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African-American Males, African-American Female Principals, & The Opportunity Gap

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AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE PRINCIPALS, AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES,
AND THE OPPORTUNITY GAP

by

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(Under the Direction of Devon Jensen)

ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, research has been devoted to bridging the gap in academics and

opportunity among African-American males. Missing from the dialogue however, are

the voices of African-American female leaders. This voice will not only play an

instrumental part in mediating cultural misunderstandings that occur in the classroom, but

it will also facilitate a much needed conversation in understanding gender and race by

displaying different views on educational leadership. Thus, the purpose of this study is to

explore the perceptions of the opportunity gap among African-American female

principals in Title I schools to raise the presence of their voice in this educational

discussion. As the opportunity gap is an issue that has a global impact, this research can

be transferred to various contexts in the educational setting. The findings that emerged

from this study can assist both rural and Title I school districts in reevaluating existing

educational programs or aid in designing new initiatives to improve outcomes for low-

performing African-American males. Moreover, this data can support school districts in

developing the cultural competence of teachers and staff through professional

development and culturally sensitive pedagogy.

This study included an elementary, middle, and high school principal. Using a

phenomenological approach, the participants were encouraged to discuss factors

influencing their leadership practices, internal and external barriers and actions taken to

overcome those barriers, and measures to enhance staff effectiveness through

professional development. After two interview cycles, the researcher analyzed

participants' responses through the lens of Critical Race Theory and existing literature

resulting in four emergent themes.

One theme was related to perceived barriers. The next theme was tied to a particular

leadership style. The final two themes were linked to the participant's race and gender.

Though presented in earlier literature as symbols of oppression and inequality, for the

participants in this study, race and gender served as vehicles to address the opportunity

gap in meaningful ways for African-American males in their Title I schools.

INDEX WORDS: African-American, African-American Female Principal, Critical Race

Theory, Elementary School, Middle School, High School, Opportunity Gap, Title I

school, White

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To anyone reading this, may my story encourage you; I interviewed for the doctoral program when I was 5 months pregnant with my first child. I progressed through this program while teaching full-time and adjusting as a new mother; yet none of these obstacles deterred me from my goal! For Gabrielle, my daughter who is my strength personified - thank you for making me a better mommy, a better educator, and a better me - Dr. Jennifer Nicole Dunbar.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The induction of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution (1868) granted equal

rights to all students in the United States. However, over the years, disparities in

achievement continue to prove that, not all students are created equal. Efforts to close the

opportunity gap among and between groups and communities of students have been the

focus of American public education for numerous years. *A Nation at Risk* (1983) was

one of the first initiatives to expose deficiencies in the areas of standardized testing,

teaching practices, and postsecondary preparation and performance within American

Public Education. This publication prefaced the accountability movement, inspiring a

series of education reform initiatives in school districts across the country. Since the

onset of this era of education reform, legislation such as The Improving America's

Schools Act of 1994, (No Child Left Behind [NBLC], 2002), and school choice programs

were implemented to increase the responsibility and requirements on schools and school

leaders as it relates to student achievement.

Despite these efforts, statistics continue to show a significant gap in achievement

among African-American males and their peers. In 2010, the National Assessment of

Educational Progress (NAEP) reported disparities in reading and math scores for African

American, Hispanic, and low-income students and those of white peers and students of

higher socioeconomic status (Gardner et al., 2008). In addition, the Scott State Report

(2012) concluded that only 47% of African-African males graduated from high school.

A considerable amount of research has also been devoted to locating the

underlying causes of the opportunity gap. Much of the research points to the breakdown

in the structure of the African-American family (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Fitzgerald, 2006; Heggins, 2004; Livingston & Nahimana, 2006). More recent studies revealed that the disparities among African-American males and their counterparts could be attributed to an opportunity gap that in turn has a negative effect on student achievement (Herczog, 2012). This gap in opportunity extends beyond socioeconomic factors and includes access to both experienced and quality educators. Flores (2007) contended that schools with predominately African-American student populations are more likely to be taught by inexperienced teachers. Schools have since responded to this need by implementing a number of initiatives such as faculty mentoring programs, family literacy partnerships, and parental empowerment through school choice and voucher programs.

Other research studies such as West-Olatunji et al. (2010) encouraged school districts to close the opportunity gap through transformational leadership. Like the West-Olatunji research, there is awareness among educators that because male role models are absent in many African-American households, educational leaders, like teachers and principals, could fill this void by encouraging and supporting increased minority leadership in schools. In fact, when African-American teachers take on the responsibility of mentoring African-American students with developing leadership skills, it results in positive effects on educational outcomes and student achievement (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006). Similarly, African-American male leaders have also been credited as an influence in closing the opportunity gap when they help their students develop leadership competencies (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006; Tillman, 2008; West-Olatunji, 2010). The educational challenge in this context is that the teacher and administrator workforce remains predominately white making it more complicated to influence the construct of

the opportunity gap discussed in this paragraph (Fitzgerald, 2006; Gardner, Davis, & Anderson, 2008). Although it may be understood that mentorships positively impact the learning outcomes of African-American males, limitations in current research make it difficult to adequately assess the efficacy of male leadership and mentorships on the success of African-American students. An equally important piece of this puzzle, are the perspectives of women of color. Although masculine views once dominated the literature, researchers over the past 70 years, have acknowledged the contributions of women's leadership to the growth of African-American males (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Loder, 2005). Other scholars asserted that the African-American female voice adds value to the field of education in many ways. First, race and gender differences elucidate alternative leadership experiences. This voice also adds depth to the discussion on educational inequalities because women of color are often assigned to lead urban schools with predominately black student populations (Doughty, 1980; Lomotey, 2003; Tillman, 2008). Consequently, the aim of this research is to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the leader's role in addressing the opportunity gap by exploring the perceptions of African-American female principals.

<div align="center">Background of Study</div>

Educating the African-American Male

Despite the onset of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) ruling, minorities, particularly African-American males continue to experience isolation through discriminatory practices such as tracking, ability grouping, and special education placement (Heggins, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2006). Much research has been devoted to a growing pattern of African-American males being overrepresented in special education

programs. In fact, many of the findings in Dunn (1968) and Deno (1970) groundbreaking research still hold true nearly 50 years later as one researcher concluded that in some states, "African-American males are four to six times more likely to be placed in special education classes than their white counterparts" (Franklin, 1994, p. 152; Arnold & Lassman, 2003).

Sources of this disproportionate representation point to test and teacher bias, lack of parent communication and involvement, and environmental and social influences (Arnold & Lessman, 2003). Although currently much of the debate rests on culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching practices, Deno (1970) argued that black teachers also contributed to the number of special education referrals for African-American males. Though contradictory, these two arguments are indicative of a much larger force at work − a limited understanding in disability diagnosis and determination, inadequate preparation, and insufficient resources to accommodate diverse needs in the general education setting (Arnold & Lassman, 2003).

Negative stereotypes create an additional obstacle for African-American males. Media depictions of the black male as lazy, violent, and incompetent are often reflected in the classroom (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006). Fitzgerald (2006) further argued that teachers, guided by biases and misconceptions regarding community norms, transfer these beliefs into classroom practices. In 2004, Heggins set out to examine the role of teacher perceptions at the secondary education level. The researcher examined the preparation process of African-American men participating in a faculty program. Six African-American male doctoral candidates participated in a program designed to assist them in developing professional and mentor relationships. Participants stated race and

preconceived ideas influenced their mentor relationships to the point that it negatively

impacted their interactions with professors and even admitted to "feeling like second-

class citizens," sensing their professors would base their performance off of low entrance

exam scores or other factors (Heggins, 2004, p. 359).

African-American Female Leadership

History touts the accomplishments of African-American female leaders both

before and after the Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court ruling. Pioneers such

as Sarah Smith, Mary McLeod Bethune, Fannie Jackson Coppin, and several others have

been credited for not only fighting against the inequalities that existed for students, but

also for paving the way for teachers and educational leaders both past and present to

experience a more equitable educational space (Tillman, 2008). Although the Brown

court decision was successful in ending segregation in public schools, it had an adverse

effect for African-American school leaders. While black students were integrated into

public school systems, black school leaders were forced out of administrative positions,

diminishing both the black perspective and voice at this educational level. Still, today

amidst a growing minority student population, the teacher and administrator workforce

remains predominately white (Gardner, Davis, & Anderson, 2008; Heggins, 2004;

Tillman, 2008).

Beyond the practicalities of a lack of minorities in educational leadership

positions, there is also a void in research from the minority perspective as well.

According to Tillman (2008), this research gap exists for three reasons. First, with regard

to African-American females, it becomes difficult to glean a legitimate sample size as

they are underrepresented in leadership. Second, studies involving African-American

females in education are often depicted from the experiences of teacher leaders rather than school administrators. Finally, research from the black perspective is "regarded as dubious" (Tillman, 2008, p. 187) because there are many instances where there is an omission of multiple perspectives presented in the literature. This happens because white male researchers are conducting the bulk of the research on this topic. Just as school administration is male-dominated, according to Mertz and McNeely (1998), so is the research because the focuses are often presented from the White male perspective. The concern as it relates to this research is that this lens purporting equality has been skewed for so long that over time, it has become accepted as reality. The result is that these societal and research inequalities compromise the true value of the black female perspective within educational leadership. In a national survey of black school leaders, Doughty (1980) identified a number of challenges associated with African-American female principals. First, the researcher found that most women of color were assigned to challenging, urban elementary schools with large African-American student populations. Doughty also concluded that black females in leadership positions tend to be older than their counterparts. Finally, the data noted a decline in the number of black female principals in comparison to black males beginning in the year 1967. Doughty suggested that for women of color, they must overcome both racial and gender inequities when leading America's public schools.

Conclusion

Not only does the environment affect learning outcomes, but it also governs many aspects of the learning organization. According to Hoy and Miskell (2008), schools are open-systems that are dependent upon the environment and thus changing and adapting to

respond to external demands. These external influences include but are not limited to federal and state entities, parents, accrediting agencies, policy review boards, and other educational stakeholders. As it relates to the context of this study, the research is showing that programs such as mentoring or empowerment initiatives created to address issues pervading the African-American community tend to only put a bandage on the issue. Consequently, school leaders must focus their efforts on factors they can control through on-going professional development for teachers. This can be done in an effort to diffuse cultural misunderstandings and dispel stereotypical perceptions of educating African-American students.

A natural research connection in this educational context is to delve into this reality as experienced through African-American female leaders. Unfortunately, their voice is missing from the dialogue concerning the opportunity gap. Their voice will not only play an instrumental part in mediating cultural misunderstandings or stereotypes that occur in the classroom, but it will also facilitate a much needed conversation in understanding gender and race by displaying different views on educational leadership. Much of what may be uncovered as a result of this research is determining whether there is a perceived connection between these female leaders and their influences on the opportunity gap for African-American male students. Traditionally, researchers have focused on components of leadership that inform racial or gender differences, but little is known about the impact this leadership has on addressing the opportunity gap, specifically when it involves differences in selected student demographic populations.

Statement of the Problem

In 2009, the Center for Public Education described the opportunity gap as the "quiet crisis," calling for intervention in the early education programs of the disadvantaged. In 2008, Washington State even passed HB 2722, a plan aimed specifically at addressing educational disparities for African-American students. One researcher concluded that in some states, "African-American males are four to six times more likely to be placed in special education classes than their white counterparts" (Franklin, 1994, p. 152). In many locations across the US, black males have dramatically higher suspension, expulsion, retention and dropout rates, and dramatically lower GPAs (Tillman, 2008). Data also revealed the effects of low education levels on incarceration with greater impacts for blacks than whites (Lochner & Moretti, 2001). A report issued by the U.S. Department of Justice in 2009 found that African-American males accounted for 40% of the male prison population, a 700% increase from 1970 to 2005. Along with the rising incarceration levels, the Schott Foundation for Public Education reported a 59% graduation rate for African-American males in 2013. Simply put, the opportunity gap is not just an educational issue but has larger societal impacts and the current reality is no different than what was reported here in 2009.

