracted from each of them recounted and related their experiences with rich, in-depth descriptions that only they could provide.
A transcendental phenomenology was utilized to explore the experiences of Black female school leaders through employing the lens of intersectionality. This includes the four main steps of epoche, phenomenological reductionism, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essences (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology was appropriate for this study because it allowed the researcher to uncover the essence of the participants’ experiences and provide a systematic and meticulous methodology for discovery of those experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994) and the majority of the uncovering of the experiences was achieved through interviews. The data from the interviews then led to the development of the themes. Additionally, this design also required the researcher to extensively bracket herself out of the research.

According to Chan, Fung, and Chien (2013), “the concept of bracketing should be adopted upon initiating the research proposal and not merely in the data collection and analysis process” (p. 1). Given my close proximity to the roles and experiences that I am researching, it was imperative that I was reflexive in my thinking while gathering and analyzing the data so that I could remain aware of the content and my personal feelings about the content. The semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to answer openly; that opportunity eventually caused the “participants to introduce issues of which we as researchers had not previously thought” (Chan et. al., 2013, p. 5). As the researcher employed this process, she kept a journal where she wrote down her thoughts after completing the interviews and after engaging with the data so that she could keep note of my perceptions and be sure not to inject them into the research.
Research Questions

RQ1: How do Black female school leaders describe their experiences with the intersectionality of race and gender?

RQ2: What specific challenges do participants face and how do they engage with and resolve them?

RQ3: How (if at all) do participants’ experiences with intersectionality influence their leadership practices?

RQ4: How do Black female school leaders describe their awareness of intersectionality as it relates to their decision-making?

Setting

The site for the research varied in nature because the participants were in multiple locations. The participants were selected from areas across the United States in different states and regions. These schools in these areas included those in urban, suburban, and rural districts, schools that had large and small student populations, and schools that were either Title I or affluent. Different regions in the country have differing expectations in terms of education, schools, and school leaders, so there was a hope that the data collected would yield information that could lead to findings that were comprehensive and ground-breaking. Additionally, the hiring of Black women as school leaders may vary greatly in different parts of the country; some areas may be more progressive and hire Black women indiscriminately while others may be more deliberate or cautious when making such hires.

Participants

The participants for the research study included 15 Black female school administrators who currently serve as leaders in K-12 schools. They were chosen through a combination of
convenience and snowball sampling, which are types of purposeful sampling. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), purposeful sampling is used when “the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77). The researcher was able to secure some participants through her own connections; however, there existed a need to have other alternatives in the event that a participant had to drop out. When the researcher ran out of potential participants that were members of her own personal and professional networks, she solicited other potential participants through colleagues, friends, and family and also through various social media platforms.

In order to participate in the study, participants needed to meet several criteria. They had to be a Black female who was currently serving in a supervisory position as a dean, assistant principal, or principal in an elementary, middle, or high school. This was not an exhaustive list of possibilities and the main idea was that each participant served in a supervisory position and managed other staff members. The schools that they served in could be public or private and could vary in terms of student population, student demographics, and student achievement. Each participant must have had at least three years of experience as a school leader in order to be able to share broad experiences over time.

Participants from different states and areas were chosen so that the results could be as inclusive as possible without being too overwhelming for the completion of the study. Selecting participants from different states, and from varying districts within those states, ensured a variation of responses as the cultural and social context within those states and school districts have the potential to be extremely different. It was also important for the researcher to go
beyond districts that she was familiar with; that way, results and outcomes would not be anticipated. This allowed for the transferability of the study.

**Procedures**

The initial step of the research study was to obtain the necessary approvals and this included submitting the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application (see Appendix A). The research study was submitted to the Liberty University’s IRB for approval. After the researcher successfully defended the proposal, the IRB application was submitted and approved after three revisions. At that point, the school leaders were contacted and the research was explained to them in order to get their commitment for participation. Prior to interviews, each participant received an introduction letter (see Appendix B) and once they agreed to be a part of the study, they signed a consent form (see Appendix C). These consent forms were secured in a locked file cabinet at the researcher’s home. Interviews in the immediate area near the researcher were scheduled in a location feasible for the participants and were recorded via an audio device. For those participants outside of the immediate area of the researcher, their interviews were scheduled and held by phone and were also recorded via an audio device. All of the interviews, with the exception of one, were later transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. At an assigned point during the research process, participants submitted relevant documents by either sending them via email or by having the researcher pick them up at a designated location. Participants were asked to either redact or remove all identifying information prior to the submission of the documents. Once the data was collected, it was analyzed according to the procedures established for each type of data (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).
The Researcher’s Role

As my research is qualitative in nature, the researcher is the human instrument and took great care to engage with the study with integrity and veracity. It was vitally important that the researcher built her capacity as a researcher and understood that the outcome of this study may have major implications, both positive and potentially negative. The reliability of qualitative methods centered a great deal on the proficiency, capability, and thoroughness of the research (Patton, 2002). If the research was to have credibility within academic circles, it had to be methodical and without carelessness.

Since the researcher is a Black female who currently serves as an assistant principal and aspires to one day become a principal, this study was very pertinent to her own career as it relates to my ability to maintain a leadership position in spite of the intersectionality of my race and gender. She saw the need for additional research into this particular area of leadership and administration so that Black females could have more insight into how they can potentially be perceived by non-Black members of their school community and how their voices can become a standard part of educational leadership literature. The experiences of the Black female school leaders are extremely unique; as such, there can be many other aspects that have not been considered in terms of leadership on the building level. A potential limitation to this study was that as a Black female administrator who has served as a school leader for five years, the researcher could have been tempted to inject my own biases and needed to extensively bracket out her experiences through journaling to suspend judgment. In addition, the researcher does have personal relationships with some of the participants of the study, which meant she had to be additionally cautious of my tendency to inject bias into the study, especially in terms of the interviews and reporting of the participants’ responses. The researcher thinks that in some ways,
it was beneficial that she had relationships with some of the participants because she felt that they would be honest and comfortable with me to share experiences freely whereas they may not have been so free to share with someone they did not know.

**Data Collection**

In order to begin data collection, approval was obtained from IRB at Liberty University for the research study. Once this step had been initiated and completed, the participants received an outline of the study and an invitation to be a part of the study. In addition to the outline, they received a letter explaining the purpose of the research purpose, as well as the methods and procedures. Additionally, participants were informed about the ethics and confidential nature of the study that protected them and their interests. Participants were assured that their participation was voluntary in nature and they each signed a consent form. They were also reassured that they could withdraw from the research study at any time.

The research study was a transcendental phenomenological study, which gathered multiple forms of data from the participants to uncover their lived experiences. For this research, data was collected through interviews, journaling, and through the review and analysis of relevant documents. These three methods of collection provided for the triangulation of data, which gave the study strength and trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, according to Yin (2016), using multiple sources of data permitted the researcher to review a wider range of issues historically and behaviorally.

**Interviews**

The first method of data collection to be used for the research study was semi-structured interviews. Interviews are potentially the principal method of phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994). This was the main way to gain insight into the participants’ lives, through
asking questions that require them to expound on their experiences freely. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that this format permits the researcher to “respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (p. 90). There was one interview for each participant. The questions were open-ended and were used to extract rich data in terms of intersectionality and the Black female school leader. Interviews were recorded using an audio recording device and transcribed verbatim. The interview guide was followed closely; however, probing and follow-up questioning did occur when necessary. It was incredibly important for the researcher to bracket herself out of the research by journaling after each interview; epoche ensures that one removes his or her own prejudices and biases and refrain from judgment prior to analyzing the interview data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

School Leader Interview Questions

**Background and Demographic**

1. What is your educational background, including degrees and years of experience as a school administrator?
2. Do you hold any leadership positions outside of the school where you currently work? If so, what are they and how did you obtain them?
3. Why did you choose to become a school administrator?
4. What barriers and challenges did you experience in becoming a school leader?
5. Describe a typical day that you experience as a school leader. Please include interactions with various stakeholders, typical decisions you are faced with, and situations that you encounter as a leader.

**Intersectionality**

6. How do you think your race and gender play a role in your leadership?
7. In your journey to become a school leader, in what ways do you think your race and gender worked for you or against you?

8. Based on your experiences, how do you think your race and gender play a role in how you are perceived by the educational stakeholders with whom you work?

9. What factors do you consider when making leadership decisions?

10. Please talk about any specific times when you felt particularly supported or unsupported by the stakeholders with whom you work, to include individuals inside and outside of your building.

11. When you make decisions, how often do you think the stakeholders around you question those decisions and why?

12. Please discuss a time when there was little question that a decision you made was not well received by your staff and community because they did not understand the reasons behind the decision.

Participant Comments

13. Is there anything additional you want to add about your experience as a Black female school leader?

14. If needed, would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview?

The purpose of these questions was to gather the experiences of the participants and understand how they felt about their position as school leader as well as how aware they were of their own intersectionality as they served as leader. Question number four was to correspond directly to the assertion by Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) where they stated that women of color often encounter a concrete ceiling in securing leadership positions. Although these questions were pointed with the intent of gathering certain types of information, they were not
leading in nature as Yin (2016) indicated that asking leading questions makes for a situation where the “corroboratory purpose of the interview will have not been served” (p. 107). The remainder of the questions provided the researcher with additional context in exploring the phenomenon of intersectionality as it related to the participants’ leadership experiences.

**Journaling**

According to Hayman, Wilkes, and Jackson (2012), “the main purpose of journaling is to document and reflect on experiences as a way of thinking, understanding and learning” (p. 28). The participants in this study were working as school leaders during the data collection period, and during that time, the expectation was that they would experience situations and circumstances that could speak directly to their experiences with intersectionality. This possibility meant that there could be rich data there occurring daily that could be extremely valuable to the research study. As a means of being able to maintain current thoughts and experiences of the participants that may be occurring as the study is being completed, the researcher developed an online journal through Google Forms that the participants interacted with. According to Maxwell (2013), researchers should employ more than one method of data collection to reexamine his or her understanding of the research topic or phenomenon. Not only did the journals allow opportunity for the researcher to discover and analyze additional data, but it also caused the participants to engage in their own self-reflection that assisted them in exposing additional thoughts and truths about their own realities as they engaged with their own thoughts and conclusions about intersectionality and their leadership as a Black female.

Participants were informed that they would have to participate in the online journaling process as a means of assisting the researcher in making sure that the data was triangulated. The online journal was housed in a Google Classroom app via Google Chrome. The researcher
maintained this classroom and developed Google Forms that contained journal prompts that the participants needed to answer. The classroom was only accessible by the researcher and she was the only person who could see the responses. The researcher outlined that the participants would respond to a total of three journal prompts through links that she sent them. The first was responded to prior to the initial interview. The second prompt was sent to the participants one to two weeks after the interview. The final journal prompt was sent once all relevant documents had been submitted. The researcher felt that it was important for the journaling to occur at the beginning, middle, and end of the study for several reasons. The first was so that she could pace her data collection and analysis. Secondly, the researcher felt that requiring the participants to respond at various times during the study may allow them to reach back and find experiences that they had forgotten or realize that an experience that they had and thought was useless was actually relevant to the study. The journals were there to stir the emotions and thoughts of the participants in an effort to gather more rich data and probe their potential recollection of forgotten experiences. The journal prompts were:

- Journal Prompt 1: What do you feel is the most difficult part of your daily role as a school leader and why? Do you feel that any part of this challenge is related to your race/and or gender? Please elaborate.

- Journal Prompt 2: After completing the initial interview with the researcher, what aspects of your leadership are you more cognizant and aware of now than you were before interviews began? Please elaborate.

- Journal Prompt 3: Please share one incident that you have experienced as a leader that you feel may have gone differently if you had been either male and/or White. Also include specific responses, feelings, psychological impact, effect on self-esteem, etc.
Document Analysis

The last method of data collection was a relevant document review and analysis. Documents can offer a variety of information as they come in many forms. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is an appropriate method of data analysis because documents require the researcher to examine and interpret them “in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge” (p. 27). The researcher was very purposeful in determining the type of documents that she wanted to include in the research. Specifically, there was a desire to obtain documents that would reinforce or substantiate what the researcher found in the other data sources. Yin (2016) stated that the value of documents in data collection and how they provide “details to corroborate information from other sources” (p. 103). As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) indicated, the study should have included any documents that were relevant and that could support the research and findings. This included evaluations and observations conducted by the participants as well as emails and other forms of written communication that could speak to sensitive topics or topics of note. Memos and meeting agendas could provide important insight into what the participants found important to discuss at scheduled meetings. Relevant documents also included articles written about the participants in newspapers, magazines, and websites, as well as any scholarly articles and journals written by the participants.

Observation reports and other documents that speak to teacher performance can do one of two things: they can either show the teacher’s strengths or they can show where the teacher needs to build his or her professional and instructional capacity. Even if the observation itself is less than stellar, but the observation conference report is written in such a way that attempts to reassure the teacher that all is not lost, teachers see their performance as something very personal and if they feel they are not doing well, they can fear that poor performance can be potential...
grounds for dismissal. This was valuable to the study as it provided insight into the Black female school leader’s method of communicating with the teacher. It also gave further insight on the Black female school leaders as evaluators; it was particularly useful when they provided a written response to the observations and evaluations by the teachers and if they offered support, guidance, and suggestion in their reports.

Reviewing meeting agendas, memos, and emails sent by the Black female school leaders or shared by their administrative teams offered understanding on their leadership style as well as the effectiveness of their leadership. The effectiveness of one’s leadership can be perceived through his or her written communication style. Meeting agendas are pretty straightforward; however, it is possible to analyze them to gather more information about motives and intentions of the individuals creating them. Depending on what the Black female school leaders wanted to discuss in their meetings, the researcher was able to gain some insight on how important those things were to them, especially if those things were repeated in several meetings or discussed multiple times.

Additionally, memos and emails are written forms of communication that can pose challenges in that it sometimes difficult to distinguish and establish tone. For that reason, they can be misread and misunderstood, which plays directly into how someone can perceive the Black female school leaders. If the tone of the email or memo is perceived to be harsh or condescending in nature, that perception is also attributed to the participants, Black female school leaders, which can perpetuate the negative stereotype that she is already fighting to dismantle.

When further analyzing the gathered documents, there were a couple of questions that had to be asked: Is there history or other contexts that need to be considered in evaluating them?
Has the document been altered? Is it possible that the researcher’s background may cause her to see the document differently than the stakeholder who provided it? Are these documents primary or secondary sources? These questions all speak to the value that the document may or may not add to the study and validating the authenticity of these documents was critical. Validating the documents may be as simple as asking follow-up questions to the stakeholders. Once this was done, the researcher looked for themes in the data through a system of coding and cataloging (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Data Analysis**

The data collection process allowed the researcher to look for patterns that gave her an understanding of the phenomenon of intersectionality. The data that was collected was of little value until analyzed and the value of the data depended on the meaning that was ascribed to the data. Doing this helped in the construction of the themes as they became evident through analysis and coding of the data (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Through this process, the researcher could see what information was most profound, thus most valuable in the research findings. This was a meticulous and highly intense method; however, doing it with fidelity and care ensured that the study was strong and solid. It was also important to remember that the participants were reporting their perceptions, which may have been selective in nature (Patton, 2002). With this potential possibility, the triangulation of the data was all the more important and vital.