Just as race and gender present a number of challenges within the education of students, it also extends to various aspects of the educational leadership infrastructure. It is due to this reality that further research is warranted to better understand the dynamics between African-American female leaders and the opportunity gap with African-American male students. Mertz and McNeely (1998) suggested that since White males continue to dominate leadership, their voice is also prominent in literary studies.

Tillman (2008) advocated for research that "presents detailed portraits of the lives, work, vision, and impact of African-American principals on the school community and student achievement, and the discriminatory practices that affect their work" (p. 192). The problem driving this research is to bring to the forefront, the perspectives and voices of African-American female leaders so that they can be heard in a clear and unbiased fashion.

Purpose of the Study

The field of education has long reigned as a female dominated "pink collar" profession. Over time, paradigm shifts and societal trends have challenged the traditional belief that men lead while women assume more nurturing, caregiver roles. Nowhere is this more evident than in the African-American community. The 2012 Schott report indicated that over 70% of African-American females head their families. Insomuch as many of these matriarchs are head of households, they also comprise the 16% of minority female leaders in many of America's public schools (Tillman, 2008). Using what we already know about the opportunity gap, African-American female leaders may hold a missing piece of the puzzle and assist in connecting areas of research as it relates to educating the African-American male. Thus, the purpose of this study is to contribute to the field of education by exploring the perceptions of African-American female leaders as it relates to the opportunity gap among African-American males.

Research Questions

The following research question will guide this study:

In what ways do the African-American female participants in this study understand their

influence on the opportunity gap among African-American male students? This analysis

will be framed using the following constructs:

    i.   Leadership style

    ii.   External influences

    iii.   Barriers (Socioeconomic, family dynamics)

    iv.   Professional development

Conceptual Framework

When race and gender are involved, culturally sensitive methodologies and

conceptual frameworks are needed. Critical Race Theory (CRT), originally rooted in

law, surfaced in education through the research efforts of Ladson-Billings and Tate

(1995) and their attempt to explore and expose the role of race in educational policy,

procedure, and practice. Critical race theorists argue that race exists as a social construct

and has progressively become an accepted societal norm manifesting as racial hegemonic

structures (Delgado & Stefansic, 2001). Counter-storytelling, permanence of racism,

whiteness as property, interest convergence, and critique of liberalism are the frameworks

that embody critical race theory. These ideals provide the avenue for research to expand

to include the unique perspectives and lived experiences of minorities in the field of

education and educational leadership.

Permanence of racism, the pillar of CRT, is the idea that acknowledges racism

and its existence in the field of education. In education, permanence of racism is a

recurring theme in countless bodies of research. The ideology of racial inferiority has a

determining factor in the disproportional placement of African-American male students

in academic support programs (Fitzgerald, 2006). Disproportionality continues to inform

the placement of African-American males into special education, for both academic and behavioral reasons.

Since CRT is concerned with analyzing school practices and policies, qualitative researchers use counter-story telling through interview accounts to usher in the silenced voices of the "marginalized minority" (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 27). Sharing experiences from the black perspective was often met with criticism as it often challenged the deeply held beliefs of the majority (Tillman, 2008). Counter-story telling would assist in mediating what Tillman and other scholars proposed as a gap in research due to the underrepresentation and omission of the African-American female voice. Tillman also criticized studies because of their failure to focus on leadership issues from the African-American perspective.

Interest convergence is the idea that acknowledges the preservation of white interests in decision-making. The displacement of African-American leaders in the aftermath of the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) decision is an illustration of interest convergence at work. Although this legal decision was successful in ending segregation in public schools, it had an adverse effect for African-American school leaders. While black students were integrated into public school systems, black school leaders were forced out of administrative positions, diminishing both the "black perspective and voice" within education at higher levels (Tillman, 2008, p. 167).

One area of isolation comes through a critique of liberalism where there is an intentional omission of race in educational policy and practice. On the surface, this adoption of color-blindness and appreciation of diversity presents equality and fairness in schools however, further analysis of such measures actually perpetuate segregation and

marginalization by ignoring hegemonic structures impeding social justice for minority students in American public schools.

The final area of CRT described as whiteness of property or 'white privilege,' refers to the unspoken advantages of whites over minorities. In education, the inherent nature of school funding based upon property taxes illustrates this idea. Property taxes for example, determine a large part of aid provided to schools. In 2012, The Schott Foundation for Public Education indicated that African Americans aged 13-28 are ten times as likely to live in poor neighborhoods where there is a smaller tax base to draw upon in the funding of local schools. Consequently, students who live in middle class communities with a higher property tax base, attend schools with better resources and funds for teacher salaries, giving an unfair advantage in the quality of education they receive as opposed to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Research Design

The researcher in this study employed qualitative research methods to understand the opportunity gap from the views and experiences of African-American female principals. Qualitative research also provides an opportunity to "hear silenced voices" (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). The approach selected for this study captured these silenced voices using a phenomenological design. Phenomenology was an appropriate methodology to explore the lived experiences of African-American female principals as it allowed the researcher to explore for deeper meaning and common understandings of the shared experiences among the participants. As these deeper meanings were explored, phenomenology nicely linked with Critical Race Theory to reveal this reality and opened up the silenced voices within this educational context. Interviews served as the most

effective means to gain insight about the opportunity gap in the Title I schools involved

in this study.

The school districts selected for this study are unique in that they are all Title I

and receive state and federal funding to address socioeconomic barriers. Additionally,

the elementary school featured in this study is situated in a rural area. As evidenced by

research, Title I school districts, particularly in rural areas, face an even greater challenge

when mobility issues, low socioeconomic backgrounds, and educational barriers come

into play (Erlandson & Bloom, 2003; Flores, 2007; LeTendre, 1997; Lomotey, 2005).

The researcher conducted two interviews per participant using semi-structured

questioning. According to Creswell (2007), semi-structured questions solicit open-ended

responses and allow for authentic data to emerge. The interviews in this study were

designed specifically to activate counter-story telling by ushering in the silenced voices

of the "marginalized minority" (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 27).

Participants were chosen using selective sampling: "the calculated decision to

sample a specific locale according to a preconceived but reasonable initial set of

dimensions" (Glaser, 1978, p. 333). The dimensions in this study were race, leadership

experience, and educational context. Consequently, the researcher recruited participants

who were African-American female principals, possessed at least 10 years in the field of

education, and served predominately African-American, Title I schools. Based on

accessibility, the researcher contacted three principals with an informal invitation to

gauge interest and availability. The researcher also provided the participants with a brief

description of the research and an overview of the purpose of the study. Data were

analyzed using Hycner's (1982) explication process. The research question frameworks

of Critical Race Theory served as categories when analyzing and coding data. Any data not theoretically defined was analyzed further to determine if it substantiated or opposed Critical Race Theory. This will be described more fully in Chapter 3. Information gained from these interviews illuminated the lived experiences of these leaders and their role in closing the opportunity gap among African-American males.

<div align="center">Locating Myself within the Study</div>

My experiences as a beginning classroom teacher initially sparked my interest in exploring the opportunity gap. As a child, I was fortunate enough to be raised in a middle-class home with both parents and attended a school in a suburban school district. As an African-American female, my school experiences were positive, despite a few isolated events. As a beginning teacher however, my experiences with working in a small, rural school district witnessing what at times was blatant injustice, initially sparked my interest in exploring the opportunity gap. The disparities in socioeconomic status, family structures, family education levels, and mobility trickled down to the demographics and make up of classes. In most cases, beginning teachers were assigned the most behavioral or academically at-risk students and in many instances, this translated into African-American males. It is one thing to read about alarming statistics on achievement and inequalities, but it takes on a new meaning when witnessed firsthand. African-American males are indeed in trouble and it scares me as a concerned educator. It would be naïve to assume that race plays no part in how I relate to and interact with my students and to what extent race influences the learning and academic outcomes of my students. I often wonder if race influences my effectiveness as a classroom teacher. What I hope to gain from this research as an aspiring leader, is an understanding of the

leadership style and the decision-making necessary in improving the educational outcomes of all, but especially that of African-American males. It is my hope to extend these ideas to other leaders and teachers.

<div align="center">Significance of the Study</div>

For educators, this study is significant because there remains the need to understand more effective methods to relate to and instruct African-American males. The context of this research also makes it unique in a number of ways. First, the school districts used in the study were all Title I schools. In addition, two of the featured principals lead schools in the same rural area. As evidenced by research, Title I school districts, particularly in rural areas, face an even greater challenge when mobility issues, low socioeconomic backgrounds, and educational barriers come into play (LeTendre, 1997). Therefore, the findings that emerged from this study could assist both rural and Title I school districts in reevaluating existing educational programs or aid in designing new initiatives to improve outcomes for low-performing African-American males. Moreover, with the recent identification of the opportunity gap, this data can support school district leaders in strengthening the cultural competence of teachers and staff through professional development and culturally sensitive pedagogy.

This research can also facilitate necessary dialogue in the on-going debate of gender and race among educational leaders. In a professional environment, many women experience difficulties in leadership roles, in some instances because of the perception of their personality and gender traits. One major gender difference is the general perception that female leadership should be more relational and democratic, as opposed to male leadership, which is more dictatorial and autocratic. As a result, African-American

women must bear a larger burden as they attempt to demonstrate the capacity for leadership needed to secure and succeed in school administrative roles. They also endure racial and gender discriminatory experiences that are not often shared by their male peers. Even though women of color most often exhibit common leadership qualities of others in the profession, continued research is needed to explain whether or not leadership traits and behaviors vary across race and gender. In this research, the impact of gender and race was explored as it relates to ways in which African-American female principals address the opportunity gap.

Limitations

The following conditions limit the extent to which the researcher can explore the African-American female perspective of the opportunity gap.

1. Although the researcher is an African-American female teacher, she still brings her own bias to the study. Despite teaching within the school district and working with African-American males in rural, Title I schools, these experiences and opinions will not influence the findings that emerge during the study.

Delimitations

1. In order to gather a comprehensive and broadened perspective of the opportunity gap, the researcher employed counter-story telling through face-to-face interviews. In addition, the researcher limited participant selection to African-American female leaders who varied in age, years of experience, and position. Finally, since each participant served in some capacity within the school district, they were easily accessible to the researcher.

2. Only African-American female leaders in a rural, Title I school district were

included in this study. Therefore, assumptions cannot be made for African-American female leaders in non-rural, Title I school districts.

3. Time constraints and distance determined the number of participants used for this study.

Definition of Terms

African American – citizens of the United States whose total or partial ancestry originates from native populations of Sub-Saharian Africa. African Americans are also referred to as 'Black' or 'Afro-Americans,' therefore these terms may be used interchangeably throughout this research study.

African-American Female Leader - for purposes of this study, African-American female leaders are women of color who hold an administrative position either at the school or district level. These positions include assistant principal, principal, district curriculum director, director of federal funding, and assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction.

Critical Race Theory (CRT), originally rooted in law, surfaced in education through the research efforts of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and their attempt to explore and expose the role of race in educational policy, procedure, and practice. Critical race theorists argue that race exists as a social construction and over time has become an accepted societal norm manifesting as racial hegemonic structures (Delgado & Stefansic, 2001). Counter-storytelling, permanence of racism, white privilege, whiteness as property, and interest convergence are the guiding frameworks for critical race theory; these ideals provide the avenue for research to expand to include the unique perspectives and lived experiences of minorities in the field of education and educational leadership.

Elementary School - A school designated for students in grades Pre-Kindergarten through five.

Middle School - A school designated for students in grades six through eight.

Opportunity Gap - Disparities in the allocation of resources and educational opportunities among children of poverty and their affluent counterparts.

Title I School - An extension of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) which provides funding to Local Education Agencies to assist in educating students from low income families.

White - a United States citizen who is described as White, non-Hispanic by the United States Census Bureau. This term will be interchangeably used with "majority."

<div align="center">Summary</div>

Chapter I detailed African-American males in public education and proposed the need for further attempts to close the gap in educational opportunity among them and their counterparts. Using what is already known, African-American female leaders may hold a missing piece of the puzzle and assist in connecting areas of research as it relates to educating the African-American male as it relates to the opportunity gap. Thus, the purpose of this study is to delve deeper in closing the gap by gleaning the perspectives of African-American female leaders. This study featured three African-American female leaders in Title I school districts. Using Critical Race Theory as a lens, the participants shared their experiences and the leadership practices enacted to meet the needs of African-American males in their schools. The findings that emerged from this study can assist both rural and Title I school districts in reevaluating existing educational programs or aid in designing new initiatives to improve outcomes for low-performing African-

American males. This data can also assist in developing the cultural competence of

teachers and staff through professional development and culturally sensitive instructional

methods. Finally, necessary to understand the implications and effects of each as it

relates to bridging the gap in opportunity for African-American males.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The specific focus of Chapter II is to identify major themes in the literature surrounding African-American female leadership. This chapter is organized into three sections. The first explores the influence of race and gender in the hiring and assignments of women, particularly the patterns among women of color in educational administration. The second section chronicles the experiences and contemporary issues relative to black female principals. The final section includes a discussion of cultural and historical influences with regard to the familial structure and matriarchal roles unique to African-Americans. These historical understandings not only established leadership styles, but also informed leadership practices of African-American females particularly the act of other-mothering, caring, and spirituality, and transformational leadership. This discussion yielded four characteristics of African-American female leadership. First, the researcher learned from the literature how motherhood and values of caring and nurturing are significant to how African-American females interpret their roles as educational leaders. Next, the researcher saw from the literature review the impact of culture in influencing the behaviors and leadership practices of African-American females, calling attention to an ethno-humanist role identity often assumed by minority leaders both men and women. Third, the literature review revealed how spirituality was an anchor that sustained the African-American woman during slavery, as heads of households, and in the quest to uproot oppressive practices in education and educational leadership. The

final section discussed the historical and cultural influence on the transformational aspect of African-American female leadership.

Literature Review Concept Model

Chapter II provides a review of the literature and research related to African-American female leadership. The chapter will be divided into the following sections and subsections:

Figure 1.

Literature Review Concept Model
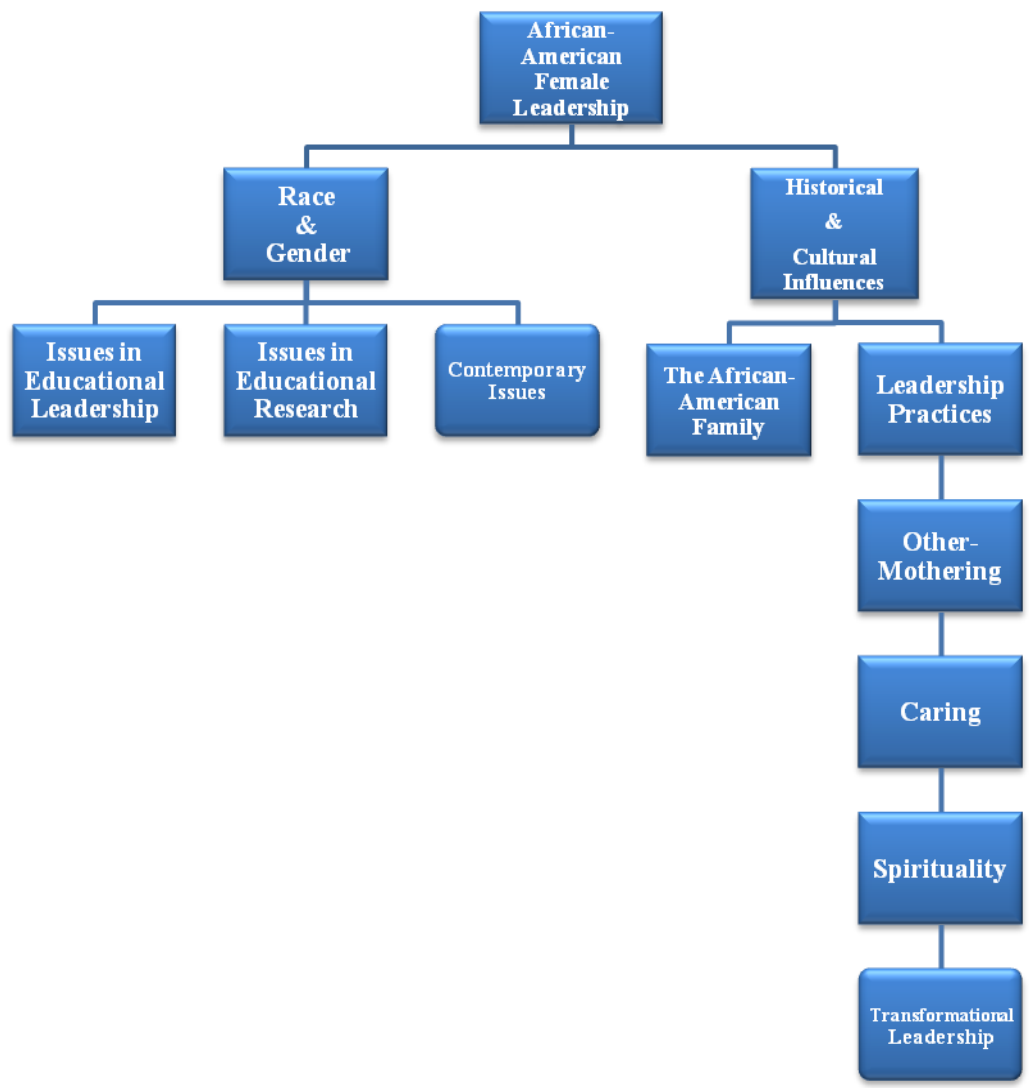
Race and Gender

Issues in Educational Leadership

Research has been clear in the distinction among males and females in American society. For decades, differences in employment, advancement opportunities, and income have been noted in the corporate world and beyond. Loder (2005) and Lomotey (1993) argued that women are often researched as topics as opposed to populations. In educational leadership, much of the research has been devoted to understanding the differences in how men and women lead businesses, organizations, and educational institutions. Up until the year 2000, a disproportionate ratio of male and female leaders existed in educational leadership; however today, at the elementary level, the ratio of males to females is almost equal (Gaetane, 2013). Despite this increase, white males continue to dominate leadership at the middle and high school level although females continue to comprise over 80% of the teaching profession (, 2013). Though these disparities have been attributed to sex-role stereotypes minorities, particularly women of color also experience disproportionality following Sernak's (2004) assertion that black women are the least privileged group in this nation. In 2011, the Center for Public Education reported that principals of color accounted for only 15% of the administrative workforce in America's public schools. Consequently, African-American female leaders experience a sort of double jeopardy as gender and race present a unique set of challenges.

Aside from underrepresentation, women of color encounter stereotypes associated with their race. Often depicted as super-human, innovative problem-solvers, and exceptionally resilient, these cultural misconceptions may also inform their

administrative assignments (Doughty, 1980; McCray et. al, 2012). Tillman's (2008) research on African-American female principals before the Brown vs. Board of Education (1954) ruling, illustrated common roles assumed by African-American female educators from 1907-1967. These *Jeanes Supervisors* served as principals and teachers overseeing curricular, instructional, and the operational management of segregated schools. One such example is Anna Julia Cooper; principal in one of Washington D.C.'s all black high schools in 1902. Cooper faced many challenges and met great opposition as she maintained high expectations for her students in preparing them for postsecondary education. This failure to yield to the status quo eventually led to her school being accredited by Harvard University. Outside of her principalship, she also founded The Colored Women's League of Washington in 1892. Although she was later terminated as principal of M. High School, Cooper would go on to assist in the creation of the first YWCA chapter for women of color.

Similar work on the life of Fannie Jackson Coppin is illustrative of the contributions of African-American women in education. Despite being born into slavery, Coppin's life work was dedicated to educating African-Americans. After establishing an evening school for freed slaves, Coppin became the second African-American principal of Oberlin University. Described as one of the most influential Black educators in the 19th Century, Coppin is credited for beginning the first industrial training program, overseeing 5,000 African-American graduates, and preparing hundreds of Black educators. Coppin State University was later established in 1926 and presently operates as a historically black college and university in Maryland.

These historical examples not only highlighted the implications of race and gender, but also the contributions of African-American females to the field of education and educational leadership. This perspective offered new insights into the experiences of African-Americans and deepened surrounding women and people of color in society at large.

Later studies also unveiled the perceptions of women of color in educational leadership. In a national survey of Black school leaders, Doughty (1980) concluded, "She [the African-American woman] embodies two negative statuses simultaneously. One is her color and the other is sex; neither of which society values very highly" (p. 153). Not only did the data reveal disproportionate numbers in minority leadership, but Doughty also found that in most cases, African-American females led schools that were both economically and socially disadvantaged. This theme resurfaced in later research with the identification of the achievement and opportunity gaps (McCray et. al, 2012). In a sense, the assignment of African-American female principals serves as a double-edged sword; despite the fact that women of color are assigned these challenging schools, studies also identified African-Americans as effective leaders in this educational setting (Lomotey, 1993). Other researchers including Bloom and Erlandson (2003) and Loder (2005) used this platform to call attention to the influence of culture and community understandings in African-American leadership identifying ethnohumanist and community-centered leadership practices

Though non-traditional career patterns characterize women in the field of education, this trend has additional implications for minorities. Bulls (1986) used an ethnographic case study to identify the "highly purposeful behaviors" of nine black

female leaders. Aside from earning doctorate degrees, Bulls concluded that mentors, networks, and work at the district level were all necessary in obtaining superintendent positions. Though Bulls contended that mentorships and networking increased the likelihood for women of color to earn leadership positions, later work revealed that a lack of mentoring programs and sponsorships were available for African-American female aspirants (Brown, 2005). Grogan (1999) also contributed to the conversation with concerns that traditional sponsorships were patterned after White male leaders, further perpetuating the absence of black representation in educational leadership.

Issues in Educational Research

From 1960 to 1980, feminist epistemology provided one of the first platforms to bring awareness to discriminatory hiring practices and challenge sex-role stereotypes in an effort to create equitable work environments. Still, researchers argued that black women were excluded from this research activity (Collins, 1989; Sernak, 2004; Thompson, 1998). In addition to Black Feminist Thought, Critical Race Theory emerged as a theoretical framework within the realm of education research to illuminate the reality of racism in the field of education.

The next trend in the research came with the identification of the achievement gap in 1989. This era of reform marked a shift in traditional research by exploring the influence of factors such as socioeconomic status and parental involvement, analyzing instructional practices, and finally, critiquing teaching styles (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006; Tillman, 2008; West-Olatunji et al., 2010). Later research would expand this discussion to include leadership practices, particularly those of African-American leaders, in having a direct influence on school climate and student achievement among

economically disadvantaged minority students. These studies will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Despite the growing body of research on women of color in educational leadership, researchers such as Tillman (2008) urged for continued efforts to present the "lives, work, vision, and impact of African-American principals on the school community and student achievement, or discriminatory practices that affect their work" (p. 192). In her analysis of African-American principals before and after the Brown court decision, she offered three arguments to explain why this gap existed. First, with regard to African-American females, it becomes difficult to glean a legitimate sample size as they are underrepresented in leadership. Second, she maintained that although studies exist on women of color, they often depict the experiences of teacher leaders. Finally, Tillman concluded that research from the black perspective was "regarded as dubious" either because of the controversy surrounding issues of race and gender or because research in this area was simply undervalued (p. 187).

Contemporary Issues

A review of research that has emerged since Tillman's (2008) works illuminated two trends among black women in educational leadership. First, findings suggest that discriminatory hiring practices and sex-role stereotypes manifest in educational leadership. A study conducted in 2014 illuminated the power of negative perceptions on gender roles. Staff in one urban school system rated female principals significantly lower than male principals despite comparative student achievement data (Nichols & Nichols, 2014). For African-American females, statistics revealed the "concrete ceiling" forged by race are evidenced by their absence in leadership at the secondary level (Center for

Education Statistics, 2013). Wrushen and Sherman (2008) continued the discussion on sex-role stereotypes in educational leadership. Interviews with eight female principals of various races illuminated experiences in which gender and/or race presented a number of issues in leading secondary schools. In terms of gender, principals described their leadership style as either "compassionate" or "emotional" and felt uncomfortable asserting power. The black participants revealed that race overshadowed gender stereotypes in overcoming the "status quo."