**Epoche**

Analysis began with the epoche, which is where the researcher bracketed out any personal experiences as a Black female school leader as a means of suspending judgement. Moustakas (1994) noted that perceiving directly allows the researcher to “focus on the object
itself and not the perceiving experience” (p. 91). This needed to be done consistently throughout the data collection process so that the data was viewed with fresh eyes and devoid of bias and presuppositions. It was necessary to get to the essence of the experience of the phenomenon and bracketing allowed for that to occur (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The majority of the bracketing was performed through journaling during the data collection and analysis processes so that thoughts could be written down and not injected into the research as bias.

**Phenomenological Reductionism**

In phenomenological reductionism, the researcher views concepts as they appear, but also should also view them in a reduced, horizontal, or equal manner (Moustakas, 1994). This process is horizontalization, and this step leads back to the descriptions that the participants provide which relate their experiences for reflection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During this process, “every statement initially is treated as having equal value” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). Those statements that are not related to the focus of the topic or that overlap were eliminated so that only the “textural descriptions” of the experience or horizons remained (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96).

**Imaginative Variation**

Imaginative variation involves the researcher’s role in “describing the essential structures of a phenomenon,” and also refers to how the “experience of the phenomenon came to be what it is” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). Through this process, there was an attempt to “see the object of the study- the phenomenon- from several different angles or perspectives” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 227). “The task of imaginative variation is to seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or
functions” (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 97-98). In this research, the participants’ responses led to structural descriptions that were analyzed.

**Synthesis of Meanings and Essences**

Synthesis of meaning and essences is the final stage in Moustakas’ (1994) model of phenomenological data analysis. This is the step in which the textural and structural descriptions were combined to develop an illustration of the essence of the phenomena as a complete concept. This step includes analyzing the experiences of the participants through seeking out the “essence or basic structure of a phenomenon” (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 227).

The data collection process began with the interviews. Because the participants’ interviews were audiotaped, when transcription began it was possible to make clear notes of what was heard. This was not necessarily the data analysis, but simply the collection. The analysis began when the audio files were sent to the processional transcription company and transcribed verbatim. After this, the files were sent back and the onset of the analysis began because it was organized and refined piece by piece. This allowed the coding process to begin, which, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), involved “nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects” of data (p. 173). As coding continued, the researcher took meticulous notes of other ideas that occurred, concepts or ideas to go back and clarify, and information to leave out as the study had to be narrow and focused.

Data that were related to specific information in the literature review and the research questions was sought. The purpose of the study was to ultimately discover how Black females could use their intersectionality as a positive force in their careers. The analysis process included various colors of highlights that helped categorize and organize the findings for easy reference and identification. This data was reviewed multiple times and organized over and over again in
different categories; however, this was okay and expected. The goal was to eventually make the
data manageable so that the process did not become too overwhelming and the purpose of the
study lost. In addition, the researcher had to make sure that she did not go down paths that
would not assist in supporting the research as that data was dismissed.

**Trustworthiness**

It would be a disservice to the study and participants if it were to be completed solely
based on the researcher’s vested interests and biases, so much care was taken in not allowing the
researcher’s ideas skew the data (Patton, 2002). The researcher had to take into account any
personal shortcomings in the data analysis process, so the practice of consistently checking the
data for accuracy was imperative to follow. In order to guarantee trustworthiness, triangulation
and member checking procedures were utilized. Triangulation was gained when the multiple
sources of data from the interviews, journal entries, and document reviews were combined; this
process ensured accuracy. Member checking provided for the participants’ view of the validity
of the findings (Creswell, 2013). The participants were allowed to review the transcripts of the
interviews so that they could check to see that their words and ideas were not misinterpreted or
misrepresented. This ensured that no liberties were taken with what they had to say.

**Credibility**

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), there are many ways that researchers can
ensure that their study has credibility. One of these ways is through triangulation, which
involves multiple methods of gathering data, multiple sources of data, and “multiple theories to
confirm data findings” (p. 215). Validity of a study is established through the credible measures
that a researcher uses when performing his or her research (Yin, 2016). When completing the
data analysis, the researcher had to include the direct quotes of participants to make sure that
their words were used to reflect their perceptions and ideas as they meant them. This was the principal method of member checking (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, credibility was established through a strategy that Merriam and Tisdell (2016) identified as the researcher’s position. This meant that the audience needed to be made aware of the researcher’s position so that they could have clarity when understanding the interpretation of the data. Furthermore, exposing any biases and dispositions in the beginning shows the reader that there was no attempt to be deceptive.

**Dependability & Confirmability**

Dependability refers to how well the data is interpreted and the findings of the research reported. Additionally, the documented and traceable progression of the research determines its dependability (Schwandt, 2015). There was an organized documentation system of every procedure where all data and notes were appropriately filed. This was a highly beneficial practice as it allowed the information to be available to anyone who wanted to review it; as such, he or she could appropriately “attest to the use of dependable procedures and the generation of confirmable findings” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 13). It was necessary to report all of the processes within the research study so that all concerned parties could be sure that appropriate procedures and practices had been followed. An audit trail was also implemented. According to Creswell (2013), an audit trail is an “evidentiary chronology of research activities, including field notes, questionnaires, and transcriptions for focus groups, coding efforts, data analysis activities, and other information relating to the completion of the study,” (p. 291).

Schwandt (2015) stated that confirmability ensures that the researcher’s conclusions are not figments of the imagination. Additionally, through clarifying any biases, the study’s confirmability was also strengthened. It was very important for this study to be corroborated by
others. So all procedures were documented for the purposes of checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. As such, comprehensive record keeping and protection of data for potential examination were crucial to this approach.

**Transferability**

According to Creswell (2013) transferability is accomplished via the thick and rich description of the study. Patton (2002) argued that rich description is the substance and an important part of good qualitative study. He added that description is separate from interpretation as interpretation “involves explaining the findings, answering ‘why’ questions, attaching significance to particular results, and putting patterns into an analytic framework” (p. 438). There was an intention to provide comprehensive descriptions of all of the participants so that the audience could adequately place himself or herself within the context of the study and understand it better.

**Ethical Considerations**

This study was very sensitive in nature as it involved the personal feelings and experiences of Black female school leaders and how they perceived they were treated based on their race and gender. Because of this, ethical considerations were vital and imperative. Formal approval for the study was requested and received from Liberty University’s IRB prior to any research data being collected. It was also necessary to receive informed consent from the participants before interviews and journals were completed and documents submitted (Creswell, 2013). Participants were made aware, in acute detail, of the purpose of the study and all of the procedures. It was also important to inform them that their participation was completely voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time.
In order for participants to be open and honest with me in during the data collection process, they had to feel confident that their identities would be protected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this reason, the use of pseudonyms was employed all throughout the study to protect participants as well as the various sites of the study. Participants were also made aware of the time commitment involved with this study. It required that they be available for individual interviews, have time to respond to journal prompts, and submit relevant documents in a timely manner.

All of the data gathered was kept secured in the researcher’s home office to ensure that it was safe and protected. All transcribed data was stored and locked in a cabinet and all computerized data was housed on the researcher’s personal computer and thumb drive, which was also kept in the researcher’s home office. The researcher’s personal computer was password protected. Audio tapes were kept in the locked cabinet, as well. In accordance with Office of Human Research Protections, these records will be maintained for three years after the study has been completed.

Summary

This chapter identified appropriate rationales for all components of the research study. This design of this qualitative study was acknowledged as a transcendental phenomenology. The justification for using this approach was outlined and delineated. The participants were identified, as well as the reason for including those participants. Data was collected from three sources and the analyses of these data were discussed. Procedures to ensure trustworthiness were identified and at the end of the chapter, there was a conclusion as to how ethical considerations of the research was ensured.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Black female school leaders as they related to intersectionality. The goal was to show that Black female school leaders could actually use this concept that has been defined as oppressive as a tool of empowerment and inspiration. This chapter presents a narrative description of the participants. Findings are an analysis of the participants’ lived experiences and perceptions revealed through individual interviews, participants’ journaling, and a review and analysis of relevant documents. This chapter concludes with a summary.

Data collection procedures included gaining approvals from Liberty’s IRB and obtaining signatures of consent from each of the participants. The data collection process was explained to the participants; they were informed that every aspect of the research was confidential in nature and that their participation was completely voluntary. The three data sets collected from each participant were interviews, responses to journal prompts, and relevant documents. The researcher reviewed and analyzed the data using analysis procedures as outlined by the transcendental phenomenological design. This included coding and searching for themes through repeatedly reviewing the data. This process led the researcher to be able to answer and address the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Black female school leaders describe their experiences with the intersectionality of race and gender?

RQ2: What specific challenges do participants face and how do they engage with and resolve them?
RQ3: How (if at all) do participants’ experiences with intersectionality influence their leadership practices?

RQ4: How do Black female school leaders describe their awareness of intersectionality as it relates to their decision-making?

Participants

Participants consisted of Black females who served in a supervisory capacity in a K-12 school or program. These individuals had to have been serving in this position or one similar for at least three years in order to participate. The rationale for this reflects findings that indicate that administrators, especially principals, leave their stressful positions by year three (Tyre, 2015). Requiring three years shows that the participant had broad and comprehensive experiences that allowed them to provide the researcher with thick, rich descriptions of those experiences. Participants were from several different states and regions. These states included states in the Mid Atlantic, South Atlantic, Midwest, Southeastern, and Southern regions of the country. The researcher wanted to be able to gather an extensive range of experiences from diverse regions with the expectation that Black females would encounter diverse experiences based on where they lived and served.

Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to ensure confidentiality; this included their names and any other identifying information to include names of schools and school districts. The researcher made the decision to not include some pertinent information because of the potential for breach of confidentiality. Some of the experiences shared were very sensitive in nature and confidentiality was imperative. In fact, one of the participants reiterated several times during her interview that the researcher would need to be careful in reporting her experiences as she felt that some of them were extremely unique and telling and she did not want to be revealed.
It was very important that the researcher made the participants comfortable while sharing their experiences so that they would be as open and transparent as possible. To ensure that the narratives of the participants flowed in a more fluid context, the same pseudonyms were used in reporting data collected across all three sets of data.

The researcher created a table that identifies each participant, to included several pieces of information (see Appendix D). In addition to pseudonym and position, the researcher included age, years of experience, marital status, location, and highest degree earned. The participants’ ages were important to note so that the reader would have an idea of how the participant may be received based on age especially since there is an opinion that age influences how individuals are perceived. The years of experience were included so that the reader could know how long the participant had been in their current position or a similar position. That information could be valuable in understanding how some of the participants have learned to navigate their careers and the nuances of their interactions with education stakeholders. Although not directly listed in any research question or finding, the researcher chose to list marital status of participants so that the reader could simply have a more well-rounded depiction of the participants. It is possible that marital status or some other personal aspect of their lives could be related to Black females’ leadership; that potential will be listed in Chapter Five for recommendations for future study. The chart also includes the regions that the participants are from as well as the highest degree that they have earned. Their location could provide a context in which the reader could couple his or her knowledge of that region along with what the participants reported. The researcher would also like to note that collectively, the participants bring 142 years of experience to the study.
Annie

Annie (pseudonym) is a 43-year-old assistant principal who works in a high school in a Southeastern state where the majority of the student population receives free and reduced meals (FARMS). She has been an administrator for seven years and has been in education for 20 years; she also has previously served as an English teacher and reading specialist. Annie earned her doctorate in education in 2012. At the time of the interview, Annie was starting her first year in a new school after having worked for six years at her previous school in a different state. Her former school was in an affluent suburban area, while her new school is in a relatively poor community. She indicated that the differences in these two communities caused her to find herself exerting more time and energy towards student-related tasks, particularly discipline-related tasks, than she did at her previous school. In sharing her thoughts about being a Black female school leader, Annie said, “I think [it] is really great for children to see, embrace, and understand that we all can be successful no matter who you are and where you come from.”

Candace

Candace (pseudonym) is a 53-year-old principal who is currently serving her 18th year in the position at a large and diverse high school in a suburb of a Mid-Atlantic state. She has been in education for 28 years and has an earned doctorate. A member of several organizations, Candace often finds herself engaged in various functions that serve to benefit students. When she first became a principal, she did so in an area that did not have a lot of minorities in leadership positions. Candace stated that a large part of her daily tasks as a school leader involves finding the time to do everything that she needs to do. During the interview, she stated that she has dealt with several situations where her leadership was challenged; she thinks she would not have had to deal with those situations had she been a White male principal.
Deloise

Deloise (pseudonym) has worked in the Phillips County (pseudonym) school system in a Mid-Atlantic state for almost 40 years. At 62-years-old, she has seen the suburban, affluent district go from serving mostly White students to the mostly minority district that it is today. During her career, she has worked in a variety of capacities from physical education teacher, to special education resource teacher, to now serving as an assistant principal. She noted that other administrators and colleagues around her encouraged her to become an administrator. Deloise stated that although she has felt that her race has impacted some parents’ interactions with her, she also feels that her age is a negative impacting factor when dealing with staff members. According to Deloise, “I find that there is a mindset that only the young have new or fresh ideas.”

Hattie

Hattie (pseudonym) is just beginning her first year as a principal at a middle school in a Mid-Atlantic state after having served as an assistant principal for eight years. The school where she gained her experience as an assistant principal was extremely diverse, but last school year, she became a principal intern at a mostly white, extremely affluent school. She indicated that that experience prepared her for her current position as the minority population at her new school, which is very small and the community is very educated and wealthy. At 44, education is Hattie’s second career as she spent four years in the private sector after graduating from college. Hattie notes that one challenge she encountered in her journey to becoming an administrator was that those in positions of hiring felt that at 35, she was too young to become an administrator. Once the interview concluded, Hattie included the following in one of her journal responses: “The interview really illuminated the significance of EVERY decision and more
importantly how much my decisions, verbal and nonverbal moves may be scrutinized because of my race and gender.”

**Maxine**

Maxine (pseudonym) is 51 years-old and is starting her 11th year as an assistant principal at a middle school in an up and coming suburban area in a Mid-Atlantic state. She has been in education for a total of 29 years. She has spent the last few years working at a high school and she notes that the dynamics between middle and high school are drastically different. Maxine’s educational background includes special education, and that experience allowed her to spend several years as the administrator that supervised special education. However, during the last year at her previous school, the special education program was taken from her and given to a White female who had no experience with special education. Maxine noted that at one point during her career, she was hired as an administrator because those in the position to hire were looking specifically for a Black female to fill the position.