Secondly, the challenge of leading urban schools prompted a renewed focus on leadership development. Previous studies cited several advantages of such programs as positively impacting women's career advancement, particularly among African-American female leaders (Brown, 2005, Bulls, 1986; Grogan, 1999). This theme also resurfaced in more recent research. In Bridges (2010) dissertation entitled *African-American High School Principals: Their Pathways and Perceptions of the Position*, the researcher used the construct of feminist theory to examine the lived experiences of seven African-American female high school principals in North Carolina. This accounted for 35% of the total population of African-American female high school principals in the state. The findings illuminated the barriers participants experienced including overcoming negative perceptions rooted in race and/or gender as well as the challenges of leading urban schools amidst funding and poor academic performance. This study was significant in unveiling the importance of mentoring and support programs for urban school leaders with implications for leadership preparation programs. Crow and Scribner's (2013) case-study also concluded with strong implications for urban school leadership, urging that components of leadership preparation programs should foster critical self-reflection,

training to address the multiple audiences served in urban schools, and develop the leader's capacity to adopt strategies to build and sustain positive self-concepts and role constructions.

Williams (2013) dissertation also combined Standpoint Theory and a Womanist perspective to illuminate the leadership realities of former African-American female principals. Many of the findings were consistent with current literature where a majority of the participants led Title I schools with predominately African-American student populations participants demonstrated ethno-humanist and democratic leadership styles, enacted leadership agendas concerned with a holistic educational approach and community involvement, and experienced marginalization and resistance from colleagues and other administrators.

To contribute to the evolving literature on the leadership exhibited in challenging school environments, the aim of this study is to further the discourse on black female principals by exploring their perceptions of educational leadership through the concept of Critical Race Theory. Following Tillman's (2008) concerns on the research activity of African-American females, this study will contribute to emergent research by illuminating the realities of black female principals as they address the opportunity gap within the context of urban and rural Title I school settings.

African-American Female Leadership: Historical and Cultural Influences

The African-American Family

The slave experience is unique to African-Americans for many reasons. For one, it serves as a source of identity necessary in explaining the strength, prowess, and determination of the Black community. Slavery is also useful in understanding the

deeper cultural realities of the African-American family. The housing of several different tribes together, for example, resulted in fictive kin networks, a complex interweaving of "blood relatives and unrelated individuals" (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 231). Survival of the slave tribes would depend on unity, interdependence, and shared responsibility ultimately establishing the framework of the African-American family structure (Sernak, 2004). In his article, *Towards a Black Psychology,* James White (1972) explained that these fictive kin networks are expressed in a series of "uncles, aunts, big mamas, boyfriends, older brothers, sisters, deacons, preachers, and others who operate in and out of the Black home" (p. 48).

Over the course of American history, economic and societal shifts would have a direct impact on African-American families. In their *Primer for Educators*, authors Diller and Moule (2005) credited the early 1970s and 1980s as the time frame in which the Black family structure dismantled. The 1973 oil embargo for example, not only led to the closing of several factories and contributed to record-breaking job cuts, but also contributed to the displacement of the African-American male. For this reason, role flexibility has become an identifying characteristic for Black families in America. There are many explanations as to why fathers are absent in many African-American homes. One such scenario is expressed through Moule's argument, "his precarious economic position" along with the need for income," has placed the African-American female as the head of the home (p. 232). Consequently, women of color are often characterized as overly dominant by default because in most cases, she has to be both mother and father. Furthermore, in the African-American household, the woman according to Diller and Moule (2005) has greater empathy for the male's frustration in a racist society, possesses

an underlying awareness of the male shortage, and holds close ties to religious values that teach tolerance for suffering. Finally, this displacement trickles down to the offspring tagging the term, 'parent-child' to older children who assume caregiver roles in the absence of one or both parents. While thought to improve responsibility and promote maturity for older siblings, Pinderhughes (1989) warned that an overemphasis on the mother's role could have negative implications as well. One such consequence is a process known as 'emotional fusion' where the child relates primarily to their mother's moods or wishes over their own. In the classroom, emotional fusion manifests itself in many ways including poor peer interactions, defiance/power struggles, and attendance issues.

Leadership Practices

Along with family systems, researchers use these historical understandings in an attempt to explain the leadership styles of African-American female leaders. When describing the core of African-American female leadership, black feminist scholars tell the story upon the shoulders of slavery: "Black women's African heritage and history as slaves in the U.S. influenced their social and economic subordination in modern society, as well as their roles in church and community" (Sernak, 2004, p. 75). According to historian George Gregory Jackson, women endured the hardships of slavery using "syncretistic reasoning," a unique fusion of European values and their mother culture. This survival mechanism allowed slaves to balance the evils and exploitation of slavery while maintaining a sense of heritage and also is indicative of the significance of the African-American woman as a mother and leader. Slave auctions often resulted in displaced children separated from their families. In this, slave women would assume a

mothering role, acting as a caretaker in the absence of parents or blood relatives.

Historical contributions add value to discussions surrounding the opportunity gap.

Understanding the dynamics of the African-American family can assist school districts in

interacting and involving these families in meaningful ways. As the research unfolds,

history is also expressed in African-American female leadership practices including

other-mothering, caring, and spirituality.

Other-Mothering

Other-mothering is defined as "the assistance delivered to blood mothers in the

care of their biological children either in an informal or formal setting" (Case, 1997, p.

26). Under this concept, age is a distinguishing factor because a younger woman may act

as an other-mother to the children she serves but has yet to gain the respect of the

community. On the other hand, a community other-mother, one who is over the age of

40, uses her understanding of traditions and culture to foster community respect and

exercise widespread power. Other-mothering was noted in the work of principals before

the groundbreaking Brown vs. Board of Education court decision. Since schools were

segregated, principals often worked against community and economic barriers. Doing

more with less, these African-American females served in dual capacities where they

worked as both principals and teachers. In the classroom, educators such as Anna Julia

Cooper used their insider status to build relationships with parents and students. In the

community, Cooper solicited the support of the church and external sources to pool

financial resources and instructional materials. Similarly, Fannie Jackson Coppin

exercised her community other-mothering to eventually gain accreditation for

Washington D.C.'s only Black high school in the early 1900s. Her influence was also the

driving force behind the formation of The Colored Women's League of Washington and one of the first chapters for the YWCA.

Case (1997) explored the role of other-mothering using a case study analysis of two elementary school principals in Connecticut. The principals served two elementary schools in Connecticut with majority African-American student populations. Using open-ended interview questions, the researcher explored topics related to upbringing, beliefs about motherhood, the role of paternal and maternal grandmothers, leadership stories, "community and parental involvement, urban children, and maternal thinking" (p. 16). In their accounts, the participants shared stories that connected their upbringing to their leadership practices. They employed other mothering by empowering at-risk students, revamping the reputations of their schools, exploring ways to gain the respect of blood mothers, and enlisting community support and involvement in the schools. The participants attributed their successes to an instilment and personal commitment to social justice and community advancement. This study was significant because it illustrated the role of other-mothering in meeting psychoemotional needs, which for children of poverty, is crucial to their academic success.

Understanding the make-up of the African-American family is necessary in developing culturally sensitive pedagogy and teaching practices. These examples also demonstrate how the roles of African-American mothers often transfer into the leadership practices of African-American females. This finding is the basis for understanding the 'hows' of African-American female leadership and also suggests that these dispositions better position African-American females in understanding and relating to African-American male students. The findings presented in this discussion also illustrated how

motherhood and values of caring and nurturing are significant to how African-American females interpret their roles as educational leaders (Loder, 2005).

Caring

Several studies have explored the influence of caring on leadership styles. Noddings' (1984) analysis was the first to call attention to creating caring school environments. In her book, *Challenge to Care in Schools*, Noddings proposed a framework for moral education based on modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Though Noddings' attempt was the first to question standardized testing, contemporary theorists accused her work of being color-blind and inapplicable to diverse and challenging school populations (Thompson, 1998). For this reason, future studies sought to examine care under the context of culture.

Sernak (2004) extended this idea by proposing that race and ethnicity also play a role in the enactment of and perceptions of caring acts by both giver and receiver in the school setting. He further asserted that a more narrowed perspective is needed to understand children of poverty and children of color. Furthermore, the purpose of Sernak's study was to explore the influences of historical female kin on the leadership behaviors of African-American female leaders. The participants included three administrators from a high school, elementary, and alternative school. After conducting a series of interviews, data were analyzed using the accounts and analysis of slave history and literature about Africanity and African worldview. From this analysis, Sernak identified three behaviors that paralleled themes in the literary study of slave history: community, spirituality, and the balance of power with caring, or 'Oneness of Being.' Sernak further contended that these leaders exercised their power not for personal gain,

but to uplift their race through relationship building, attending to the needs of school and community, and encouraging collective caring. The results of this study illustrated the role of historical influences in the leadership practices and viewpoints of African-American female leaders.

An ethic of caring was also a recurring theme in several other studies involving women of color in educational leadership. Dillard (1995) for instance, documented the work of high school principal, Gloria Natham. Like Sernak, Dillard also used qualitative approaches to capture Natham's account. The study was situated in a large metropolitan school district with an ethnically diverse student population. By establishing high expectations for her students, working closely with parents, and overcoming both external and internal opposition, Natham demonstrated caring leadership by remaining focused and committed to the success of her students. The results of this study were significant for many reasons. First, it highlighted the role of an ethno-humanistic leadership approach. Consistent with Tillman's assertion, Natham's culture and race influenced her decision-making. Dillard concluded Natham's leadership was directly tied to her same-race affiliation, cultural background, and status as an African-American woman.

Similarly, Reitzug and Patterson (1998) noted caring in the leadership style of middle-school principal Debbie Pressley. Her community and colleagues nominated Pressley for her success among economically disadvantaged African-American students. After shadowing Pressley for two days, the researchers noted differences in how Pressley exhibited caring towards her students. To establish and build relationships, students remained with the same teacher for three years. She practiced an open-door policy by

allowing students to voice their concerns, thus fostering a sense of belonging and community. Finally, Pressley implemented a conflict resolution protocol to assist students in understanding the consequences of their actions and empowering them with skills to become better problem solvers.

For the caring leadership exhibited by the African-American female leaders in this discussion, culture was a recurring theme. This finding is important because it suggests that race and cultural affiliation is the vehicle that drives decision-making and extends to other practices including the hiring of teachers and interactions with parents. The results of these studies were also significant in defining ethno-humanist role identity, a leadership style unique to African-American leaders (Lomotey, 1993; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). The mission for such leaders is to meet both academic and cultural goals through a commitment to academic excellence for all students, confidence in their student's abilities despite academic and social barriers, and compassion with respect to students and their individual communities. Caring is a necessary component of leadership in schools with predominately Black students because it considers and begins to address both internal and external barriers that impedes the success of these students. Interestingly enough, Bloom and Erlandson (2003) argued that school reform and a focus on standardized testing make it difficult for African-American leaders to assume an ethno-humanist role identity and caring leadership is compromised as federal, local, and state agendas often take precedence.

Spirituality

No discussion involving the plight of African-Americans would be complete without the mention of spirituality. Although the church is central to the Black

community, it serves only as an extension of religion. For African-Americans, spirituality transcends the boundaries of religion by instilling a sense of liberation from cultural, political, and social injustices (Dantley, 2010). During slavery, spirituality served as the catalyst to fuel syncretistic reasoning. As mentioned earlier, this coping mechanism allowed slaves to combat dehumanization and oppressive acts through hope and assurance in a higher power. It is this same spirituality that has sustained African-American mothers as heads of the household in the absence of fathers. Finally, this strength has assisted Black female leaders in overcoming gender and racial inequities in education.