**Linda**

Linda (pseudonym) has been an assistant principal for six years in a Mid-Atlantic state in an area where the population is relatively less affluent than areas around it. She noted that because she has worked with her current principal the longest, she is the first in charge when her principal is out of the building. At 38 years of age, Linda has been toying with the idea of becoming a principal. She admits that the idea gives her a little bit of angst because she is acutely aware of the huge responsibility and political prowess it involves. The demographics of Linda’s school is mostly minority and a large portion of these students are Hispanic. The student population also includes a large number of LGBT individuals, which adds to the school’s
diversity. When asked why she wanted to become an administrator, she responded, “I really feel like I knew I would be an administrator before I ever even became a teacher.”

Susan

Susan (pseudonym) is a 45-year-old assistant principal who is in her third year of administration. She currently works in a Midwest state in a relatively small and rural school district outside of a large, urban city; her elementary school serves students in grades K-5 and has about 635 students enrolled. Susan is also working on her doctorate and she is researching the impact of the positive behavior intervention support (PBIS) program on a certain demographic of students enrolled in her school. She recently secured several thousand dollars in grants to implement mentoring programs in her building, which is mostly minority and 100% FARMS. It was important to learn that Susan is the only assistant principal in her building, and between her and her principal, she has the most interactions with students and staff. Towards the end of the interview, Susan shared that she often feels lonely in her role as she does not have many other Black female school administrators around her that she can connect with and discuss the lows and highs of the job. Susan captured the essence of her professional struggle by stating, “I don’t think a man of any race would second-guess his effectiveness at this [administrative] level, especially if he were 18 months away from earning a doctoral degree.”

Clara

Clara (pseudonym) has been in education since 1995 and has been an administrator since 2003. After having served six years as principal, she decided to move into a more global role of overseeing an enrichment program that serves over 3000 students in a suburban county in a Mid-Atlantic state. Clara, who is 50 years old, stated that since taking on her current role, she has had the opportunity to see school operations in a broader light and it has helped her to
understand the necessity of entities working together. This new role also has allowed her to have more oversight with her program than she did as a school-based principal. These responsibilities include but are not limited to budgeting and program and curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation. Clara was interviewed in person one evening in a public place after having attended three separate meetings with various stakeholders; those stakeholders had vested interests in her program and she noted that a large part of her current work entails countless meetings and consultations to make the program better for students. According to Clara, “I am keenly aware that to be equal to others, I have to be several percentage points BETTER than those that do not look like me.”

Elizabeth

At 34, Elizabeth (pseudonym) was the youngest administrator interviewed for this research. She has served in a supervisory role for four years in a poor school district in a Southeastern state. Elizabeth aspired to become an administrator early on, but changed her mind when she found that she loved working with curricula and teachers instead. In fact, when asked about how she became an administrator, she noted that she did not interview and truly was not given an option. Her principal, who is a White male, came to her after another administrator went to another school, and told her that she would be taking that individual’s place. Elizabeth felt that her race and gender worked positively for her in that she can say certain things to Black and Hispanic students that White administrators and Black male administrators cannot say.

Pamela

Pamela (pseudonym) is starting her tenth year as a school administrator in a suburb of a Mid-Atlantic state. After she graduated from college, she started working in the private sector, but got an opportunity to teach when the state in which she lived started recruiting minorities to
become educators through an alternative certification process. Pamela is 41-years-old and was first promoted to the administrator position in the same building where she was teaching, admitting that this caused some challenges. She found that one of the challenges was that her principal, who was a White male, allowed staff members to circumvent the assistant principals in the building, including her, when they had questions and needed things. They instead went directly to him, which did not follow the expected chain of command. During the interview, Pamela noted that she thinks that we (Black women) are sometimes our own worst enemies.

**Evelyn**

Evelyn (pseudonym) has been a middle school principal for 11 years in a suburban area in a South Atlantic state. Prior to becoming a principal, she was an assistant principal, becoming one at age 30. Evelyn is 45-years-old and defended her dissertation in March of 2017. When she arrived as principal of her current building, which she notes had been mostly minority for a while, the racial makeup of the staff did not reflect the student body: there were about seven Black instructional staff while almost all of the students were Black. Now that she has been at her school for eight years, she has increased the numbers of minority instructional staff, to include Hispanic and Asian teachers. When asked about her experience as a Black female school leader, she recounted a retreat that she attended and there was an opportunity for her to share her experience because she was the only Black female there. Once she shared, she said the other attendees were totally surprised, saying, “they could not understand or even begin to believe what Black female administrators experience.”

**Bonnie**

Bonnie (pseudonym) is a 41-year-old principal of a pre-K through 4th grade elementary school with an enrollment of 1200 students in an urban area of a Southern state. She has been an
administrator for a total of 10 years and three of those have been as a principal. Education is a second career for Bonnie and after four years in the private sector, she began teaching, and has since taught 1st, 2nd, and 4th grades. Bonnie’s interview, which was by phone, actually started later than scheduled as she had an unplanned meeting after school, which correlates to the busy nature of school administrators. Her school enrollment is mostly minority as about 90% of her school population includes Black and Hispanic students. During her interview, Bonnie shared an interesting observation: she noted that before she became principal of her school, Black parents, females in particular, were used to getting their way in the school because they would come in and cause such a disruption that the previous principal, who was White, would give them whatever they wanted just to get them to leave the building.

Amelia

Amelia (pseudonym) has had the unique opportunity of gaining all of her administration experience in one building located in a suburban area of a Mid-Atlantic state. A 42-year-old New York native, she graduated from a prominent southern university where she did not initially major in education. After a series of opportunities, she became principal of an elementary school and is in her second year in that position. Amelia noted during her in-person interview, that was held in a public place, that as a Black female principal in her current building, it is important for her to always have a White assistant principal because with only two administrators, she understands the need of White people to have someone that they can relate to and find common ground with. The demographics of her student population is mostly Hispanic. She has found that the reading and comprehension strategies that her staff uses with her ESOL students (English for speakers of other languages) also work for her Black students who struggle with reading and comprehension.
Elaine

Elaine (pseudonym) has been an educator for 16 years in a Midwest state. During that time, she has served as both an English teacher and an assistant principal. Currently, she is in her third year as a principal of a junior high school that serves grades 5-8. Elaine is 41-years-old and noted that one of the challenges she experienced when interviewing for a position in administration is that she was perceived as too young for the position. Elaine’s school is relatively small with only 400 students; of those students, half are White, while Black and Hispanic students make up the rest of the student population. When asked about the most difficult part of her job, Elaine said that it involves encouraging her “staff to see that change is a necessary part of our existence as educators and that it something we must embrace if we want to successfully equip our students with the tools they need to be successful beyond the classroom.” The middle-class district where Elaine currently works is diverse, and the central office personnel are mostly White. During the interview, Elaine stated that in the district where she previously worked, which was majority Black, she faced many more obstacles and complications as she tried to serve as principal in her former building.

Maggie

Maggie (pseudonym) has been a school administrator for four years in a large urban city in the Mid-Atlantic. She currently works in a high school where the majority of the students are Black. For this reason, Maggie indicated that she has never felt that her race has played a significant role in her leadership; however, Maggie previously lived in a Southern state and believes that her race definitely worked against her there as she applied to be a school leader for three years and was never hired nor given the opportunity to interview for a position. Maggie has an earned doctorate from a prestigious historically Black college. She stated that one of the
main reasons that she wanted to become a school leader was because she wanted to work with both students and teachers and not be limited to only classroom interactions. Maggie said she wanted to be an administrator because she saw the need for minority girls to have role models: “Growing up in a predominately White school district, very few teachers, let alone school leaders looked like me. I wanted to be a role model for Black and Brown children, especially the girls.”

Results

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to document the lived experiences of the 15 research participants as described in this chapter. The research process began with a set of interview questions which were completed by phone or in person, whichever method was most conducive for the participant and researcher. Immediately following the interview, the researcher bracketed out thoughts and feelings of the interviews’ content so that accurate data was reflected within the research. That way, the researcher’s personal feelings, opinions, and ideas would be excluded. Each of the interviews was transcribed. All of the interviews, except for one, were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist company in which a nondisclosure agreement was signed. Each participant was given the chance to review her transcribed interview for accuracy and member checking.

Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher implemented several methods to analyze the data. First, the researcher utilized Atlas.ti to input all of the transcribed interviews. After the interviews were added to the system, the researcher began to reread and review the transcribed interviews looking for themes and commonalities amongst the participants. Additionally, the researcher created documents in Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word to organize the data which assisted in grouping some of the common responses of the participants. The researcher read and reread the transcribed interviews many times in order to have a clear
understanding of what each participant was trying to portray through their lived experience. Using Atlas.ti, Microsoft Word, and Microsoft Excel allowed the researcher to facilitate the coding of data and clustering of statements into themes and subthemes based on the similarities and parallels of the participant responses.

The researcher also analyzed the other forms of data that were collected from the participants, which were the journal responses and relevant documents. There were three journal prompts, and the intent of the journal prompts was to track the trajectory of participants’ thoughts as the research process continued. The goal was to require participants to respond to prompts that made them think about their jobs and the intersectionality of their race and gender on purpose. Additionally, the researcher wanted the participants to think of instances where they felt strongly that the circumstances of those instances would be different had they been of another race and/or gender.

The relevant documents were reviewed so that the researcher could get an understanding as to how the participants communicated in written form, and for what reasons they felt written communication was necessary. Some of these documents included letters of reprimand, observations, emails, and newsletters. These documents were linked directly to what the participants stated in their interviews and substantiated their experiences and how they felt they were viewed and treated.

**Theme Development**

After repeated review and analysis of the data, the researcher began the coding process by identifying themes that were noticed in the participants’ responses. This included epoche, phenomenological reductionism, imaginative variation, and the synthesis of meanings and essences. Through this process, the researcher identified six themes that stood out with regards
to Black female school leaders’ experiences as they related to intersectionality. After the themes were identified, the researcher then assigned codes to each theme, noting the frequency of each. The themes that were identified were:

1. Having to prove one’s self
2. Having to deal with assumptions
3. Having to be questioned by others
4. Having to present concepts carefully
5. Having their decisions challenged
6. Having a dedicated commitment to students

The themes are addressed below along with the research questions to which they correlate. They are also addressed with the subthemes that were developed out of the information gathered from the transcripts of the participants’ interviews and journal prompt responses. Participants used the words “African-American” and “Black” interchangeably.

RQ1: How do Black female school leaders describe their experiences with the intersectionality of race and gender? Multiple questions were asked to obtain an understanding of participants’ descriptions of their unique experiences as school leaders who experience intersectionality as they are Black and female. The researcher wanted the participants to include their points of view and their perceptions of how they dealt with the “double jeopardy” (Essed, 1991) that was their reality. They reported these experiences both through responding to interview questions and through responding to the journal prompts.

Black female school leaders were asked about their experiences in their leadership roles as they related to their race and gender. In this instance, participants reported mostly negative experiences; however, they never communicated, verbally or nonverbally, that they allowed
these negative experiences define them or deter them from the larger purpose of ensuring students received a valuable education. Answers to the interview questions and journal prompts, along with the review of the documents, led to the emergence of the first main theme.

**Theme 1: Having to prove one’s self**

The first and most profound theme that emerged from the data analysis was that Black female school leaders felt that they have to prove that they belong in their positions of leadership as 11 of the participants’ responses contained this theme. Information from the data sets revealed and explained why the participants felt this way. Participants felt that even after preparing for and obtaining a position as a school leader by gaining education and going through extensive interview processes, there still was a feeling that they had to prove that they were knowledgeable and capable of serving in the role. Linda felt that as a Black woman, dealing with White men and women required a higher level of expertise because she had to prove herself. She indicated that it was important to know the “curriculum or rules of whatever it is people are asking [you] about” because her race and gender played against her.

Bonnie noted that “people wonder how you got your job” as if she did not have to meet the same standards as a White person. She indicated that maybe it is due to Black women’s own insecurities, but she has to go over and beyond the minimum requirements to show people why she has her job. Candace echoed this sentiment as she explained that because she never can escape being Black and being a woman, there are concepts that go along with that and one of those concepts is having to do more and having to do extra work. Having to prove herself has actually caused Deloise to alter her leadership style in that she has to be more directive with her staff versus allowing them to be more participatory or self-directed. Annie surmised that proving one’s self may be sometimes related to the culture of the school. She added
Depending on the culture of the school, there are people that are going to judge you just because you are African American and they’re going to have higher expectations because they’re going to feel like as an African American, you should have had to work harder to get that position.

Elaine approaches having to prove herself a little differently. After being faced the possibility of being asked to resign, her immediate supervisor told her to prove that she had worked hard to make all of the gains in her building that she said she had. She could not because she really did not have the documentation or artifacts to verify. As a result, Elaine says that now, she keeps everything and even implements blogs and other means of record-keeping as evidence to prove the work that she does. To corroborate this, Elaine shared a wealth of relevant documentation showing how she leads her school and proving that students are learning. She keeps copious and detailed notes of every staff and PTO meeting. These notes include issues that are as simple as discussing substitute pay with the Board of Education to documenting that the building service worker needs to replace batteries in the carbon monoxide systems. If she has documentation about these various things, she can verify that they happened and have proof if ever questioned.

Maggie said that she never really reflected on the fact that she works hard to prove herself until faced with the question during the interview. She said, “I never really examined just how much harder I have to work to prove myself as an effective leader.” Amelia was the only participant who said she does not feel the need to prove herself; however, she did state that some people don’t want to work for Black women because of their need to prove themselves and said that this need often becomes their Achilles’ heel.
There were three subthemes that emerged from this main theme. Participants reported experiences that included not getting credit for their work, having an inequitable workload, and working to gain trust. The three subthemes seemed to lead to a unique dynamic: the participants recognized that not getting credit for their work and having an inequitable workload somehow moved them to diligently working to gain the trust of those around them.

**Not getting credit for work.** Six of the participants reported that they have worked hard, implemented programs, or completed other tasks and these efforts were either overlooked or the credit was attributed to someone else. This indicates that even when Black female school leaders do the same as school leaders who are White and/or male, or when they go beyond the expected requirements, they still do not receive recognition or accolades. For example, according to Maxine,

I began to notice that whenever I completed a major school-wide task, accomplished a school-wide goal, made announcements or decisions in favor of staff or students, the principal would either repeat what was stated and/or try to give others credit for my work. Maxine was clearly taking steps to improve the education and instructional opportunities for children, but she felt that her efforts were not valued because her principal gave the credit for her work to someone else or he would not acknowledge her at all. Nevertheless, these women do not stop these efforts simply because they do not feel they get their just due. They continue to work tirelessly for students regardless of the lack of recognition.

Deloise echoed this by stating that, “It does not matter how much work you do, you still may not get the credit or respect for your accomplishments.” Although Maggie works on an administrative team where all of her counterparts are also Black, it does not mean that she is absolved from having the same sentiment of not getting credit for her work. She said, “It really
opened my eyes when I thought about different scenarios where my male colleagues have been praised for their work and I have not.”