Witherspoon and Arnold (2010) sought to extend the concept of caring in Black female leadership by exploring the ways in which religio-spirituality impacted leadership behaviors and caring acts in schools. In addition to interviews, the researchers compiled a series of 'spiritual narratives' and analyzed the responses of each participant using a womanist theological framework and historical and spiritual narratives. Results of the study revealed that the participants led their schools in the same way pastors lead congregations. For these administrators, the following were core leadership skills: (a) their decisions centered around personal beliefs and spiritual principles; (b) they saw social justice as their overall mission for their students; (c) they perceived their work as extensions of God and church; (d) they recognized and consistently challenged the realities of racism in education; and (e) they approached racial and social barriers with just as much fervor as curriculum and instruction. This analysis confirmed previous thought as it relates to the leadership styles and behavior of Black female leaders. For one, it confirmed Sernak's notion that culture and history play out in a number of ways

but mainly in the processes by which care is enacted and demonstrated in the school setting. This study is also significant because it introduced a new perspective of caring, pastoral care, and setting the stage for the exploration of the role of spirituality in leadership among women of color.

Quantitative studies have also been used to explore spirituality among African-American female leaders across contexts. In a double-case study, Garrett-Akinsaya and Mack (2009) examined perceptions of race and gender on leadership functioning and also the self-care differences among African-American women leaders in different work settings. The first study included European and African-American males and females in counseling director positions. Race was identified as a significant factor in determining the types of coping strategies. African-Americans were more likely to use spiritual and cultural mechanisms to address stress whereas, European Americans relied on self-help books, therapy, and other emotional forms of support. The second study examined the self-care strategies of African-American women within different work fields. Results from the second analysis revealed that the spiritual domain was among the most used self-care strategy among African-American counseling directors. In other high-stress leadership positions, social support was more utilized than spirituality. The findings of this study are significant for several reasons. Although differences exist as to how and under which circumstances spirituality is exercised, this study suggested that African-centered values continue to inform the leadership practices of women of color. In counseling, cultural identity and of the concept of self-consciousness are said to be the corner stone of African-American mental health (Garrett-Akinsaya & Mack, 2009). Since education is an open-system influenced by federal, state, and local entities,

African-American female leaders are often caught between their social justice agendas and reality (Gaetane, 2013). Furthermore, this evidence coincides with Bloom and Erlandson's (2003) assertion that school reform and a focus on standardized testing compromises the ethno-humanist role and caring leadership among African-American leaders.

Contemporary research involving the opportunity gap proposed for progressive leadership that questions education reform and oppressive hegemonies in addition to the "psyches" of educators and educational leaders (Witherspoon & Anderson, 2010, p. 93). Critical spirituality blends African-American spirituality and critical theory and includes four domains: critical self-reflection, deconstructive interpretation, performative creativity, and communal efficacy. Critical self-reflection and deconstructive interpretation force the leader to look within to analyze the beliefs and values that guide their leadership practices. Next through performative creativity and community efficacy, these leaders project their reflective epiphanies to inspire teachers, students, and the larger community. Since it informs the adaptive nature of leadership, some scholars have argued that spirituality is the basis for the transformational leadership needed to improve urban schools with predominately African-American student populations (Dantley, 2010; McCray et. al, 2012).

Transformational Leadership

The term *leadership* has morphed over the past decade due to the number of challenges plaguing American public education. No longer trapped behind a desk bogged down with administrative duties, educational leadership in the 21st Century calls for individuals with the capacity to withstand the changing nature of education and

educational leadership from budget deficits and increased accountability, these leaders

must also diligently seek new approaches to bridge the gap in achievement. In 1979,

James Burns introduced a progressive leadership orientation, shifting away from

transactional leadership models by placing emphasis on leader - follower relationships,

organizational needs, and shared values. Although originally introduced to the corporate

sector, empirical studies on the effectiveness of transformational leadership, concluded

with three implications for the school setting. Transformational leaders define the

school's mission, possess strong instructional leadership, and promote a positive learning

environment through empowerment and shared decision-making (Hallinger & Heck,

1996; Leithwood, 2003).

Though previous studies on female leadership styles found women to utilize

participatory forms of leadership, many researchers further characterize African-

American female leadership as transformational in nature (Shakeshaft, 1997). Bass

(1990) and Tillman (2008) asserted that black leaders often exhibit transformational

leadership to rally for social change through innovative thinking and creative problem

solving. Historical and cultural examples revealed that through their experiences,

African-American women in particular, enacted adaptive forms of leadership to survive

"oppressive forces in the American social system" (Branche, 2014, p. 71).

Black women have also been described as resilient. In a narrative study on the

lives of six African-American women during segregation in Mississsppi and Arkansas,

researchers Wormer, Sudduth, and Jackson (2011) noted that the participant's upbringing

was rooted in messages of racial socialization. This finding is important as Branche

(2014) noted that both resilience and transformational leadership influence leadership

outcomes and organizational success. The focus of Branche's dissertation was to illuminate the value of African-American female leadership in the non-profit sector. The researcher employed a mixed – methods approach to investigate the leadership styles and resilience levels of 33 African-American female leaders. The interview results revealed examples that confirmed transformational leadership approaches. The quantitative data reported strong inspirational motivation strategies in addition to high levels of resilience.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

Much of the research today points out that issues of gender and race are prevalent in educational leadership. Studies have been successful in exposing the challenges women of color often face in educational leadership, but fail to delve into how these differences can inform or enlighten theoretical formulations. A review of contemporary research concluded that gender and race stereotypes informed perceptions and impacted the manner in which female principals led their schools. Trends in African-American female principal assignments and statistical data eluded discriminatory hiring practices. Finally, mentoring and sponsorships were noted as having a positive impact on female leadership development. Moreover, cultural and historical underpinnings are evident in African-American female leadership. The slave experience in particular has not only defined the complex familial structures that exist in the African-American community, but also defined the role of African-American females as mothers, community staples, and trailblazers in education. Studies have unveiled the ethno-humanist roles assumed by women of color in the educational setting and identified culture as the constant in practices such as other-mothering, caring, and spirituality.

Early examples of other-mothering were exhibited in the work of female leaders before the groundbreaking Brown vs. Board of Education court decision. Anna Julia Cooper and Fannie Jackson Coppin acted as other-mothers both inside and outside of the classroom. Sometimes serving as both principal and teacher Cooper and Coppin extended their leadership to the community and used their insider status to establish successful outcomes for students and future educators. Participants in Case's (1997) study also shared stories that connected their upbringing to their leadership practices. They employed other-mothering by empowering at-risk students, revamping the reputations of their schools, exploring ways to gain the respect of blood mothers, and enlisting community support and involvement in the schools. The discussion of other-mothering demonstrated how the roles of African-American mothers often transfer into the leadership practices of African-American females.

An ethic of caring was a recurring theme in studies involving women of color in educational leadership. For the caring leadership exhibited by the African-American female leaders in this discussion, culture was a recurring theme. This finding is important because it suggests that race and cultural affiliation is the vehicle that drives decision-making and extends to other practices including the hiring of teachers and interactions with parents. The results of these studies were also significant in defining ethno-humanist role identity, a leadership style unique to African-American leaders (Lomotey, 1993; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003).

Next, spirituality was interwoven in the leadership practices of African-American females in educational leadership and across contexts. Witherspoon and Arnold (2010) used spiritual narratives to connect aspects of the church to African-American female

leadership. Results of their analysis confirmed Sernak's notion that culture and history play out in a number of ways, but mainly in the processes by which care is enacted and demonstrated in the school setting. Similarly, Garrett-Akinsaya and Mack's (2009) double case study illuminated a number of themes related to spirituality in African-American leadership. First, this study suggested that African-centered values continue to inform the leadership practices of women of color across contexts. Finally, it substantiated Bloom and Erlandson's (2003) claim that the business of education often compromises the ethno-humanist role and caring leadership among African-American leaders.

Finally, studies used history and culture to describe the resilience and transformational qualities of African-American women. This leadership is necessary in the wake of education reform and accountability and also essential to African-American females as they are often called upon to lead challenging school environments. This finding was also evident in non-education environments as more recent studies. Though the body of research will continue to evolve, this evidence holds potential to broaden leadership theory by introducing intersections of race and gender.

Now that culture and history have established a backdrop of African-American female leadership, this research will move forward by exploring how these behaviors, beliefs, and practices play out in the school setting. This dissertation will distinguish itself from previous work on African-American female principals in predominately black schools because it not only contributes to previous findings on the influence of race and gender, but it will also expands the discussion on the leader's role in addressing the

opportunity gap in Title I schools by illuminating the perceptions of three African-

American principals.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative research explored the lived experiences of three African-American female principals in Title I elementary, middle, and high schools. It was necessary for the researcher to apply a methodology that would allow the voice of the participants to emerge in order to provide a "textural description of the phenomenon" (Hycner, 1985, p. 280). In this chapter, the researcher will justify the rationale for selecting phenomenology as a means to explore the opportunity gap through the eyes of African-American female principals. The researcher will also revisit the study's purpose and research focus question. Finally, Chapter III will discuss data collection procedures, explain the data analysis process, and outline the measures taken to maintain trustworthiness for the duration of the research process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of African-American female leaders and their influence to address the opportunity gap for African-American male students. This study included three African-American female participants from Title I school districts. Using Critical Race Theory as a lens, the participants were encouraged to share their experiences and perspectives of the opportunity gap and how they exercised their influence to address the opportunity gap among African-American males.

Research Question

The following research question guided this study:

> *In what ways do the African-American female participants in this study*
>
> *understand their influence on the opportunity gap among African-American male*
>
> *students?*

This analysis will be framed using the following constructs:

i. Leadership style

ii. External influences

iii. Barriers (family dynamics, socioeconomic status)

iv. Professional Development

Research Design

Qualitative Research

Based on an extensive review of various research approaches, the researcher felt a qualitative design was necessary to explore the opportunity gap in Title I schools as perceived by African-American female principals and to amplify their voice that has been silenced in the research. Aside from the challenges associated with educational leadership, African-American female principals must overcome barriers attached to being both female and black (Doughty, 1980). Consequently, a qualitative research approach was useful in presenting a rich description of the lived experiences of three African-American female principals as they address the opportunity gap in Title I schools.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology begins with an experience of a shared event of conditions that is investigated through the perceptions of those involved in the experience.

Phenomenology focuses on the subjective nature of reality and provides a way to understand how people view themselves and the world they live in (Willis, 2007). A shared phenomenon is often a shared condition, or a variety of combined experiences (Campbell, 2011).

In phenomenological research, the researcher focuses not on a specific event, but instead examines the perceptions of the participants as they live in the event and reflect upon it. The focus on understanding the voice of the persons being studied allows for a deeper understanding of the event or occurrence (Willis, 2007). The transcendental phenomenologist examines specific data by "reducing the information to significant statements or quotes and combines the statements into themes (Creswell, 2007). Each of these approaches focuses on how individuals make sense of the world around them and create shared meaning (Patton, 2002). Phenomenological research strives to describe rather than explain, without relying on preconceptions (Husserl, 1970). Modern uses of phenomenology allow the researcher to be a subjective observer who makes clear when and how meanings may have been placed on the topic at hand by the researcher.

Data Collection

The researcher used interviews and existing school literature to collect data. Interviews are a recognized source of data when engaged in phenomenological research looking to uncover the counter-story telling component of Critical Race Theory. This method seeks to usher in the silenced voices of the "marginalized minority" (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 27). Counter-story telling, as a research construct, was vital in this study for many reasons. First, it can assist in mediating what Tillman and other scholars proposed as a gap in research due to the underrepresentation and omission of the African-

American female voice (Gaetane, 2013). Next, it can assist in creating a more balanced perspective in existing literature that is often "explained, conceptualized, and seen through the eyes of White males" (Tillman, 2008, p. 173).

The interview questions were formed using the presented literature with regard to leadership practices, external influences, barriers, and professional development. Furthermore, the questions embodied tenets of Critical Race Theory. Table 1 details how each question was structured according to these constructs. Since the study seeks to explore the leader's perceptions, six of the questions focused on the influences that shape various leadership behaviors. These questions were also framed to investigate the role of other-mothering, caring, or spirituality and determine if any of these behaviors play out in any leadership practices. Since a considerable amount of research already exists about barriers contributing to the opportunity gap, only two questions were devoted to explore how these participants perceived and addressed these barriers. One question surrounding professional development was included to explore Flores (2007) assertion that schools with predominately African-American student populations are more likely to be taught by inexperienced teachers and explore the issue of culturally-relevant teaching practices. One question related to external influences was included to investigate the extent to which educational policy and procedure affects the participants' ability to assume ethno-humanist roles as African-American female leaders are often caught between their social justice agendas and reality (Erlandson, 2003; Shakeshaft, 1997). Based on the findings of the first interview, the researcher used this data to generate a second set of questions to be used for a follow-up interview which will be presented in Chapter 4 because they were formulated based on an analysis of collected data.

Table 1.

Interview Questions Based on Theoretical Frameworks

Interview Question	Construct	Critical Race Theory
Leadership Behaviors		
2	In what ways do you address the achievement/opportunity gap for African-American males in your school?	Counter-story telling
1	Briefly describe your experiences as an educator/educational leader.	Counter-story telling
6	How do your personal goals align with external influences when addressing the opportunity gap?	Counter-story telling Interest convergence
	What challenges if any, occur during this process?	Counter-story telling
3	In what ways do you use your influence to involve the community to address the opportunity gap?	Counter-story telling
8	What personal influences have the most impact on how you lead your school?	Counter-story telling
10	How has your race/gender influenced your leadership experiences?	Counter-story telling Permanence of racism Interest convergence
11	How does spirituality or other moral convictions influence various aspects of your leadership experience?	Counter-story telling
External Influences		
9	How do state, local, and national mandates affect the manner in which you address the opportunity gap?	Counter-story telling Interest convergence
Barriers		
4	What do you perceive as the external and internal barriers for African-American males in your school?	Counter-story telling Interest convergence Permanence of racism Whiteness of property
5	How do you address those obstacles?	Counter-story telling interest convergence
Professional Development		
3	What measures are taken to foster on-going professional development as it relates to the cultural competence of your staff?	Counter-story telling Permanence of racism Interest convergence

Participants and Site

Participants were selected using Glaser's (1978) selective sampling method. This method was more suitable for this study because the informants are selected intentionally in a direction where a "phenomenon of interest exists" (p.233). To fully investigate African-American female principal's perceptions of the opportunity gap, this study called for participants based on the following criteria:

- Current or former African-American female principal

- At least three years in a leadership role

- Current or former principal in a Georgia Title I school

The researcher's affiliation with Rural, Title I School District as a former employee, facilitated access to principals with the ability to provide the elementary and middle school perspective. The researcher made contact with employees of other school districts to secure an African-American female principal in a Title I high school. As a result, the researcher recruited the third participant through a mutual acquaintance. This acquaintance was the researcher's former colleague and presently serves as the parent facilitator in this Title I high school. Once secured, the researcher assigned pseudonyms for each participant's name, school, and school district to maintain confidentiality. The end result of this recruitment process yielded participation from Dr. Early, Dr. Middleton, and Dr. Highland.

The first participant, Dr. Early, is a native of rural, Title I School District. After college, she came back to her hometown to teach and coach track. After six years in the classroom, she became an assistant principal of an elementary school within the district. She was then promoted to principal of Rural, Title I Elementary School X where she has remained for the past six years. Dr. Early is the second African-American female to be

named principal of rural, Title Elementary School X. The second participant was Dr. Middleton, principal of Title I Middle School Y. She taught middle grades science for eight years before she became an assistant principal. She served as an assistant principal for eight years. For the past two years, she has led Title I Middle School Y which is home to 996 students in grades six through eight. The final participant, Dr. Highland currently serves Urban, Title I High School Z. Prior to her principalship, she taught science in the same school she would become principal ten years later. During this time, she worked at the district level as the science curriculum director and as the head director for curriculum and instruction. She is the school's first African-American female principal. Urban, Title I High School Z houses approximately 700 ninth through twelfth graders.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

Data were analyzed using Hycner's (1985) explication process. This data analysis procedure extends the work of the pioneers of phenomenology by proposing a set of general guidelines that will enable the researcher to remain "true to the phenomenon" (Hycner, 1985, p. 280). This data analysis model was chosen not only because it supports the methodology but it also addresses two areas of trustworthiness that are transcribing and bracketing which will be further explained in the next section of this chapter. Once the researcher produced transcripts of each interview, it became necessary to implement a method to filter any bias, preconceptions, or opinions in order to preserve the authenticity of each interview account. Bracketing, a phenomenological reduction method, served this purpose and occurred at several points throughout the research process. Once the researcher produced transcripts for each interview and employed

measures to bracket personal bias, the explication process began. This procedure included identifying delineating units of general meaning, applying the research question to each unit to delineate units of relevant meaning, clustering these units to form themes, summarizing each interview and conducting a follow-up interview, extracting general and unique themes from each interview, and contextualizing each theme.

Delineating Units of General Meaning

After the first interview cycle, the researcher transcribed each recorded interview to begin the next process of delineating units of meaning. Hycner defined these units as "significant words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or non-verbal cues from the interviews in an effort to demystify the participant's meaning" (p. 282). This step began with identifying general statements of significance for each interview question. To do this, the researcher listened to the interviews and read each transcript repeatedly, referring to the reflexive journal for any anecdotal notes recorded during the interview encounters. The purpose of this journal was to enhance trustworthiness of phenomenological research by providing opportunities for the researcher to assess the influence of personal bias in the interpretation or presentation of data (Hycner, 1989; Tuffman & Newman, 2010). For each response, significant or reoccurring statements were highlighted then copied and pasted into a Word document.

Delineating Units of Relevant Meaning

After extracting the general statements of significance, the researcher applied the research question to each highlighted statement initiating the next step in the explication process, delineating units of relevant meaning. These significant or repeated statements were then copied and pasted into a three-columned table using each participant's

pseudonym as the column header. A complete list of these significant units will be presented in the next chapter.

Clustering Units of Relevant Meaning

This required the researcher to determine the statements that "naturally clustered together" (Hycner, 1985, p. 287). Once these clusters of related statements were grouped, the researcher assigned "codes" to the clusters or in some cases, subcategories. These codes assisted in identifying additional supporting statements from responses to the remaining interview questions in each transcript. These additional supporting statements were added to the table created during the previous step. Table 3 in this chapter lists the codes assigned to each of the clustered units of relevant meaning.

Determining Themes

After scrutinizing each transcript for additional supporting statements, the researcher determined an initial theme to capture the core of each cluster. The coding assigned to the units and clusters of relevant meaning from each participant's interviews informed these emergent understandings. These initial themes were very general and primarily served the purpose to assist in writing a summary of the first interview findings.

Summarizing & Follow-Up Interview

After applying the explication method to each interview question and generating a set of initial themes, the researcher wrote a brief summary of each participant's interview, being careful to highlight the emergent themes. This summary served two purposes. First, it provided an opportunity for the researcher to "play back" the data both to facilitate dialogue about the initial findings and to provide an accurate account of the "whole." Secondly, it addressed the confirmability through a member checking

component of trustworthiness in qualitative research that will be further discussed in the next section of this chapter. The second interview was necessary to strengthen the findings and solidify the emergent themes. Such was the case with this study, there were several occasions when the responses were unbalanced and more information was needed from each participant.

Modifying Each Theme

With the new data from the second interview, the researcher applied the above procedures for each response to the interview questions. Hycner cautions the researcher to pay particular attention to themes common to all or most of the interviews as well as those that were only unique to a minority of the participants. The researcher's general rule was that if consensus existed among two or all three participants, a theme could be projected. However, if the information only applied to one participant, the variation was verified through the literature and the theoretical framework, and then categorized as a negative case if necessary.

Contextualizing Each Theme

The final phase of the explication process involved a contextual analysis of each theme. Aside from the opportunity gap, the phenomenon being explored, the researcher used the frameworks of Critical Race Theory and the existing literature to further define each theme. In several instances, the original themes were modified at the conclusion of the second interview and after the bracketing interviews with the researcher's dissertation committee. Much of this discussion takes place in Chapter 5.

Table 2.

Data Analysis Codes

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4
•Teachers (T) •Policy-Context (PC) •Negative Perceptions (NP)	•Ethnohumanism (EH) •Psychoemotional Development (PD)	•Other-mothering (OM) •Caring (C)	•Closing the Gap (CG) •Professional Development (PD)

Trustworthiness

Guba (1981) proposed credibility, confirmability, dependability, and

transferability as necessary in establishing trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry.

Credibility ensures the research results are valid and reflect the participant's perspectives.

Dependability addresses consistency with the idea that similar results will be obtained if

the study were repeated. In addition, to limit bias and personal interests, confirmability

protects neutrality by ensuring that the findings are not skewed in any way. Lastly,

transferability maintains that the findings can be applied to other contexts or settings.

Credibility

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), credibility is one of the most critical

elements of trustworthy, qualitative research. To remain consistent with this research

construct, the researcher implemented a number of measures to build credibility into the

study. Before data collection, the researcher contacted each participant informally, to

initiate the groundwork for establishing a positive rapport. This action, known as

prolonged engagement, facilitates meaning and understanding of research participants

and members of a setting (Erlandson et. al, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As a former

employee, the researcher entered the study with familiarity of the context of *Rural, Title I*

School District and among one of the participants, Dr. Early (pseudonyms were used for

all the participants). Dr. Early is the principal of *Rural, Title I Elementary School A*, and

the researcher's former assistant principal from 2008-2010. Prior to IRB approval, the

researcher contacted Dr. Early by telephone. The purpose of the phone call was to

discuss the background of the study and to gauge overall interest and availability. Dr.

Early gave her consent to be included in the study pending IRB approval. The next

participant, Dr. Middleton, is the principal of *Rural, Title I Middle School B*. The

researcher had no affiliation with this participant prior to this research and so Dr.

Middleton was chosen based on accessibility. The researcher contacted Dr. Middleton

three times by telephone using the information provided on the school's web page. After

the third unsuccessful attempt, the researcher initiated an informal introduction through e-

mail. In this email, the researcher disclosed her affiliation with the county, a brief

background and purpose of the research study, and a proposed timeline of the data

collection process. Dr. Middleton responded the same day and expressed that her

participation would depend on district approval. To locate an African-American female

high school principal, the researcher looked to other school districts because one did not

exist in *Rural, Title I School District*. A former colleague of the researcher suggested Dr.

Highland. This acquaintance facilitated an initial meeting by soliciting Highland's

permission to be contacted. After granting permission, the researcher contacted Dr.

Highland by telephone providing a general overview of the research study and a proposed

timeline for data collection. Dr. Highland expressed her interest and willingness to

participate in the research study pending IRB approval. After IRB clearance, the

researcher contacted superintendents of *Rural, Title I School District* and *Urban, Title I School District* by email. In this email, the researcher provided a brief introduction of herself, the purpose of the contact, and an attachment of the IRB approved consent form. The superintendent of *Rural, Title I School District* responded within two hours giving his permission to proceed to data collection. The superintendent of *Urban, Title I School District* stated that participation would be at the discretion of the principal and then forwarded the researcher's request to Dr. Highland.

The informed consent document (see appendix 3) was an additional measure to foster honesty among the principals and strengthen the study's credibility. Once granted permission at the district level, the researcher contacted each participant by email and attached the informed consent document. This document reiterated the purpose of the research and provided specific information about the methodology and data collection, more specifically the need to record and transcribe each interview. Equally important, the informed consent provided each principal with the opportunity to refuse participation at any point in the data collection process. According to Shenton (2004), this option facilitates openness on part of the participants and solicits genuine participation. This coupled with a positive rapport, promotes openness with the hope of gathering authentic data.

Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1994) maintained that confirmability could be best achieved through the use of an audit trail. Once the initial and follow-up interviews concluded, the researcher transcribed each interview verbatim to the audio recordings simultaneously reinforcing credibility and dependability. Producing this text required the researcher to

listen to the data several times to ensure accuracy in the transcription process and also

enabled the researcher to "become one" with each participant's story. This practice

initiated the hermeneutic circle, a process of interpretation that involves interacting with a

text multiple times using parts of the reader's understanding to make meaning of the

whole (Laverty, 2003). Each encounter with the text required a "projection," an

unpacking of the researcher's background, personal experiences, assumptions or biases

that may have emerged during this exchange. These projections interacted at a

crossroads where hermeneutics ends and where phenomenology begins. It is at this point

where the research data moves away from just a pure presentation of a hermeneutic

discourse between the researcher, the data, and the participants to a revealing of the

phenomenon at the heart of this discourse.

Researcher's Perspective

While hermeneutics and phenomenology both require the researcher to

acknowledge his/her own bias, one of the major differences between these two methods

lies in how the researcher uses these projections once they have been unpacked. With

hermeneutics, biases and assumptions are essential to the interpretive process, while

proponents of phenomenology advise researchers to bracket, or set them aside to allow

the lived experiences of the participants to emerge (Laverty, 2003). To portray the lived

experiences of the African-American female principals, it became then, crucial to enact

mechanisms to ensure the researcher's projections promoted self-reflection without

skewing the data (Tufford & Newman, 2010). In other words, the research process truly

allowed the voice of the participants to be heard. Moreover, due to the closeness of the

researcher to the research project, it was also necessary to provide an avenue by which

the investigator could detach from the position of an African-American female educator when analyzing data and reporting the research findings. Bracketing, a form of phenomenological reduction, provided such a pathway and supported the succession of qualitative research by acting as a filter at each stage of the research process (Tufford & Newman, 2010). For this study, the researcher bracketed the following assumptions.

- Same race-affiliation and cultural similarities better position African-American educators to teach African-American children.

- African-American male students view African-American females as mother figures.

- Based on classroom experiences in a rural, Title I elementary school, African-American and novice teachers are more likely to be assigned classrooms with both academic and behaviorally at-risk students which tend to contain more African-American males.

- Due to the prevalence of single-parent parent families in the African-American community, African-American males require tough love and positive affirmations more so than their peers.

- Title I schools and school districts have extra funding to address the specific needs of children of poverty with the intention to close the opportunity gap over time.

Through interviews, reflexive journals, and memoing, these bracketing methods held the researcher accountable for using these preconceptions as a source of engagement with the data rather than an obstacle or source of interpretation (Laverty, 2003).

Bracketing to Establish Confirmability

First, the researcher utilized bracketing interviews, a form of investigator triangulation, to advance clarity of the phenomenon in question (Rolls & Relf, 2006; Tuckett, 2010). As with bracketing interviews, the aim of investigator triangulation is to involve external sources of data to lend an 'objective eye' to the research process (Tuckett, 2005). The researcher selected three committee members possessing experience with supervising, performing, and executing educational research. Bracketing interviews played an important role early in the study by supporting the investigator in refining research questions and by suggesting the use of a reflexive journal for the duration of the study.

According to Tufford and Newman (2010), reflexive journals aid in the bracketing process by promoting self-reflection, enabling the researcher to maintain transparency. At the onset of the study, the researcher documented her background and identified the influences that prompted the study. The researcher provided this background information in the "Locating Myself within the Study" section of Chapter I. Following each interview, the researcher returned to the reflexive journal to document the ways in which this data confirmed or challenged the thoughts or beliefs brought to the study. The negative cases brought forth in the bracketing interviews, shielded against an overemphasis on the findings that only reflected the researcher's stance on the opportunity gap in Title I schools. Memoing, which is the writing of ideas, was useful during the data collection, transcription process, and analysis phase of the study. Written summaries of the first interview aided in the process of preliminary thematic identification and helped to identify the necessary questions for the follow-up interview.

During the interviews, the researcher used memoing or anecdotal notes to assess the emotional valence of the participants. For instance, questions related to mothering divulged more emotionally driven responses than others. Once the data from both interviews were transcribed, marginal notes allowed the researcher to cross-reference related or repeated statements among each participant, the existing literature, and the study's guiding conceptual framework. Memoing facilitated data analysis by synthesizing coded statements from the interviews and marginal notes from the transcripts to devise and justify the basis for each emergent theme.

The final action to promote confirmability came through conducting member checks. The validity of member checks has been a source of dissension among qualitative theorists. While Koch (1994) and Cormack (2000) endorsed member checking for validity purposes, some critics asserted that it interferes with the emergence of authentic data as respondents are able to tamper or alter wording (Angen, 2000; Sandelowski, 1993). Finally, Morse (1991) advocated the use of member checking throughout the research process. Consequently, the researcher incorporated member checks at two points in the data collection process because it was important for the participants to recognize "something of themselves" (Tuckett, 2005, p. 37). After the first interview, the researcher communicated the results of the initial analysis in order for the participant's to understand the basis for the questions presented in the follow-up interview. This action was necessary not only for accuracy, but this process also allowed the researcher to present, strengthen, refine, and modify the emergent themes. Although the participants declined the researcher's initial offer to review the interview transcripts, it was necessary for two participants to review their transcript for clarification purposes.

Further explanation was needed in reference to Dr. Middleton's statement about her "firm hand" on discipline. Similarly, Dr. Highland reviewed her transcript to offer a more descriptive response to her statement regarding counterproductive policies in her school.

Dependability

Dependability is concerned with the reliability of a research study with regard to the constancy of emergent data (Rolfe, 2006). To this end, close attention and careful consideration were given to each aspect of the research process to serve as a template for future studies. Purposeful theoretical sampling was useful in capturing the lived experiences of credible study subjects with each participant lending at least 15 years of teacher and leadership expertise. Interview recordings and transcripts promoted dependability by ensuring accuracy when quoting or referencing participant's statements. Bracketing aimed to filter personal bias or opinions to ensure an accurate presentation of the featured participants, an additional measure to foster dependability. Bracketing interviews with a review committee provided objective insight at each stage of the research process. Finally, reflexive journaling and memoing facilitated transparency and provided a rationale for decisions made throughout the research process (Sandelowski, 1993; Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Transferability

The 'thick description' of participants and research setting in Chapter 4 along with the outlined data collection procedures promoted transferability. Schofield (1993) further identified specificity among the research subjects and site, a determining factor in the overall applicability of the research. Consequently, purposeful theoretical sampling was useful in elucidating a perspective absent in existing literature, the African-American

female principal voice. Space triangulation, which investigates a phenomenon in two or more settings, was beneficial for examining the consistency of data across sites (Tuckett, 2005). The variance in the context of rural and urban Title I school districts, also increased the potential relevance of this study. Due to the sample size of the participants interviewed for the study and the geographic location of the Title I schools in Georgia however, the findings cannot be generalized in other Title I schools or non-Title I schools elementary, middle, or high schools in other geographic locations.

Although the purpose of this study was to explore the manner in which these participants addressed the opportunity gap in their schools, these practices have not been extensively investigated with regard to their value as interventions. Therefore, an indication of their effectiveness may inform knowledge on future educational leadership practices, educational policy reform, or implementation of programs designed to target student populations impacted by the opportunity gap. Ultimately, due to the premise of transferability inherent in qualitative design, readers will be able to interpret the findings and conclusion and apply them as appropriate over a range of educational constructs.

Summary

Chapter III revisited the background, purpose, and the research question mentioned previously in Chapter I. In addition, the research design, details about the participants and site, and data collection methods were further explained. A table outlining the theoretical frameworks was also provided with interview questions. This chapter also outlined the data analysis procedures and explained the rationale for selecting Hycner's explication method. Finally, this chapter disclosed measures to ensure trustworthiness with regard to credibility, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability. To maintain credibility, the researcher initiated prolonged engagement to establish a positive rapport with the participants and an informed consent to foster honesty and willing participation. Next, audit trails maintained confirmability by ensuring accurate reporting and to develop the researcher's familiarity with each interview account. Aside from disclosing the biases, preconceptions, and underlying assumptions, the researcher brought into the study, actions taken to bracket these understandings were also discussed. The final measure to establish confirmability and further strengthen the rigor of the study was achieved through member checking. To assure dependability, the researcher relied on purposeful theoretical sampling, interview recording and transcripts, and bracketing to ensure reliability and fidelity. Finally, thick descriptions and space triangulation were among the many actions to promote transferability.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to present the lived experiences of three African-American female principals in their quest to address the opportunity gap for African-American males in each of their Title I schools. Phenomenology, the applied methodology in this study, illuminated the silenced voices and provided an opportunity to expose the lived experiences while Critical Race Theory revealed the concepts of counter-story telling in their perceptions.

In this chapter, the researcher will present the data gathered from the first and second interviews. The results of the study informs understanding of the opportunity gap in Title I schools in four ways showing that: 1) the participants expressed how culture, class, context and policies, and counterintuitive perceptions present barriers; 2) race informed the leadership practices and behaviors of each participant; 3) gender informed the leadership practices and behaviors of each participant; and 4) the principals employed transformational leadership to address the opportunity gap for African-American males in their schools. The major findings will be presented in this chapter and conclude with a summary of the emergent themes.

This study included three African-American female principals in an elementary, middle, and high school under the Title I designation. The researcher assigned pseudonyms for the participants' name, school, and school district to maintain confidentiality. The following is a description of each participant.

Dr. Early

Dr. Early is a native of Rural, Title I School District. She returned to her

hometown to teach after a leg injury ended her college track scholarship. She taught 4th

grade and coached high school track. After six years in the classroom, she was appointed

assistant principal of the same school. As an assistant principal, she gained experience in

facilities management and discipline. She attributes her experience as the assistant

principal of discipline as the driving force behind her pursuit of a doctorate degree in

educational leadership: "What I began to notice is that African-American males were

being sent to me more than any other demographic of students at that time" (Dr. Early,

personal communication, January 28, 2015). This observation and her need to "stay

ahead" of her counterparts, inspired her quantitative study aimed at exploring the impact

of a local mentoring program on African-American male achievement. Shortly after

earning a doctorate in educational leadership from Georgia Southern University, she was

named principal of *Rural, Title I Elementary School A*, the second African-American

principal since its establishment in 1983. She considers her mother and a former

elementary principal as major leadership influences, often referring to the Golden Rule as

her reference point when making decisions in her school. Her elementary principal was

someone who helped her believe in herself and gave her confidence through

encouragement and compassion. She also uses her experience of being raised in a single-

parent home to relate to and interact with students, parents, and teachers. Since

becoming principal, her accomplishments include implementation of a Science

Technology, Engineering, and Math (S.T.E.M.) based mentoring program geared

specifically towards African-American males, entrance into the S.T.E.M. certification

process, recipient of the Superintendent's Distinguished Achievement, and the U.S. Healthy School Gold Awards.

Dr. Middleton

The next participant, Dr. Middleton is the principal of *Rural, Title I Middle School B*. She is originally from Mississippi and came to Georgia to attend college. She realized her passion for teaching at an early age and always knew she would follow in her mother's footsteps, who also taught for 42 years. She credited her parent's focus on the importance of education and her upbringing in the church as major influences in her personal and professional life. Her educational preparation reflects diverse fields of education including higher education, middle grades science, multicultural education, and educational leadership. Dr. Middleton's teaching career began in an urban school district where she taught for five years. After transferring to a suburban school district, she eventually left the classroom to become an assistant principal. Despite her efforts to aspire to principalship, she remained in this position for eight years. She attributed this stagnation to her race, gender, and appearance:

> "I didn't realize how much pressure I was under as an assistant principal. I felt like I had to work twice as hard to prove myself. I knew I had to "look the part," but I was so stressed out, my weight had increased…in retrospect, I know it played a part in my upward mobility. I took classes to stay abreast of contemporary issues and policies; I was called upon quite a lot to provide professional development outside of handling discipline for the entire school; within this time frame, I worked under three males" (Dr. Middleton, personal communication, January 30, 2015).