**Inequitable workload.** Ironically, as nine participants felt that they had to work harder to prove themselves, this lead to their having more work to do than their White and/or male counterparts. None of the participants seemed to be particularly bitter about this fact; they simply spoke about it as a part of their reality. Clara reported a very telling experience. She stated that she and a White female colleague, with whom she had gone through the principal intern process, were both principals of middle schools that were geographically close together; however, Clara’s school had more problems and challenges than her White female counterpart’s school. As a result, Clara had to work harder to just maintain control of her building in terms of behaviors and the socio-economic challenges that were present while her White female colleague could spend her energies perfecting her role as an instructional leader (which eventually propelled her to a central office position). Evelyn noted something similar. She said

I feel like I’ve got to always be telling the story of my school. I’ve always got to show that we have good things happening whereas I don’t think the others [White/male] feel as obligated to do it. They pretty much can get accolades regardless…get what they need for their school. I sometimes feel like I gotta prove that we’re worthy of things, whereas others, opportunities may fall in their lap.

Maggie noted that she experiences high levels of frustration when her male colleagues “do the bare minimum and I have to pick up the pieces to make sure the job was done efficiently.”

**Gaining trust.** Five of the participants felt that gaining the trust of stakeholders were a part of proving themselves because their race and gender precludes them from being seen as
trustworthy. Gaining trust leads to appropriate relationship building that allows the Black female school leader to be seen as an advocate versus an adversary. According to Candace, “I do think there are many instances where your relationships with people, how they trust you….takes longer for that to happen….I believe [with] a White male that happens faster, especially in situations where there's a majority White staff.”

Hattie, who is in her first year as a principal and whose staff is made up of mostly White females, works hard to marry her own strategies with the things that the previous (White male) principal did in order to gain her staff’s trust. She noticed that any time there is a challenge that involves race and equity, there is a great deal of discomfort with those discussions. She said Any discussions about race and equity, I find that even myself as a person of color, I really do have to dance a little bit because in some regards, in order to not shut down the conversation, I have to figure out how to engage them in a productive way and have them trust the process and trust that I'm not making judgements on them. I need to get to the root of the belief systems, and that is where we're headed as a school.

Evelyn also replaced a White male principal. She said that the first year of her principalship was “about building culture, trust, and positive climate.” Clara acknowledged that the only way to move forward is to counteract distrust with trust because there is too much work to be done in schools and classrooms. She said that she is …very passionate that [we] all need to work together. You have to figure out how you're going to work together, because this heavy lifting is about to come. You got to figure out who you're connected to, and who can help you move your work forward, and you got to get rid of all this distrust.
Theme 2: Having to deal with assumptions

Participants noted that being Black and female carries along with it assumptions and presuppositions that other individuals do not have to contend with. All of the participants noted that there are assumptions that come with being a Black female in the position of school leader. These assumptions are connected to the isolated aspects of their identity (Black and female) and there are also assumptions connected with those aspects combined. The implications of those two realities are quite different. There were three sub-themes that were revealed in this. They were perceptions, stereotypes, and being viewed as a race/challenge expert.

Perceptions. 100% of the participants in the study noted various experiences that were based on how they were perceived by other educational stakeholders. Annie felt like people see a sense of power when they see Black women and as a result, people automatically have their guard up against them. While this is perhaps because they know that Black women have to work harder to earn and maintain these positions of leadership in schools, Annie said that she still had to work to break those barriers down so that the staff members she worked with saw her as an advocate. Pamela reiterated the sense of power concept and believed that others are, in fact, threatened by Black women. When probed further to elaborate, she said this threat could be perceived by the way that they address certain topics or the way that they speak. She recalled an instance when she was a testing coordinator and told staff members that a certain infraction during a test administration would result in a formal write-up. The staff members were offended by her statement and felt that she was being threatening. She noted that this was a learning experience for her and noted that, “had it been said by someone who didn’t look like me, I don’t think it would have been taken the way it was taken.”
In some cases, this perception may go in an opposite direction. Deloise recounted an experience where the Black parents of a student felt that she was going to go easier on the student because she, too, was Black. Specifically, Deloise said, “There’s this expectation that you’re going to treat them [Black students] a little bit differently, give them a little bit.” This is not surprising because there is a belief that Black people will make exceptions for other Black people. This played similarly with Annie, who was issuing a consequence to a bi-racial child. The mother of that child, who was White, did not agree with the consequence and accused Annie of not looking out for the Black children and referred to her as “a White woman trapped in a Black woman’s body.” Maxine actually was not hired by a Black principal because she was Black. According to Maxine, the principal said, “I’m going to go with [a White candidate] because the main office would be too dark” if she were hired.

Clara noted that in her experience, perceptions have worked in her favor because of the resiliency that Black women are known for. She also conceded, however, that there is some negative aspects embedded in that notion. She said, “African American women are strong and can endure, but at the same time, I feel like the lifting that I have to do is very different than the lifting that other people have to do that don’t necessarily look like me.”

**Stereotypes.** Black women have multiple negative stereotypes that are attached to their identity, related to both their race and gender collectively and singly. As a result, when serving as a school leaders, the stakeholders that they interact with may expect these stereotypes to play out in their leadership. More often than not, the most prevalent stereotype expected is that Black women are ineffective as leaders. Nine of the participants reported having had to deal with or respond to negative stereotypes. Prior to last school year, Evelyn’s administrative team consisted of all Black female administrators. This was unprecedented in her district and she
knew that some people did not agree with it. She knew that it would not last and said, “That’s a mindset, that in order for our team to be effective, we have to have a White male or a White person on it.”

Elizabeth recalled an incident with a bi-racial child whose mother was White. Elizabeth had the student in her office after a fight and the child was on speaker phone with her mother and the mother assumed that the child had gotten into a fight with Black girls because Black girls would be the only ones who wanted to fight her. Elizabeth worked with the student to resolve the conflict effectively and when the mother came to the school, she was shocked that Elizabeth was a Black woman because of the way she handled the situation.

Susan and Maggie both felt that they were not given opportunities to become school leaders because of their race and gender and because individuals who are Black females are sometimes viewed as unqualified. Susan said, “the notion that as a Black girl, that maybe I wasn’t admin material for whatever reason. I’ve sat in interviews with White women and they ended very, very quickly and I ended up not getting the position.” Maggie tried to become an administrator in a Southern state for three consecutive years and was unsuccessful. This belief that Black women cannot be good leaders extends into how Black females decide to respond to certain stakeholders.

Maxine encountered a stereotypical assumption in a different way. She once dealt with an issue of race at her school where a Black father was adamant that a non-Black student called his son a slave. In her investigation of the incident, Maxine did not find that to be true; however, the father found it difficult to let go. Since Maxine was Black, she was supposed to feel the same way that he did about the allegation. Maxine said that the father expected her to side with
him when he said, “You're black. You should know. If you call one kid a slave, you're calling everybody a slave.”

**Being viewed as race/challenge expert.** Oftentimes, the majority race feels that Black educators are more prepared to work with Black students because they assume that they can relate to them easier. While only 33% of the participants reported this experience, the ones that were reported were quite salient. Pamela noted that she often finds herself engaging with her staff on how to deal with the behavior of students who are mostly Black. While this may reveal weaknesses in White staff members’ ability to work with Black students, there also exists great opportunities for Black female school leaders to gain trust on all sides. For instance, Linda felt that she can say things to students that other people (non-Black and non-female) cannot say. She said that being a Black woman allows “respect. There’s a level of understanding. There’s things that I’m going to be able to say. As a Black female, you need to understand this is how people will perceive you.” Elizabeth reinforced this sentiment as she indicated that her being a Black female allows her to relate to Black female students a lot easier. She said, “Sometimes I can just get on their level and they feel a whole lot better. Their parents will come up here and I will say the same thing to their mamas. And it works. It works to my advantage.”

On the other hand, this can play out very differently in terms of the placement of principals. For instance, Evelyn felt particularly strongly about what she thinks was an unjust placement of principals based on certain schools and the characteristics of those schools. She said

Sometimes you feel like you’re the cleanup principal. That’s the challenge I see a lot.

The schools I’ve been to have been very hard schools. I look at some of the other Black female principals and the schools are hard schools. There are other schools, I don’t want
to say they’re a piece of cake school, but they don’t have as many challenges…the people appointed to those schools tend to be White male or female.

**Challenging White privilege.** As for White privilege, four of the participants spoke about this concept in some way. Amelia struggled with the notion of White privilege as she feels she deals with it quite often in her school. Since the majority of her staff is comprised of White women, she is frequently faced with what she believes is “helplessness or feigned ignorance” when something does not go the way they feel it should. The problem she has with this is that it directly impacts the way that these individuals address their work, which directly impacts the students. Clara indicated that this privilege emerged when she attempted to open access to her magnet programs a little wider to minority children.

Susan experienced this White privilege a bit differently. She noted that when she attends district meetings for school leaders, she notices that the White administrators, regardless of age, are cliqued together. She said that the older White administrators pour into the younger ones and give them advice. She says for that reason, Black administrators avoid those individuals because they are not supported by them and they are not treated as equals simply because they are Black. Evelyn noted that oftentimes when outsiders or community members come into her building, they do not believe that she is the principal. She said these individuals will instead go up to her White, male assistant principal, thinking that he is the principal because the leaders of buildings should be White and/or male.

RQ2: What specific challenges do participants face and how do they engage with and resolve them? The purpose of this question was to uncover specific negative encounters that participants had that they contributed to their race and gender. Additionally, the researcher wanted to learn how the participants handled these encounters. Participants noted a number of
challenges that they face and all of those challenges were entrenched in their race and gender. The broadest and most significant challenge reported was that of having to endure the questioning of others. From there, two subthemes emerged: fact checking and ageism.

**Theme 3: Having to be questioned by others**

All of the Black female school leaders in this study believed that they have to tolerate being questioned by others to include central office personnel, school staff members, and parents simply because they are Black and female. Annie said that she feels people will question her until they’ve seen her in action and see what she does. Candace noted that when she hires individuals, she is often aware that others on the outside looking in may think that she hires based on race, especially if she promotes or hires individuals who are also Black and female. She said “I don’t think that a White male has to deal with that level of scrutiny. No one assumes that they’re hiring based on race.” This creates a certain paranoia with Black female school leaders as they attempt to run their schools while remaining aware of the fact that everyone is watching closely. Deloise was very candid in her response and said plainly that

> When you’re dealing with the majority population, there’s always this mindset of does that person [Black female] know what they’re doing. Sometimes the African American community can be as biased as the majority parents. Because I think there is a mindset with some of our African American parents who share the same value system as the majority, that White can handle it better than Black.

Bonnie said that she knows there are questions that she is asked that her previous principal did not have to contend with because she was White. Evelyn said that she believes that if she tells a parent something, they readily question or want to challenge her whereas if her White male
assistant principal says the same thing or something similar, they still may not agree but will not go “toe to toe” with him.

Linda spoke of an experience she had when she made a presentation to the staff about the master schedule. Once the presentation was over, she said that a staff member went to her principal to question what was perceived as Linda’s overuse of the word “I”. Linda, being a novice at making master schedules, actually did all of the work alone, so there was no shared responsibility and no one else to include to attribute credit to. In hindsight, she said that she realized she should have been somewhat offended because the person who posed this question was a White woman who was a dance teacher and had no experience with the master schedule.

Candace shared a memo for the record that was written to a staff member who was questioning the validity of a letter that was added to his school personnel file. The staff member wanted the letter removed and all copies destroyed. In responding to this request, Candace was very pointed and direct in explaining why the letter was necessary and also outlined the articles of the staff member’s contract that allowed and permitted her to write and submit such a letter.

Elaine complied with a district request to begin a specific learning objective in her building and her teachers “resisted at every turn.” She recognized this and tried to placate them by making arrangements to make the district request more bearable. She indicated that one of her White male principal counterparts, who was previously her former assistant principal, followed her lead in order to facilitate the same district request in his building and it was received openly and without question.

**Fact checking.** Five of the participants stated that as they lead, if they are asked questions or presented with an opportunity to respond to something, those around them will go to the principal to fact check or verify what they have said. Susan said that when she tells people
anything, whether it is about a student or the curriculum, those individuals go and double-check her information by asking her principal. Pamela, who indicated that the individuals in the building where she previously worked were mostly White said, “Some staff members felt as though to get the answer, they had to go over my head. I think folks prefer to listen to people who look like them.” Amelia spoke to this experience in a much more matter of fact way. As a Black female principal, she has a large number of White female staff members and sometimes, she finds herself needing to have open and honest conversations with them about their performance or actions. She said she cannot do that as fluidly and openly as she is not a White male.

Deloise said that she knows that staff members fact check her responses to them. She noted that these individuals verify her responses with others who have less background and experience than she does. Evelyn experienced this a little differently when a White parent came into the main office and said, “I’m sick of dealing with lady principals!” It was if the parent did not feel confident in working with her and did not trust that the information he was getting was accurate.

**Ageism.** Five participants actually expressed that they and their abilities have been questioned because of their age. Deloise said that this concept presents itself to her in that younger staff members discredit her ability to have new and fresh ideas because she is older. On the other hand, Hattie and other participants reported that when they were first contemplating the possibility of becoming administrators and even after they had secured the position, there were individuals, both on the building and central office levels, who felt that they were too young to be school leaders. Hattie said, “What was shared with me was that I came across as not having
enough experience in the position and in education, that I could not necessarily command more seasoned veterans because I had not had enough teaching experience at the time.”

Evelyn stated that when she first became a principal, she often had conflicts with older, Black teachers in her building. When it happened, her initial thought was that it was because of being only 30 years old at that time. Annie felt that people factor age in because they wonder about how much experience the person has. She said “People want to know that you have been on the front line and that you know what you’re talking about.”

For Susan, she explained that in her district, she found that younger White administrators, who have less experience and knowledge that she has, appear to be groomed more than people who look like her. In this, she knew that being a Black female worked against her. She said I know that there's something going on there that has everything to do with my skin color, because these people have no prior experience, no prior knowledge about anything. They're just young and white and they've been taken under wing, they're being groomed for all these different things.

RQ3: How (if at all) do participants’ experiences with intersectionality influence their leadership practices? With this question, the researcher wanted participants to recount experiences that have affected how they lead, to include their daily actions as leaders. It was necessary to uncover and expose specific practices that they engaged in that others who are male or White do not have to engage in. As participants are in the minority in terms of representation in school leadership, their leadership practices differ from those who are White and/or male.

**Theme 4: Having to present concepts carefully.**

Seventy percent of the participants reported that when presenting ideas or concepts to their staff or other stakeholders, they have to do so carefully so as not to be misunderstood or so
that the individual will at least be receptive. Hattie admitted that she has to be careful about the words she uses and she also has to frame concepts very carefully before presenting to stakeholders because “emphases are drawn that are not intended to be drawn”. As a new principal, she has learned that her statements are heavily scrutinized and examined. She said that members of her parent community “are very savvy in terms of putting you in situations that will set you up for misspeak and will create a sound byte that can be used over and over again, and whether it is in writing or verbally, is something that resonated with them, that sticks.” Evelyn has a very specific approach when dealing with the parents of the children in her building. She said

> What I have found is I have to, when dealing with parents, I have to kind of be like, I call it the iron fist in a velvet glove. I have to be firm and consistent, but I have got to wrap my arms up, not literally, but I've got to wrap my arms, I got to bring them in my office, I got to calm them down, I got to offer them water. I've got to make a connection. I've got to emphasize. I've got to do all of that just to get them to then kind of see why their child's being suspended or why I'm not going to offer this appeal, or why this is happening.

Elizabeth said that Black women have to be extra careful: “We have to watch what we do, we have to watch what we say. We’re supposed to present ourselves a different way. I feel like a White assistant principal, female, she could get away with a lot more than what I can do.” As a result, she said that she often changes and adjusts how she presents herself. Amelia admittedly is careful with how she leads because her building is staffed with mostly White women and she has to be aware of her students and their education. She said, “I work in a building full of White women and I need those women to do right by my kids. I don’t need those White women to
check out because they’re pissed with me.” Susan wrote in her journal response that since engaging in the interview with the researcher, she became more aware of how she interacted with her teachers. She began to ask herself questions about how assertive she appeared and acknowledged aspects of her leadership style.

**Defying stereotypes.** Elaine is the first Black leader in her district. As such, she noted that she is more conscious of race and how it may or may not affect her effectiveness as a leader. Specifically, she stated “I have the ability to set the standard and how I conduct myself could close or open doors for those who follow me. So my work is done with excellence; I look the part and I speak it, as well.” Susan felt that defying stereotypes comes with the territory. She said, “Sometimes people underestimate Black women. They don’t think that we’re enough and then we’re either enough or too much. Then they’re taken aback and they’re like “Wait a second, we thought that she couldn’t master this.”

Evelyn said that she knows people at the central office level question how she is able to run a building effectively with no problems. Her exact words were, “Sometimes I feel like, and my assistant principal and I talk about this all the time, sometimes I feel like there is wanting to know how do we get it done.” In her mind, there is an expectation of others that she cannot do what she does and that she is supposed to fail. In terms of working hard to be mindful of who she is and who people expect her to be, Amelia made a poignant assessment when she stated

Quite honestly, my race and gender, essentially are central to my leadership because every move that I make, the way I present myself, the way I come into a space, the way I respond emotionally to anything, has to be measured because I can’t be an angry Black woman. I cannot be.
Elizabeth was honest with her assessment that there are those who expect Black people to be late and not follow through on things. For this reason, she is especially careful to return phone calls promptly with little delay. She said, “Where if someone calls on a Monday, I can’t call back on a Wednesday. I need to call them back before the end of the day. I feel like, well, I mean I know what they expect. Black people never do anything on time and they don’t follow through. We already face that stereotype.” Bonnie said that when she got to her school, some of the Black female teachers in the building had the assumption that she was going to “save them” and make exceptions for them because she was also a Black female. The expectation was that she was going to treat them differently. When she did not, she said that there were some hard feelings.

When reviewing Hattie’s relevant documents, the researcher noted the highly-organized nature of what was submitted. Additionally, the documents were aesthetically appealing, grammatically correct, and highly informative. One of the documents was a letter to families to discuss the opening of school. The letter was two pages and included generic information regarding the school schedule, bus routes, and the first day of school; however, it also included upcoming calendar events and the web address to the school website with an exhaustive list of everything that parents could find on the website. Additionally, the letter included ways that families could earn money for their child’s school through various registrations.

**Relationship building.** Six participants acknowledged that relationship building was a necessary part of their leadership and assisted them in learning how to present concepts to the stakeholders around them. Evelyn noted that she works to build relationships and make connections with everyone in her building. Pamela told about a time that she had to work with a White male teacher who was experiencing some challenges. She said that she worked really hard to establish a working relationship with him so that he would see her as an advocate and not
just see a Black woman telling him what to do. As for Linda, her race and gender works for her in that she feels like she is able to forge relationships with some people because she is a Black female.

**Staff.** When Amelia is working with staff members on situations that have the potential to become contentious, she realizes that it is important to make them feel comfortable first. She said, “I have to be supportive. I have to come with solutions. I have to come to you ready to problem solve.” Candace says that while building relationships with staff members is important, it takes time because for Black female school leaders, they usually do go out with staff members to gather socially at happy hours and other functions. They may eventually do this, but it occurs over time after trust is built. Linda said that she knows that staff and students thrive in an environment where they are supported when they are struggling. She said they value when administrators work at developing the relational aspect of leadership.

In reviewing some of the participants’ documents, the researcher noted that they regularly trust members of their staff with various aspects of making their schools run. For instance, for one of her staff meetings, Candace shared an agenda that showed how she allowed other members of her admin team to facilitate portions of the meeting. This actually showed her proclivity to build relationships in two ways: by building a relationship of trust with her team, and by also allowing her team to build relationships with her staff. Maxine also shared an agenda that she used to conduct a meeting with the security team at her school. She noted that the objective of the meeting was to “discuss how to develop a culture of respect between the security personnel, staff, and administration”.

**Community.** Hattie had to send a letter to her community in order to suppress rumors that stated there were some specific types of assaults occurring on the property of her school. As
a first-year principal, Hattie knew that the community would be paying close attention to her actions regarding this. In her letter, Hattie was very careful in her statements: she was sure to dismantle those statements that were absolutely untrue but also acknowledged that other portions of what was being reported were true. What was important to note was that some of the rumor included allegations that some fights that had occurred in the building had been shared via social media platforms. While unfortunate, Hattie disclosed that the fights did occur; however, what her letter stated next showed her dedication to building relationships with her parents. She invited them and their families to a movie being shown at her feeder high school that addressed the importance of cyber safety and cyber civility.

RQ4: How do Black female school leaders describe their awareness of intersectionality as it relates to their decision-making? The purpose of this research question was to comprehend the awareness of the participants as it related to their race and gender. Specifically, this line of questioning was to discover how it affected their decision-making. When reviewing participants’ responses, it was evident that many of them felt that their decisions were often questioned. All of the participants spoke of instances where they were aware of the fact that their decisions would be questioned.

Theme 5: Having their decisions challenged.

All of the participants noted that they have had experiences where their decisions have been challenged. In cases where she makes decisions and those decisions are then challenged, Amelia stated that she has to process the emotions connected to the decisions and has to filter them rationally to determine her approach. She was adamant that her decisions and desired outcomes are never about her. Even if there was a negative response to the decision, she is careful to remind herself that it is not about her but about her students. Specifically, Clara noted
I truly believe that as an African American female, when I make decisions regardless of what those decisions are, there are always people from other genders and or other races that will automatically think that my decision is not sound because of who I am. That plays out in many different ways.

Maggie’s response was much more emotional. As an individual who says she wears her heart on her sleeve, she said that it hurts when parents doubt her decision-making skills or accuse her of not having their child’s best interest at heart.

**Rationale.** Evelyn and Amelia believed that there are ways Black female school leaders can quell the inevitable questioning that seems to come when they make decisions. In their opinion, it involves being sure to frame the decisions effectively and explain the “why” behind the decision. Sometimes, the decisions that Black female school leaders are faced with making are a result of something that trickled down from a higher entity, i.e. central office. This happened to Clara once as leaders of her district chose to send two staff members back to her building after the staff members were involved in a very public and unfortunate incident. The school and community attributed the decision to Clara even though she had no choice in the matter. Although it bothered her tremendously, she could not dwell on it. Clara said that as she moves forward in her leadership, she has to “focus on things that she has control over and not spend time second-guessing other decisions even when those decisions impact my ability to run a smooth, safe, and orderly school.”

Deloise noted that she is very careful about following central office guidance and direction when she makes decisions because she wants to be in compliance and does not want to run the risk of her decision being reversed. She said that the problem with this is that “then you're no longer running the building and somebody at the next level is running the building.
You're perceived as not being in charge or knowing what you're doing.” Hattie described decision-making in her building as “fast and furious.” She said that sometimes she has thought that she knew how to make a decision based on a previous experience, but then she finds an additional layer or challenge within the situation that changes things up a bit. Then, she is not so sure. Hattie also noted that she is very slow and deliberate in making decisions as she likes to gather data and look at the big picture.

Linda said that when she encounters staff who questions her decisions, they are questioning them because they believe that she is making them to benefit a certain group of kids. She said, “People love to say, ‘Is that fair? Is that equitable?’ We get a lot of that because it may be something that they just don't want to do.”

**Shared decision-making.** Candace, along with five other participants, felt that it is valuable to make decisions in collaboration with other members of the staff, particularly their administrative teams or their instructional leadership teams. This way, the decisions are shared, and do not belong to the Black female school leader. Pamela explained that she had to learn how to make decisions in cooperation with those around her. She said

I don't make a decision in isolation. I can tell you that. When I first started in administration, I used to want to jump the gun. You just want to make sure you're making a decision right then, right there. I was taught, coached, as I continue to grow as a leader that you don't have to make a decision right then and there.

Bonnie indicated that her process involves getting a “pulse” on the staff and how they’re feeling. She said she sometimes furnishes her with staff choices, even though they may be “controlled” choices. Bonnie also said that she has an open-door policy for people to come in and have discussions with her about her decisions. She said it relates to their concern, and she “will listen
to them…try to step back away from it take some time re-evaluate, put the pros and cons of both sides.”

**Theme 6: Having a dedicated commitment to students.**

Every participant in this study responded at various times with statements that embody their commitment and dedication to students, their emotional well-being, and their academic success. They each work diligently in their respective positions to promote equity and excellence in the classroom that does not only benefit Black and other minority students, but all students. Evelyn said that when she evaluates the decisions that she and her team makes, it totally depends on the best interest of her students. A poignant statement that Linda made sums up what all of the women said in some way: “I’ve always felt since my first year that I am a defender of kids. That’s what I do first. I am going to defend kids when I think that someone has mistreated them or is not giving them a fair chance.”

Linda, who runs the 9th grade team at her school, shared two documents that speak to her commitment to students. The first was agenda for the team. It was extremely detailed and included two pages of content. The first two points of the agenda were to address and discuss six college visits that the 9th graders were going to take. Secondly, they were to discuss ways that teachers are to embed content support into their classes that would better prepare students for college prep courses. These two points were telling because it signified this team’s dedication to exposing 9th grade students to their potential college futures much sooner than some would think was necessary. The other document was a copy of a PowerPoint that she used for an introductory meeting for the 9th grade team for the school year. This presentation outlined specific steps that the team would take to support students to include increasing their academic achievement to decreasing the number of referrals that they received.
There were three subthemes that emerged from this theme. They were relatability, equity, and a focus on quality instruction. The participants spoke about their work with students passionately and with conviction. Some of the documents they shared displayed their work in ways that openly defy the lack of high regard that they sometime face.

Relatability. Seven participants stated that being committed to students requires that they be relatable to students. Some of them feel that they are able to do that more with their Black students because they are Black, as well. Bonnie said that

As an African American female and the majority of my students are African American, I am able to relate more and my students are able to relate more to me... they [parents] do feel that I have the best interest of their child. A lot of our kids...deal with a socio-economical gap...they’re angry. They come with a lot of barriers and things of that nature so I think in that sense, being an African American woman it puts me into being that role model to be very supportive and to try to give them what they need to be successful.

Elaine echoed that sentiment. When speaking with her Black students, they respond when with comments such as, "Oh you sound like my momma now." She noted that the minority parents in her building, to include other parents of color, appreciate her presence there as well because they feel like there is someone there that their kids can relate to and connect to. Hattie, whose building has a small minority population of students, reported that her minority students were quite excited to have a Black principal even though those students unfortunately make up the majority of the disciplinary problems in the building.

Elizabeth said that when dealing with Black and Hispanic students, especially female students, it is important for them to understand that she knows where they are coming from and
the stresses and struggles they deal with; however, she also noted that having worked in schools with majority White students, she found ways to connect and relate to them, as well. She prided herself in being able to move fluidly between both domains and flourish in both.

Amelia spoke of a salient incident that occurred when she and members of her staff met with a Black mother whose daughter was showing signs of academic struggle. The team, Amelia included, was recommending that the mother agree to retain her daughter so that she could gain more skills prior to her moving on. Amelia noted that she and the mother were the only two people of color at the table and she knew that the mother was uncomfortable because of her body language. She felt like she was being ganged up on. Amelia spoke up and was very clear to the mother, explaining that the decision was solely hers, regardless of what any of the rest of them said. Once the meeting was over, Amelia said that she and the mother talked for two hours during which Amelia said that the mother

Told me her life story. She confided things in me that she would not have confided in a White administrator. From that day, she has felt comfortable at my school and she knows that her children are loved because I’m there. She believes I look out for them like I look out for my own.

Maggie credits being able to relate to students as a reason that she is measured in her decision-making regarding discipline. Although she did not grow up in poverty like some of her students, she has learned to understand the implications of what happens if they get suspended and cannot attend school. Aside from missing valuable instruction, she also said that some of them may not have food at home, so what they get at school may be the only meal they have. Or she said they may not have heat or air, so they may essentially be on the streets if they get suspended from
school. As a result, she has to consider alternative consequences that implements a penalty while also considering the conditions the student lives in.

Maxine implemented a program at her former school that was dedicated to helping Black female students learn how to develop pride in themselves. She recounted an incident during a summer orientation that involved several Black girls and it did not seem to end. She said she was constantly getting calls about them. It got so bad that one day, she went in to see her White male principal about something one day and as soon as she walked in, he said to her, “What have your girls done now?” That interaction convinced her of a need to promote conflict resolution and understanding among those students and she believes that she was the only one who could do it in her building. She said that a few years later, she saw the same thing happening to another group of Black female students, but their administrator was a White female. She knew that she would have to eventually find a way to work with those students as well. She said, “Because that administrator did not do what I did, and that administrator couldn't do what I did, because she was not Black.”

**Equity.** Candace said that before she arrived at her previous school, there were no Black students in AP classes. Linda noted that her awareness of her intersectionality drives her to be extremely dedicated to the cause of equity. She works to do whatever is going to open doors for students because she understands that socially and sometimes academically, they are already at a disadvantage. She said, “I know equity is not always equal…what I do is all about equity…. leveling the playing field for everyone so that everyone has the same chances as everyone else.” Clara, whose program works to provide students supports so that they can increase their academic capabilities, explained that when she was an assistant principal at a previous building, she experienced a situation where the master schedule was built around a specific athletic team’s
needs. This proved frustrating for her, because the students were athletes, but they were not performing well in the classroom. As a result, she began to focus her work on providing opportunities for those students to experience the same success in the classroom that they were experiencing athletically.

Hattie acknowledged in her interview that there is a discomfort with equity in her building. It is teeming underneath and she is working hard to understand what it is. She indicated that she has not quite figured out where her staff is with race and equity, but she did say

I'm hearing what the kids are saying because my focus is the students. The fact that the students are saying what they're saying, there is an issue [with equity] whether they realize it or not, whether it's subliminal or overt. There's something. There's some underlying tone here.

Amelia feels very passionately about equity and asserted that seeking it drives what she does for her staff and students. She recounted an incident that occurred with a Black male and female student in her building that unfortunately escalated into a small racial situation. The grandmother of the White female student made some complaints to Amelia’s assistant principal, who is a White female. Based on how the assistant principal dealt with the grandmother and handled the situation, Amelia was able to see that her assistant principal was just as passionate about assuring equity for their students as she was. This was comforting to her.

Pamela noted that part of her reasoning for becoming an administrator was because she wanted to take her work from the micro to the macro level. She said she desired to shift the focus from just the students to the bigger picture. Making sure that our students were given an equal chance in the classroom. Looking at instruction, managing staff
members, working with them, coaching them on how to deal with students who may not look like them. Working to employ staff members that are representative of the student population.

**Focus on quality instruction.** Candace stated that she had to make some challenging decisions as it related to the master schedule that others questioned, but she was willing to endure that questioning because it was going to improve instruction for students. Bonnie stated that her school is “a minority-based school. So instructionally, a lot of things we do are focused on minority students.” Deloise felt that there are many other steps that need to occur prior to effective instruction happening. She said that order and discipline are necessary and out of that, staff members are able to instruct students. Evelyn and her team attempt to engage in instructional rounds every day. While she acknowledges that they do not do as many as they planned or do not get to them all because something comes up, the plan is to give teachers feedback that they can use in improving their instructional methods and delivery.

Pamela stated that she feels it her responsibility to make sure that staff members provide quality instruction to all students, including those who do not look like them. She said she often wonders how some schools are chosen for some instructional programs while others are not. Candace offered that the road to ensuring better instruction for her students at her previous school was a process and included more than just focusing on what happened in the classroom. She said

I dealt with a lot of racial things there. Always being conscious of the gender piece too, because they had also never had a female leader. It took a little while. It really took a couple of years for people to realize that I cared about all kids, because the school was predominantly white. That we were making things happen, academically. That we had
to ramp up our instruction, and that was my focus. I was very visible. I attended a lot of activities. I was there for parents. It was a challenge initially, but as we got through the years and our school certainly increased in our academic performance. Instruction was a lot better.

Bonnie and her instructional leadership team review data every morning to discuss if what they are doing in the classroom is either working or not working. She noted that she spends much time completing classroom observations and said that because her school’s population is mostly minority, they do many instructionally that will benefit those students. Clara responded and said that she feels that the most difficult part of her job is getting others to “act with a sense of urgency regarding student achievement.” She believes that some adults do not possess the self-efficacy that is necessary to transcend beyond the odds that they face in trying to educate students and instead maximize every opportunity to “hone their craft until every child is performing above grade level.”

Elaine explained that in order to support an academic initiative that her district wanted implemented, she actually altered her school’s instructional schedule. She and her assistant principal engaged in walkthroughs to check compliance. When her staff said that they needed training to complete the task, she supported that request and reworked the staff-meeting calendar to provide embedded professional development during the school day. As a result, gains were made in the area that the district was targeting.

Evelyn presented copies of her newsletter that she publishes every week. When reviewed, these newsletters contained a wealth of information that was geared towards assisting her teachers in providing their students with maximum learning opportunities. One of the newsletters included a listing of digital tools that would help teachers check for understanding
after delivering a lesson to their students. Another newsletter contained a data point about the boys in her school and how they were receiving more referrals than girls. The write-up gave strategies that teachers could use in the classroom that promoted learning so that the boys would be too engaged in the lesson to disrupt and misbehave.

Maxine submitted a document entitled “Figuring Out the Discipline Problems”. This document lists 10 very pointed questions about practices that teachers use and engage in while with their students in the classroom. One of the questions was, “Do you give students a real and legitimate sense of control, influence, responsibility, and power while in class?” Another question was, “Do you vary your instructional format and materials enough to allow the students to avoid being bored?” These questions forced the teachers to be reflective in their practice and adjust those that may not afford students the best opportunity to experience academic success.

**Summary**

Candace’s quote embodies the essence of this research when she stated, “You never lose being a woman. You never lose being an African American. I think there is just always going to be some things that come with it. I have to do more, just because.” In terms of exploring the lived experiences of Black female school leaders, this chapter offered descriptions of participants, presented the results of the data analyses, and identified the themes that were revealed. The participants’ answers were tied into the research questions for organization and association purposes. It is important for the reader to comprehend the data in terms of the guiding research questions. As the researcher completed data analyses of the three sets of data collected from individual interviews, the journal responses, and relevant document analyses, she arranged the findings and coded the answers which resulted in six themes being identified. Subthemes also emerged and were explained with appropriate participant narrations.
Deeper insight of the experiences of the participants materialized. They explained feeling the need to prove their credibility and right to be in their positions. They recounted the sense of having to work harder than their non-Black and non-female counterparts to show their capabilities. Being in their role made them acutely aware of stereotypes and presuppositions assigned to them because they are Black and female. They expressed the importance of dismantling these stereotypes through careful responses or by engaging in actions that some may not understand the reasoning for. Even with all of these negative experiences, all of the participants expressed their unwavering commitment to students and their education despite the unforgiving nature of social constructs that continue to try and restrict them and their potential.

Chapter Five presents a summary and discussions of the findings, answers to the four research questions, implications and limitations to the study, recommendations for future research, and concludes with a summary of the chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore and describe the lived experiences of Black female school leaders as they relate to intersectionality. Particularly, the study intended to show how the Black female school leaders were able to lead and be effective in spite of being subject to the intersectionality of their race and gender. The study involved a sample of 15 Black female school leaders in several states in the U.S. The participants were employed as school-based administrators who supervised staff in their building and had been in the position, or a similar position, for at least three years. This chapter presents a summary of findings, correlation to the literature, a discussion, theoretical and practical implications for practice in education, specifically in terms of hiring practices, dismantling and reclaiming stereotypes, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Summary of Findings

Four research questions guided this research. RQ1: How do Black female school leaders describe their experiences with the intersectionality of race and gender? RQ2: What specific challenges do participants face and how do they engage with and resolve them? RQ3: How (if at all) do participants’ experiences with intersectionality influence their leadership practices? RQ4: How do Black female school leaders describe their awareness of intersectionality as it relates to their decision-making? In order to answer these questions, three types of data were reviewed and analyzed. Through reading the transcripts of the interviews and reviewing the answers to the journal prompts, the researcher saw that the participants reported mostly negative experiences as school leaders; however, there was also evidence, from the interviews, journal prompts, and
relevant documents that revealed Black female school leaders’ positive outlook on building school climates where students are encouraged, valued, and effectively educated. Six themes were revealed and from those themes, several subthemes were identified.

The six identified themes suggest the following: (1) Black female school leaders have worked tirelessly since the late 1800s to ensure students receive a quality education, yet society remains unconvinced that they can do this work without their having to work extra hard to prove it. (2) Negative stereotypes and presuppositions remain in not only the majority race’s mind, but in the thoughts of minorities, as well. Black female school leaders have an upward battle and a hard fight ahead in dismantling years of negative ideologies and characteristics ascribed to their race and gender. (3) After obtaining degrees and licensures that distinguish Black women as educational leadership experts, they remain in the societal tier of double minority, which essentially negates their expertise and causes people to openly question them, their decisions, and even their right to have a school leadership position in the first place. (4) Black female school leaders, because of the intersectionality of their race and gender, cannot take anything for granted, including making seemingly benign statements. Statements have to be crafted carefully, taking into consideration inferences and insinuations that could be made. Because she is Black and female, there exists multiple presumptions; Black female school leaders are under a microscope and severe scrutiny. (5) Black female school leaders employ several effective leadership strategies when making decisions to ensure that they are not making them haphazardly. The strategic steps they take when making decisions can potentially ensure that the decisions will not be questioned or overturned. (6) Regardless of the previous unfortunate truths, Black female school leaders remain at the helm of schools as strong, effective leaders and they
continue to lead in spite of society’s denial that they are capable. Education remains at the pinnacle of their efforts.

The most significant theme that emerged from the research is that Black female school leaders feel an overwhelming sense and need to prove themselves in their roles. They expressed that in a job field where they are the minority, their abilities are often questioned. They are not afforded the same level of respect that is given to individuals who are White and/or male. They are not automatically seen as trustworthy and reliable; this can create a deep sense of inadequacy and insufficiency in the Black female school leader, which can directly impact her ability to lead. There seemed to be a level of frustration in each of the participants’ thoughts and feelings about the need to prove themselves and although one participant said that she does not feel the need to prove herself, she acknowledged that the concept does exist and that it works against Black females in that it causes people to be hesitant to want to work with them.

When viewed more closely, the need to prove themselves could be a thread of reality within every aspect of the participants’ leadership. Furthermore, each research question could be addressed from the standpoint of the Black female leader needing to prove herself worthy of the position. If she is proved worthy of the position, she would be allowed to make decisions without being questioned, she could transcend beyond questions regarding her capabilities, and she could engage in leadership practices that were regarded as sound and reasonable. The notion of having to prove herself caused the participants to exert their energies and indirectly caused more work for them because in order to protect their hard-earned positions, they have to go the extra mile.
Discussion

This transcendental phenomenological study on the experiences of Black female school leaders was guided by four research questions. The questions sought to uncover the lived experiences of these individuals and understand how intersectionality may impact them and their work. The study’s results yielded findings that go beyond conjecture and actually provide valuable insight into what they do each day. The discussion section provides answers to the research questions in relation to the theoretical and empirical literature in which this study was grounded.

Discussion Related to the Literature Review

Each theoretical and empirical finding within this research linked Chapters Two and Four. The foundational framework for this research was grounded in two theories: Bell’s (1973) critical race theory and Hill-Collins’ (1986) Black feminist theory. This section will provide insight on how each theory illuminates the findings of the research.

Bell’s Critical Race Theory

The five tenets contained within Bell’s (1973) critical race theory explain and give meaning to Black female school leaders’ experiences in this research. These five tenets are counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism. In the following discussion, the participants’ experiences will be framed using CRT; it is important to view their responses using each of the five tenets which can offer additional insight to how they are viewed based on their race.

In terms of logic, literature published about a certain concept or idea often reflects the majority’s opinion and ideals because the majority’s voice outnumbers all the others. As such, literature published about education and educational leadership reflects ideals and concepts that
are promoted by the majority, which happens to be White and/or male. For example, the literature has usually supported and included the voice of the dominant majority (Gooden, 2012). He stated specifically that literature on educational leadership written in the past century “essentially came about without the voices or perspectives of African Americans” (p. 68). To augment the proposal that Black women are underrepresented, Dowdy and Hamilton (2012) purported that women still “remain underrepresented in leadership roles” (p. 190).

The majority are the individuals who have been telling the stories about school leadership. While they tell the stories of themselves, they also have attempted to tell the stories of the minority, and this has not always been with minority’s consent. Counter-storytelling will be the way that Black female school leaders share their unique experiences; they have to tell the other side. As noted earlier, research recounting and exploring the experiences of Black female school leaders is limited (Gray, 2014). Black female school leaders have extremely unique experiences and these experiences must be told. The master narrative that the majority has constructed puts Black female school leaders at a severe disadvantage; if she is going to defy the “validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 144), her story has to be told honestly and without apology. Doing so gives other marginalized groups a voice as goes a long way to create equity and opportunity.

The permanence of racism is an unpleasant truth that some White people choose to ignore. Furthermore, most of them will not acknowledge or admit that they themselves are racist in some way. However, DeCuir-Gunby and Gunby (2016) theorized that people have unconscious belief systems about race and this includes thoughts and ideas about the effectiveness of Black female school leaders. Participants recalled feeling that their decisions were questioned and that staff members went over their heads or to people who were White to
get answers. This verifies that the White people in question felt that the Black female school leader did not have the answer or that her answer was incorrect. Regardless of her training and experience, the Black female school leader faces undue scrutiny and is subjected to unfair inquiries all because of her race and gender.

In the findings, one of the participants, Clara, stated that she was a principal of a magnet school and began to “tear down walls of White privilege” to allow access for students of color. The White community did not agree with this effort and accused her of not being knowledgeable about gifted and talented children and what they needed. These White children in the magnet program had their “whiteness” as collateral; their race was their license to be a part of the program. According to CRT, whiteness as property is viewed as an actual right. Black female school leaders are not afforded this right, and therefore, some do not believe that they belong in a position that has been normally held by those who are White and/or male. In recounting Evelyn’s experiences, she noted that when people from the outside came into her building, they automatically assumed that her White male assistant principal was the principal. He had the right to be. She did not.

The participants in this research reported that in their roles, they are often seen as the race experts and the ones best suited to deal with Black students or Black people in general. It can be surmised that White people need Black females in some schools in order to create some relatability or sense of belonging for Black children and families. While somewhat understandable, this is hardly the answer. Black females should not be placed in schools or in situations simply because they are Black. This negates their potential and cheapens their value as a school leader. Interest convergence serves White people only. Black women deserve to be placed in positions of leadership because of their capabilities, not because of the assumption that
they can identify and relate to the community. Evelyn said that the Black female school principals she knows are all in hard, challenging schools. This supports Moore’s (2013) assertion that Black women are often placed in schools that are predominately Black, as if that is the only pace that they can be effective.

The practice of placing Black females at predominately Black schools also speaks to the last tenet of CRT, which is the critique of liberalism. Several participants noted that White staff members in their buildings send Black students to them specifically, hoping that they can help address their issues, which are mostly disciplinary in nature. While some of these White staff members genuinely feel that the Black female school leader is best suited for the job, they may be perpetuating “procedures that actually preserve social inequality” (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). If the White staff members do not have to deal with the Black students, it takes away a valuable opportunity for the White staff member and the student to engage in problem solving and conflict resolution which could benefit both parties.

**Hill-Collins’ Black Feminist Theory**

Hill-Collins’ (1986) Black feminist theory gives more insight in helping deconstruct Black female school leaders’ experiences as they relate to intersectionality. This intersectionality carries along with it the oppressive nature of racism, classism, and sexism as well as the implications of this triple threat that affect Black women differently than Black men or White women. These were two of the commonalities that Jones and Guy-Shefthall (2015) identified within BFT.

As the participants noted that they feel the need to prove themselves in their roles as school leaders, it could be concluded that their working harder caused them to see more positive results in their buildings. That positive outcome of their hard work could be empowering. BFT,
according to Alinia (2015) highlights possibilities within “resistance, activism, and the politics of empowerment” (p. 2334). Having to prove one’s self can cause that individual to feel very vulnerable and subject to further marginalization because there always exists the possibility of failure. Racism, classism, and sexism promote inequities; BFT creates an awareness that allows Black females to navigate these multiple isms from a place of experience and it empowers them. Members of the majority race or gender do not have this opportunity.

Black female school leaders are the identified managers of entire school buildings, yet they encounter unfair inquiries because of their race and gender. This solidifies McClellan’s (2012) belief that Black women’s experiences place them in an ideal position to impact intellectual thought about how intersecting forms of oppression affect “educational opportunities, economic freedom, and political disenfranchisement” (p. 90).

Black women have to cope with years of socially-constructed identities that become stereotypical and cheapen their value as individuals (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Participants in this research echoed the sentiment that they are often at the mercy of stereotypes and work hard to dismantle and defy them. Annie does not believe that she can escape the possibility of being viewed stereotypically simply because of her race and gender. The Black female experience carries along with it multiple forms of oppression because of the multiple opportunities for other to dominate. The stereotypes that have been placed on Black women are simply another form of domination by the majority; this research supports this because the participants work hard to not embody the stereotypes. Elizabeth said that she consciously makes a point to return phone calls to parents and others on the same day because Black people stereotypically do not return phone calls in a timely manner or do not follow through.
Crenshaw’s Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality theory contains within it the multiplicity of oppressions. For Black female school leaders, the ability to transcend beyond the multiple isms that she faces each day in her role is important. These isms are extremely nuanced in that they vary based on who she is interacting with as well as the context in which she is operating. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) wrote that Black women “must often focus on all of the areas of minority difference for them and how these sources of identity influence their struggle to achieve success and feel comfortable in majority-dominated organizations” (p. 173). Participants in this research told of a range of personas that they have to embody while remaining true to the focus of leading instruction in their schools. They cannot appear too strong for fear of appearing aggressive, but they also cannot appear weak for fear of appearing inept.

Hurtado (1989) developed an understanding of how operational inequality impacts contact between women who differ by race and ethnicity, explaining that Black women’s interests vary greatly with the interest of White women because of their relationship with White men, the most privileged group in American society. White women share their race with White men and so while there does exist some inequity, they benefit from those inequities as mothers, daughters, and wives of White men. Black women do not have this same connection; as such, their “femaleness” is not the same. Specifically, Hurtado noted that “the definition of woman is constructed differently for White women and women of color, though gender is the marking mechanism through which the subordination of each is maintained” (p. 845). As a matter of fact, women of color, particularly Black women, have been expected to adopt standards of femininity and beauty, but cannot due to social constraints developed through economic exploitation, stereotyping, and other culturally marginalizing factors. As a result, Collins (2004) wrote that
these benchmarks, because Black women cannot meet them “become a normative yardstick for all femininities in which Black women are relegated to the bottom of the gender hierarchy (p. 193). Amelia commented in her interview how, when dealing with her majority White female staff, she sometimes thinks about how easier her job would be if she were a White male. She said

    They don't see white men as bullies. It's like someone's dad. They've been taking orders from white men their entire lives. They've been being told what to do by white men their entire lives because they have white fathers. That kind of stern messaging from a white man doesn't come across the same way as stern messaging from me.

Haslanger (2014) wrote that “experience…cannot be disaggregated into separate elements” (p. 116). Because of this, it may not be possible for the participants to speak directly to which structural oppression that they were experiencing at that time. In fact, Miller and Vaughn (1997) asserted that “the twin disguise of racism and sexism still impose great restraints on the utilization of the competence and talents of African American women” (p. 179). When experiencing negative interactions with members of their staff or community, participants, while aware of both their race and gender, could not be sure which factor was causing the negative interaction except on a few occasions. In one instance, Hattie did report a situation where the father of one of her students did not want to speak to her regarding an incident with his son. This family was Muslim, so Hattie knew that this was a case of the father wanting to speak to a man because of his ideas about men being able to handle challenges better than women. Elizabeth commented that Black people in general are stereotyped as not returning phone calls promptly or not following through, but other reports from participants were not so precise.
When an individual is a member of multiple subordinate groups, he or she is relegated to whatever presuppositions have been identified about those groups. For the Black female school leader, she experiences this on multiple levels. As a result, it becomes necessary for her to make decisions about her leadership that will allow her to experience success in spite of these negativities. Hill-Collins (1990) commented on the intersectionality of Black women’s race and gender and explained how to move beyond it as a means of empowerment. She said

Empowerment involves rejecting the dimensions of knowledge, whether personal, cultural, or institutional, that perpetuate objectification and dehumanization. African-American women and other individuals in subordinate groups become empowered when we understand and use those dimensions of our individual, group, and disciplinary ways of knowing that foster our humanity as fully human subjects. this is the case when Black women value our self-definitions…

According to Bowleg (2012), belonging to various subordinate groups can cause an individual to grow and evolve as a person. Learning to adapt to various situations was a common thread in the findings in this research. As a result of being members of two subordinate groups at the same time, participants learned to incorporate creative means to deal with situations that they may not have if they did not have the opportunity to live those situations through their unique lens.

This current research study has chosen to highlight the participants’ experiences through the lens of multiplicative intersectionality. The Black female school leader can fall into a plethora of categories in terms of social status. The three most identifiable are the categories that are the same for all of them: they are Black, they are female, and they are school leaders. Outside of this, their intersectionality could include context, where they live, sexual preference, etc. In this research, there were instances where the participants had notably different
experiences based on where they lived. For instance, Maggie stated that after multiple attempts to become a Black female school leader in the south, she eventually gave up while Susan, who became an administrator when she lived in the Mid-Atlantic, got the first administrator job she applied for.

**Empirical Literature**

Participants’ responses wholly validated the literature and in some cases, forged additional avenues to be considered in terms of Black female school leaders and their intersectionality. Once analyzed, the findings greatly extended what existing research purports and the participants’ responses offer greater insights. The following section lists the four research questions in this study and denotes the participants’ responses as they relate to the literature.

RQ1: How do Black female school leaders describe their experiences with the intersectionality of race and gender? This question was essential to the efforts of understanding what it means to be a school leader who happens to be Black and female. The intersectionality of her race and gender make her a minority twice and thus, subject to multiple forms of oppression. During the interviews and when responding to the journal prompts, the participants reported mostly negative experiences as it related to their role and being Black and female.

The themes and sub-themes that were identified for this research question pointed to Black female school leaders’ struggle with feelings of being inadequate and unqualified, thus exposing a need to prove themselves. They shared strong emotions and expressed many assertions about their lived experiences. While the researcher never got an impression that the participants questioned their own self-worth or allowed these feelings to take up mental space in
their minds, there was no denying that the way they have been treated because of their race and gender is ingrained in their thoughts and memories; it makes an impact.

Black female school leaders have to prove themselves because they are Black and female. The participants corroborated the literature that stated this (Jean-Marie, 2013; Wallace et. al., 2014). Their experiences have been developed, controlled, and told by sources outside of the Black community. Due to this fact, it is important for their stories to be told so that society can have the opportunity to see their side and somewhat understand the challenges that they face. Ladson-Billings (1998) wrote that sharing these experiences provide context for interpretation, which could give access to greater understandings about society’s expectations for leadership. Black female school leaders, in this research, named their own reality, which is they have to prove that they belong in their positions. Not only do they have to prove it, but they have to prove it by working harder and doing more work while somehow dedicating time and energy towards gaining the trust of those around them. School leaders who are White or male do not have this specific challenge. Candace mentioned the word “trust” at least five times in her interview, which speaks to how important she feels it is in her leadership. This is telling because Tillman’s (2012) research noted that there is a cultural discord in American society that impacts a community’s confidence in women of color. Society links their race and gender to incompetence, so Black female school leaders have to work specifically towards dismantling that perception. Candace obviously works hard to not allow this discord to expose itself as she works with her school and community because she attempts to gain their trust in all of her efforts.

Participants all recognized and reaffirmed the fact that because they are a Black female, they have to contend with negative stereotypes. They spoke about this actuality quite matter-of-factly but they did so without a need for sympathy. None of the women in the research embody
any of the negative stereotypes that society has normalized for Black women; however, the unfortunate reality for Black women or any minority is that one’s identity carries along with it meanings on the micro and macro levels (Wilkins, 2012). Stating that they do not embody the stereotypes, while possibly true, does not absolve them from being seen through the eyes of White people in a stereotypical way. Amelia recognized this and admitted that even if she is angry because her students are not being given opportunities or instructed according to her expectations, she fights against any opportunity for her to be seen as the “angry Black woman.” Other participants also spoke about making concerted efforts to not fall into any negative stereotypical category. Their reality substantiates Horsford’s (2012) notion that Black women have to “see and feel both sides of things while still having to then explain herself to everyone else” (p. 13). Striving to defy an identity that society has developed is a difficult task for these women; however, throughout the research, there were threads of evidence that the participants engaged in a self-definition that Collins (2009) asserted was key if they are to be successful.

RQ2: What specific challenges do participants face and how do they engage with and resolve them? Previous research into Black female school leaders indicates that they remain at a disadvantage in these roles because their voices are not heard, both literally and figuratively (Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012; Gooden, 2012). The findings in this research substantiate this theory because participants reported having to prove themselves in their role as well as being questioned in spite of their leadership roles. Participants noted that their credibility has often been challenged by the stakeholders around them. They reported that whatever they say is then commonly followed-up on or confirmed by individuals going to someone else to verify and that person is usually White and/or male. This speaks to the majority race believing that they are not qualified for the position. Being unqualified precludes them from being able to add their voice
to the literature on educational leadership. It is as if the majority group is permissive in allowing Black females to be a school leader, but when time comes for them to share their thoughts and give perspectives that may deviate from that of the majority, that opportunity is not extended.

This validates the premise that Grant (2012) made when he stated that Black female school leaders “have been invited into places where the dominant group has assembled, but they remain outsiders because they are still invisible and have no voice when dialog commences” (p. 106). Susan was the participant who said that she attends district meetings for administrators, but often feels left out when the older White administrators appear to take the younger White ones under their wing to help mold and shape them. Evelyn talked about going to a retreat, and being the only Black female in the room, laid her soul bare about what she faced in her position. Their voices and points of view do not have to be validated because non-Black women cannot authenticate the voices of Black women. But their voices must be heard, considered, and valued. Their voices have to be included in what educational researchers read and know about leadership and administration in schools.

Participants indicated that staff members go above their heads to fact check what they have said or decided. The intersectionality of their race and gender negates the fact that they are an instructional leader. In some cases, a few of the participants reported that their age was a part of this, as well. This finding extends the research that said that Black women are often subjected to marginalizing experiences that seek to strip them of the opportunity to be seen as representatives of knowledge (Jean-Marie, 2013; Wallace et. al., 2014).

RQ3: How (if at all) do participants’ experiences with intersectionality influence their leadership practices? The implications of the multiple isms faced by Black women reveal themselves in various ways in the professional lives of Black female school leaders.
Intersectionality places Black women in two different identity categories: they share their race and gender with Black men and White women, but that is where the sharing ends. All of the participants reported having had an experience that they do not feel they would have encountered had they been White or male. This finding extended the research. The participants’ experiences were more than just marginalizing; they are also discouraging because it places Black women, who at one time, were the forerunners of education for their race, at the very bottom in the hierarchy of those in educational leadership.

Susan surmised that Black female school leaders are seen as being either inadequate or overbearing. Because of these various possibilities, the Black female school leaders have to find and exude a balance so that while they appear confident and in charge, they do not appear overly confident and egotistical. This conclusion corroborates Hill-Collins’ (2009) claim that Black women have to exhibit restraint while also demonstrating power. This seemingly polarizing reality causes Black women to have to operate in two domains: one where she reminds herself that she is an educational leader and responsible for the effective education of students and the other where she realizes that regardless of her noble aspirations, she is still a double minority operating in a social sphere that values Whiteness and maleness.

The leadership style of Black female school leaders often does not reflect those of their White counterparts (Newcomb & Niemyer, 2015). Black women have different lenses through which they see the world and their work. Because of this, Black women have become creative in their leadership styles and exert their energies towards what they can control and what they feel is most important. It was revealed that participants had similar leadership styles because as Black women, it is important to present concepts carefully because they do not want to come across in ways that could be misleading or misunderstood. This finding parallels what Jean-
Marie (2013) found that Black women have to lead in ways that do not necessarily mirror those of their White or male counterparts because regardless of what they do and regardless of the pressures they face, they have to allow themselves to be seen in a positive light.

**RQ4:** How do Black female school leaders describe their awareness of intersectionality as it relates to their decision-making? Since the Black female school leader is not a member of the majority group, she has to develop a keen sense of awareness as she leads and makes decisions. All of the participants indicated that they are constantly aware of their race and gender and that realization absolutely impacts the way that they make decisions which extends Jean-Marie’s (2013) research which stated that when the world sees the Black female leader making a decision, they see a Black woman making the decision, not a leader. Some of the participants are the very first Black individual of either gender to serve in their role. They realize that that fact has huge implications. She carries the ability to deconstruct negative stereotypes while simultaneously constructing new social norms that defy strongholds of perceived and actual oppression. For Black women or women of color, this opens many doors of opportunity.

Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) noted that “multiple aspects of identity mutually construct one another—being female influence one’s experience as an African American, and being African American influences one’s experience as female—thus emphasizing the importance of understanding the intersection of multiple identities” (p. 176). So when leading a school and making decisions that affect every stakeholder connected to that school, the Black female school leader understands, probably better than anyone else, the far-reaching effects of those decisions, as well as the potential outcomes, both positive and negative.

In terms of ensuring that the students in their buildings received a quality education that was equitable, all of the participants spoke of ways that they work towards that regardless of how
they feel they’ve been mistreated. These women find resolve to define themselves and trust in their own capabilities in spite of marginalizing factors. This fact reinforces Collins’ (2009) assertion that for the Black female leader, self-definition involves consistent movement toward changing the nature of her reality by denying the stereotypical images that society has forced on her and going beyond the restraints of intersectionality. This is not only necessary but also empowering.

**Implications**

The implications of this research have the potential to be far-reaching. This study included participants who were Black female school leaders. Because Black female school leaders are minorities twice, they have a unique sense of disenfranchisement due to their race and gender. In some cases, it may be difficult for them to tell if they have been discriminated against or treated unfairly based on their race, gender, or both. The findings can serve to inform district leaders, community members, school staff members, and even other principals who are not Black females. Education, both public and private, is an entity that extends into the lives of everyone in some way. Anyone involved in education should be exposed to the experiences of Black female school leaders whether it is on a large scale or a small one. The transferability of this research extends into other forms of school leadership, including the superintendency or other high-level district positions.

As society and culture becomes more multidimensional in terms of identity, more individuals will fall into the category of having an intersectional identity. For this reason, more efforts need to be directed in understanding the experiences of these individuals and how they cope with their intersectionality. Black women have managed to succeed in spite of their intersectionality for a long time. They have the credibility to speak from experience with
empathy to those who are just coming to terms with who they are, if they have even recognized that the intersectionality exists.

This research also has the potential to extend into other career fields, both in the public and private sectors. The experiences that Black women have as public school leaders may mirror the experiences of those Black women in corporations, government entities, and other organizations. It is worth looking at the lived experiences of those women to ascertain the similarities and disparities and to identify common themes and threads that are shared within the various career fields.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

Delimitations of a research study are described as the structures of the research plan that are developed through the conscious exclusionary choices made by the researcher (Simon & Goes, 2013). The delimitations of this research study included the setting and the selection of the participants. It was necessary to select Black females who currently serve as school leaders, so the purposeful sampling method was utilized to choose the participants. The settings varied as some of the participants were interviewed in person because of proximity. Others were interviewed by phone. An additional delimitation included the different methods of data collection. The criteria that each participant had to meet in terms of years of experience also was an outlined delimitation.

Limitations of a study are factors that could influence the results of the study and affect the generalizability of the findings. There were several limitations to this study. School leaders are the individuals responsible for leading instruction in school buildings and as a result, they are very busy during the school year. There were times when a few of the participants became unavailable for scheduled interviews because of job interruptions. The researcher tried her best
to avoid potential interruptions by scheduling interviews outside of the school day; however, some emergencies occurred and adjustments were made as necessary. The researcher went into this study knowing that she had to be prepared for this and embed flexibility within her research time frames and schedules.

Additional limitations of the study were:

- The researcher has been an educator since 2004. She first became a school leader in 2010. She served as an assistant principal during the time that she conducted this research. It became vitally necessary that the researcher bracket out her thoughts through journaling during the entire process and it was not easy; however, she managed to maintain my biases and refrained from injecting them into the research.

- This research was conducted with participants from different areas across the country. An additional limitation could be that had the research occurred within one specific school district, the findings and outcomes may have been completely different because the conditions that the school leaders work in could be more favorable or less favorable in terms of them being Black and female.

- Findings may not be transferrable or generalized to all double minorities, i.e. Hispanic women, Asian women, etc. because different races and cultures are regarded differently and each have different stereotypes.

- Some of the participants may have not told the entire truth or embellished some of their responses for the purposes of the study.
Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this research was to explore and document the lived experiences of Black female school leaders as they related to intersectionality. The goal was to prove that in spite of this oppressive identity concept, these women persevered because their work to educate their students was more important than the confines of their identity. A study that investigates the relationships of Black female school leaders with their White and male counterparts should be conducted. It would be valuable to see how these individuals work together and share strategies as they lead their buildings. It would also be interesting to see the how the staff responds to the strategies in the buildings with the Black female leaders versus the buildings with the non-Black female leaders. Those outcomes would be remarkable to record and note.

Another recommendation for future research would be to conduct this study from the perspective of another minority school leader that diverges from the Black perspective. This could be an individual who experiences being a minority singly, i.e. a Hispanic male or it could be a minority that experiences intersectionality, i.e. an Asian female. The results of such a study could be compared to research based on Black men and women to notate extensions or deviations of findings. Additional recommendations for future research are:

- Conduct the research in a single district and require that all of the participants work in one area. The results of the study could be useful in identifying systemic racial and gender challenges that may need to be addressed in single school systems.

- Investigate and identify the supports that are available to Black female school leaders, to include professional development and opportunities to share strategies with colleagues across gender and racial lines.
• Conduct research into various educational leadership and administration programs and
determine if they effectively prepare Black female school leaders or leaders of any
minority for what they will face once on the job.
• Explore the reappropriation or reclaiming of stereotypes from the perspective of Black
female school leaders. Look further into the “Mammy,” “Jezebel,” and “Sapphire”
stereotypes in an attempt to deconstruct them and show how Black female school leaders
defy them.
• Examine the coping mechanisms and strategies that Black female school leaders use as
they manage their professional lives and the various challenges they face. The scope of
coming to terms with one’s minority status while attempting to work and reach career
success is wide and broad. The consequences of this undoubtedly can impact an
individual’s well-being.

Summary

Dr. Yolanda Moses (1989) declared, “Black women are expected to work very hard, be
very quiet, and be grateful that they have a job. White women are expected to be just as quiet,
but they do not have to work as hard or be grateful. White males can do whatever they want” (p.
14). The goal of my research was to show how Black female school leaders, faced with
incessant questioning, the need to prove themselves, expectations to be race experts, and
marginalizing stereotypes find the resolve to focus on the needs of staff, students, and
communities and promote equity, quality instruction, and trusting relationships. The 15
participants shared their deepest thoughts as they related to their work and how, even when they
were attacked personally, they could never internalize those attacks, because a child’s education
was at stake.
As a Black female school leader, this research empowered even the researcher. To read the responses and be exposed to the raw emotions that my colleagues have had to suppress gives the researcher resolve to continue her work, not only in education, but in seeking opportunities to promote conversations across racial and gender lines that foster understanding and grace as it relates to becoming and thriving as a school leader. The researcher hopes that the participants are satisfied with how she has chosen to portray their thoughts, experiences, and feelings. The researcher has sought to give voice to their lived experiences and bring their realities, previously quiet and subdued, to the forefront in hopes of countering the master narrative of what has been understood to be effective educational leadership.
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October 24, 2016

Carla McNeal
IRB Approval 2652.102416: Empowered Intersectionality: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Black Female K-12 School Leaders

Dear Carla McNeal,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection extends past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Review
The Graduate School

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1871
APPENDIX B. CONSENT FORM

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 10/24/2016 to 10/23/2017
Protocol # 2652.102416

DISSECTARION RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

EMPORED INTERSECTIONALITY:
EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK FEMALE K-12 SCHOOL LEADERS

Carla McNeal
Liberty University, School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study on Black female school leaders and intersectionality. You were selected as a possible participant because you are currently a Black female who is serving as a K-12 school leader. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Carla McNeal, Assistant Principal at Clarksburg High School and a student at Liberty University, School of Education.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is: to explore the lived experiences of Black female school leaders through the lens of intersectionality and show how intersectionality can be used in a positive way to inform educational practice and inquiry.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: sign a consent form, participate in a one-on-one interview that will be audio-recorded with Carla McNeal, which will take between thirty minutes to an hour, participate in a journaling activity at least two times, which will take approximately thirty minutes each time, and agree to submit relevant documentation that speaks to leadership style, to include memos, observation reports, emails, and meeting agendas with all identifying information redacted.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
This research has minimal risks to the participant as there can be a potential breach in confidentiality if data is lost or stolen; however, all possible measures will be taken to guard against this. No one is being pressured to participate. The researcher’s relationship with the participant will be unchanged whether or not you choose to participate.

This study seeks to explore Black females’ experiences and allow a platform for a group whose voice has largely been ignored in the study of school leadership. This study’s findings can be used to aid those in the positions of hiring as it shows the strength of these women to excel and cause their schools to excel.

Compensation:
Participants will not be compensated for their time or participation in this study.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only researchers will have access to the records. The records, notes, and data from interviews will be
kept locked in a closet, on the researcher’s flash drive under password protection, or on the
computer under password protection. All documents submitted to the researcher for review will
have any identifying information, to include names, email addresses, school names, etc. redacted
prior to publication.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect
your current or future relations with the school at which you work or Liberty University. If you
decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without
affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:
You have the full right to withdraw from this study, and all information will be permanently
deleted or erased. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, you may contact me, Carla McNeal, via
e-mail (Carla_M_McNeal@mcpsmd.org or Carla.mcNeal@gmail.com), in person, or via
telephone contact at (205) 915-3174.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is Carla McNeal. You may ask any questions that you have
now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at
Carla_M_McNeal@mcpsmd.org, Carla_McNeal@gmail.com, in person, or by calling (205) 915-
3174. You may also contact my supervising professor/chair, Dr. Sharon Michael-Chadwell,
Liberty University, sdmichaelchadwell@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone
other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971
University Blvd, Green Hall 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:
I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received
answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Please initial here if you agree to have your voice audio recorded during the interview
component of this research.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: ____________

Signature of Investigator: ___________________________ Date: ____________

You may scan this signed form and email it to me or place in the stamped envelope that has been provided for you
and send it back. Thank you.
### Appendix C. Audit Trail

**Student Name: Carla McNeal**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Date Completed</strong></th>
<th><strong>Specific Tasks</strong></th>
<th><strong>Field Notes/Reflective Notes</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 9, 2016</td>
<td>Proposal approved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 27, 2016</td>
<td>Proposal defense</td>
<td>Committee gave constructive feedback and advised of necessary revisions and potential challenges to keep in mind; I made revisions and addressed challenges. Approval granted to submit IRB application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 28, 2016</td>
<td>Requested IRB approval</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 24, 2016</td>
<td>Received IRB approval</td>
<td>Proposal needed three rounds of revisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 26-October 31, 2016</td>
<td>Identified potential participants for research study</td>
<td>Eventually secured 20 participants; five of these participants were not included in the eventual executed research for various reasons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 27, 2016</td>
<td>Started writing chapter 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1-3, 2016</td>
<td>Sent introduction letter and consent forms to participants</td>
<td>Some participants requested that these be sent electronically for a quicker turnaround. Sent texts and emails to remind participants to return.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 6, 2016</td>
<td>Received last consent form</td>
<td>Stored all forms in locked file cabinet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 9, 2016</td>
<td>Sent link to first journal prompt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 10, 2016- January 4, 2017</td>
<td>Conducted interviews, sent link to second journal prompt, requested relevant documents</td>
<td>Two interviews conducted in public places, five interviews conducted at participants’ schools, eight interviews conducted over the phone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 15, 20, 28, 2016</td>
<td>Sent emails and texts to participants</td>
<td>Reminded them to send relevant documents and complete second journal prompt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 30, 2016</td>
<td>Received last set of relevant documents; sent link to last journal prompt</td>
<td>The quality of one audio file, the interview with Bonnie, was too poor for the company to transcribe. Researcher had to transcribe by hand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 5, 2017</td>
<td>Sent audio recording files of interviews to Rev.com for professional transcription</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 8- January 12, 2017</td>
<td>Received transcriptions of interviews from transcription company as Word documents</td>
<td>Sent transcriptions to participants for member checking. Transferred transcripts from computer to flash drive. Secured hard copies of transcripts in locked file cabinet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 14- February 12, 2017</td>
<td>Analyses of all three sets of data</td>
<td>Started with interviews and coded in Atlast.ti, Microsoft Word, and Microsoft Excel for record-keeping and tracking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 16, 2017</td>
<td>Communicated with chair; sent draft of chapter 4</td>
<td>Discussed potential for Spring defense and what would need to occur for that to happen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 13- February 23, 2017</td>
<td>Developed manuscript (chapter 4 revisions and chapter 5 draft)</td>
<td>Took off one week from work to focus and write.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 23, 2017</td>
<td>Sent manuscript to chair</td>
<td>Required two revisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2, 2017</td>
<td>Chair submitted manuscript to Gate coordinator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 6, 2017</td>
<td>Manuscript sent to third committee member</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 7, 2017</td>
<td>Tentatively approved for defense</td>
<td>Received feedback from second committee member/research consultant. Defense tentatively scheduled for April 4, 2017.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 7, 2017</td>
<td>Chair notified advisor to move candidate to EDUC 990</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 8, 2017</td>
<td>Applied for graduation; completed revisions based on feedback from second committee member/research consultant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 12, 2017</td>
<td>Submitted manuscript for professional edit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 25, 2017</td>
<td>Received manuscript from editor</td>
<td>Forwarded edited manuscript to committee.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX D. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

### Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years of Administrative Experience</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Highest Degree Earned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candace</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>Ed. D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evelyn</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>South-Atlantic</td>
<td>Ed. D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonnie</td>
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<td>Principal</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaine</td>
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<td>Principal</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hattie</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amelia</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deloise</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maxine</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>M.S.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>Ed. D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
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<td>Assistant Principal</td>
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<td>Single</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie</td>
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<td>Assistant Principal</td>
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<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>Ed. D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Single</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>M.A. (Ed. D.)*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Degree in progress*
Journal Prompt 1

To be answered prior to initial interview.

Email address *

What do you feel is the most difficult part of your daily role as a school leader and why? Do you feel that any part of this challenge is related to your race and/or gender? Please elaborate.

Currently, the most difficult part of my role as a school leader is doing several jobs all at once. I am in my third year as an assistant principal of a K-5 building. The demographics of our 630-student building are 65% Hispanic, 25% African-American, and 10% white and multiracial. My principal is a Hispanic male and our two secretaries are Hispanic. The only other African American adults in the building are two teachers, one at 2nd and one at 5th, and our female custodian. We have 29 other teachers who are either White or Hispanic. My principal and I work well together in that he is the curriculum/assessment/data person and I am the culture/climate/program person. We both work well with discipline issues. Currently we are down four cafeteria staff members so I spend two hours of my 6 hour school day in the cafeteria with one other person getting 100+ kids in, handing out lunches, scanning lunch cards, pushing garbage cans, clearing tables, and dealing with discipline issues. This is out of necessity because we haven't hired anyone yet to do this but I keep being told they are coming soon. All of our paraprofessionals are working in the cafeteria or playground at different times and teachers, due to union issues, won't help. This is wearing me out as I still have observations, discipline, parent issues, after school meetings, my own classes, and a ten-year-old daughter to deal with after school. I often wonder if I were a male teacher, would I get other teachers to do this, or would I just suck it up and do it myself because it needed to be done? At the end of the day, I also do bus duty, running in and out of the building to dismiss nine school buses then dealing with the fallout when one bus is especially rowdy. This is actually a two person job, but because of union rules, teachers have to be released from duty by 2:20. I want to show my teachers and my students that I work hard because I care about our school but I am wearing myself out doing it. I feel the pressure to be "better than" and "do more" because I am one of four and the only African American administrator on staff. I don't see my male counterparts in other buildings working this hard and I wonder if I am missing something. I don't feel like a leader in the sense that people come to me for assistance and guidance on instructional issues. I guess I am a leader in that I am professional at all times, I treat teachers, students, and parents with dignity, I am a role model, and I do the things that need to be done to keep the school moving daily. At the end of the day, I try to reflect and see what I could have done differently or done better. I don't think a man of any race would second guess his effectiveness at this level, especially if he were 18 months away from earning a doctoral degree. I keep telling myself that this is just a phase, a learning curve, a challenge to teach me something that I don't already know. Somehow after 23 years in education, this new challenge feels hollow.
APPENDIX F: EXCERPT OF RESEARCHER'S JOURNAL (EPOCHE')

Interview was long. We think that there are more valuable data pieces to uncover. It may need to have a follow-up interview. She stated that in some cases, she felt that she was the unofficial spokesperson for black people when it came to certain aspects. He noted the same experience when he was at We were choosing picking duties and mentioned the black Citizens program. She didn't want it as it or all added to the group. Maybe a white guy could do it. He gave me a green clear and you like no. She gave the signal. You're Black. I feel like that we were caged not too long the black people need to be able to connect if certain animals keep them apart.
My Own Experience

This is my own experience of being a leader in a school. The first day, I was a black and female, and I realized the errors had many huge lows when I got to the first day. It felt that my gender and race were an insignificant factor in any white female leader. It was not initially on their level preconceived experiences about black female leaders. It is presumed that she did not like me yet that reason there was not one other instance that a woman didn't need to deal with me, but it was felt as if I was a woman. My first real moment of experience happened when I got to the school and a female wanted me to sit beside me and was placed at the back of the classroom. It was also very common for it involved a leader that all back at church, all things, particularly, hard and at seven o'clock. I got overtired, but it reminded me.