While serving as assistant principal of discipline, she was provided the opportunity to learn from various principals however; one principal in particular, was instrumental in shaping her leadership style:

"The time I spent under his leadership probably had the most impact on my leadership style. He was just a good listener - he didn't beat people up. He didn't ridicule them in front of anyone. He didn't show a lot of mood swings…he would smile in difficult situations" (Dr. Middleton, personal communication, January 30, 2015).

This training along with her spiritual beliefs embodies her personal leadership philosophy of faith, compassion, and unconditional love for the students. She was appointed principal of *Rural, Title I Middle School B* in 2012. Under her leadership, the school was awarded the Title I Distinguished School of Excellence twice in a row, experienced gains in standardized test scores among African-American males in the areas of Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies, adopted an accelerated math curriculum, enabling students to earn high school credit hours, and is currently in the process of becoming the second S.T.E.M. certified middle school in the state of Georgia.

Dr. Highland

The final participant, Dr. Highland, began her educational career as a science teacher at *Urban, Title I High School C*, the same school she would become principal 11 years later. After 10 years in the classroom, she was promoted to district science coordinator where she served for six years. Her next experience came as the director of curriculum and instruction that included supervision of programs such as career, technical, and agricultural education (C.T.A.E.), professional learning, Title I, and the

21st Century grant. After five years in this position, she was appointed principal of *Urban, Title I High School C* where she has been for the past year. She described her present role as her "calling," often referring to her students as "my kids" or "my boys" during the interviews. This revelation came as a result of an experience she described as one instance of "malpractice" as a teacher and also inspired her doctoral research, "African-American Homosexual Males in a Georgia High School." This encounter not only challenged her Christian beliefs, but also impacted the manner in which she interacted with her students. From that point on, she contended that her focus as a classroom teacher and future principal became "making sure that every kid has a place that they can belong and pushing students to be their best self even if it doesn't resonate with who I am" (Dr. Highland, personal communication, February 2, 2015). The challenges she's encountered were in reference to gender:

"Prior to me coming to Title I High School Y, the administration was mixed; it was two males and two females. When I took over, they dissolved the configuration so it ended up where we have three female administrators which really did cause some people some angst at first thinking, "ok now we can't have three women running a high school-not an urban high school…something may happen" (Dr. Highland, personal communication, February 2, 2015).

She is the school's first African-American female principal.

Summary of Biographical Data

Questions 1, 3, 10, and 11 of the interview protocol helped craft a biographical snap shot of each principal. Participants' leadership influences included family and upbringing, spirituality, and personal leadership experiences. Although religio-spiritual

references were made in each interview, the participants were intentional in expressing these as private practices. Two of the three participants were assigned to their present school site and Dr. Middleton attained her principalship through the traditional application process as an external candidate. Each principal earned her doctorate degree from Georgia Southern University. Intersections of race and gender were revealed in each principal's interview. Drs. Early and Middleton felt they had to work "twice as hard" to assert themselves as leaders and patterned their leadership after influential male principals. Dr. Highland shared how gender influenced the perceptions of her staff. To further understand how these principals interpreted their role in addressing the opportunity gap, the researcher applied Critical Race Theory to interpret these experiences. A demographic summary of each principal's age and educational experience is provided in Table 3.

Table 3.

Participant Demographic Data

Name	Age	District	Years in Education	Years in Leadership
Dr. Early	38	Rural, Title I	16	10
Dr. Middleton	42	Rural, Title I	18	10
Dr. Highland	44	Urban, Title I	22	12
Mean Scores	41.3		18.7	10.7

Findings: Interview 1

The results of the first interview are presented according to the following research question:

In what ways do the African-American female participants in this study understand their influence on the opportunity gap among African-American male students?

Theme 1

The codes derived from perceived barriers were related to culture, class, context-policy mismatch, and counterintuitive perceptions. Several interview question responses contributed to these codes and illuminated the insider's perspective of what addressing the opportunity gap fully entails in the featured Title I schools. These relevant statements are outlined in Table 4 which appears later in this section.

One principal described the effects of cultural misunderstandings among students and teachers in her elementary school:

"I have about 65% African-American students. My staff however, does not reflect my student ratio. Maybe 5% of my teachers are African-American. I don't think they actually understand our children because when you listen to some of them and see how they treat our children or sometimes how they do not relate. They always say, "I can't get the parent…", "I try this…" "If the parent would do this…" Like I told them, "that's something we can't work with, we can't deal with the parent, we have to work with what's in front of us." [And] with the different cultures, I do not think they truly understand. So, I think that's a barrier and I can't say that's all teachers but for the most part, that's what I see from the majority" (Dr. Early, personal communication, January 26, 2015).

In this next example, culture was again perceived as an internal obstacle despite having a racially balanced staff:

"Part of closing the gap is keeping them in school, providing the discipline, and

also providing instruction that is culturally relevant to them…internally, within

the school just making sure everyone is on board with that vision and on board

with that philosophy to care and really take that extra time to build that positive

relationship - that's something we continuously work on and that's something

that's internally an issue for our African-American boys - having those strong,

key relationships in the building" (Dr. Middleton, January 30, 2015).

The remaining participant identified class as an issue among African-American

staff and African-American male students:

"I think we have a huge issue especially in urban schools, a class issue where

although I'm African-American that doesn't necessarily mean that I had the same

experiences as an African-American child who is in my classroom. I may come

from a whole different background although we may look alike, that doesn't mean

that the way that you think or the way you pull things together is what I would

think. A lot of times what happens is, even though there are people who feel like

they aren't doing it, they lower the expectations, "bless his heart, he doesn't have

a daddy," or "bless his heart, his mama has been to jail," "bless his heart, he's on

free and reduced lunch." And what we don't realize is although we want to bless

his heart, when we lower expectations, what we do is don't set them up for the

real world that they're going to encounter" (Dr. Highland, February 2, 2015).

The next code "Policies & Context" was driven by several statements related to

policies and mandates that impede or perpetuate the opportunity gap in each participant's

school. For all three principals, their responses suggested the imposed policies do not always suit the context of Title I schools.

In Dr. Highland's counter-story, this context-policy mismatch became apparent as she made the transition from the district science coordinator to high school principal:

I've spent a lot of time at the central office looking at the theory and the processes behind something about making things work but actually being in the school - now I'm seeing what that looks like in reality and sometimes when we think about kids and policies that are put in place-policies sound good. They may have a research basis to them even, but a lot of times when you look at the reality of what's going on in an urban school or suburban school or even a rural school, the policies sometimes don't jive with the reality of what the schools are and what the school is, especially for the African-American students (Dr. Highland, personal communication, February 2, 2015).

Dr. Highland's counter-story also suggested that in addressing the achievement gap, funding was still an issue:

"There are a lot of times the mandates are unfunded - there are these things that they want to happen but they don't necessarily give the money for it to happen" (Dr. Highland, personal communication, February 2, 2015).

Dr. Middleton expressed similar concerns about programs specifically geared towards at-risk students such as "Response to Intervention" and the associated challenges:

"If you tie our hands a little too tight we'll run the risk of destroying our school if we don't provide the proper support for certain students. For example, "Response

to Intervention" is a great thing but you need to be able to have a staff that will provide the interventions and support. You need the fiscal commitment to some of the demands and without that financial backing and those key people in human resources in place to implement some of the mandates - we have the mandates without the support" (Dr. Middleton, January 30, 2015).

Dr. Early discussed the complexities of meeting state and federal mandates on parental involvement. Although Title I mandates require parent involvement at the school and district level, mobility creates another barrier for her rural, Title I school:

"[The school] is spread out so for many of our parents, yes we try to have Parent Night, Family Night, Math Night, Reading Night all sorts of things for our parents however, it's very disheartening when you have activities planned and only 5 or 6 parents show. I tried to do a 'Parent University' where I invited people from the community - had accountants from the bank, I had someone from the high school come and they were talking about Sexual Education. I had different people from - nurses coming from Medical Specialists…I had just different people from the community to attend however, only two parents showed up" (Dr. Early, personal communication, January 26, 2015).

The final code under Theme 1 was derived from statements suggesting that negative perceptions create a barrier to addressing the opportunity gap. For one participant, these perceptions not only exist within the school, but also from external sources and the students themselves.

In one counter-story, Dr. Early shared a situation involving Caucasian parents who accused an African-American male student of handling their child roughly during recess:

"I wasn't trying to take up for the little boy but like I told the parents, that's probably what he [African-American male] sees when they play police. Maybe your child is not aware of that because she's not in that environment but the reason they were being so rough with her is because that's what they're seeing in their neighborhood. So…it's not just the teachers, it's the parents also come in reporting that their child is being handled roughly by African-American male students" (Dr. Early, personal communication, January 26, 2015).

Dr. Highland shared:

"Although they hear about the "American Dream," they have so many counter-examples they don't always believe it…the more that my kids get a chance to see these community people and see that, "You know what little black boy? You can get there from here, I went to college." The more they see that, the more they can see that's an option for them" (Dr. Highland, personal communication, February 2, 2015.)

Finally, Dr. Middleton identified negative mentalities as a challenge for many of her African-American male students:

"For my boys, changing the mindset that, "money is everything" is one of the challenges I encounter. Bullsying is centered around money and what you have." They lack that positive role model, who can lead them away from negativity and point them towards things that are positive" (Dr. Middleton, personal

communication, January 30, 2015).

Table 4.

Statements of Relevance: Theme 1

Interview Question (s)	Statements of Relevance			Codes
	Dr. Early	**Dr. Highland**	**Dr. Middleton**	
Questions: 4, 7, 9	"I have about 65% African-American students. My staff however, does not reflect my student ratio." "I don't think they [teachers] are actually understanding...our children." "Many of the teachers say they don't see color." "I don't know if they're there to actually help the children."	"I think we have huge issue especially in urban schools, a class issue where although I'm African-American that doesn't necessarily mean that I had the same experiences as an African-American child who is in my classroom."	"Making sure everyone is on board, with the vision." "Having strong key relationships in the building."	Teachers (T)
Theme 1	"Because we are out in the rural part of the county, everything is so spread out and it's very disheartening when you do things to involve the parents and only 2 show up." "You know we're in a rural community being in this area a lot of things are ran by certain people and those people make the decisions. "	"We need some common sense policies maybe, also looking at our context and environment." "Sometimes, the mandates ask you to do things but they won't fund what you need to do to keep kids pushing." Policies sometimes don't jive with the reality of what the schools are and what the school is especially for the African-American students." " In my view [the earring policy] it's nothing that will disrupt instruction…what does that have to do with anything? But again, that's one of those policies to me that runs counter."	"You need the fiscal commitment to some of the mandates." "Response to Intervention is a great thing but you need to be able to have a staff that will provide the interventions and support." "We have the mandates without the support." "It [policy] can hinder us especially when it comes to intervening with students that behind like 2 years you really do have to have additional resources."	Policies & Context (P & C)
	"Cops and Robbers" counter-story (Page "Sometimes African-American males are discouraged because they feel that they are labeled because of maybe behavior."	"That's been a hard lesson I think for some of our students to learn because they're so used to having it held against them. They're so used to people "profiling" them." "That's an internal barrier, not necessarily believing that hard work will reap great rewards."	"What they wear is important…they care about money."	Negative Perceptions NP

Theme 2

The second theme revealed from the participant's counter-stories was their leadership based on same-race affiliation. During the coding phase, several sub-categories were coded including ethno-humanism and psychoemotional development. These codes were inspired by the existing literature. This theme suggested that the African-American female principals are aware of racial and gendered inequalities in their building. These inequalities were seen through realities such as negative teacher perceptions as well as the external and internal barriers that may affect African-American males. Whether it was acting as a "cultural mediator" or going the extra mile to meet not just academic needs, but social, emotional, and psychoemotional needs, these leaders provided several examples in which they took proactive measures to ensure equality, fairness, and success for African-American males in their schools.

In her interview, Dr. Early explained how her mother and her upbringing informs her decision-making as a principal:

> "One personal influence could be my mother. She's not in education but she's one I can vent to often and she always just taught me about different family members at times, you know how this person may have been seen one way by someone and how that could have a negative impact. She taught me to not go by what I hear about a person but to get to know them for myself and move forward. [And] I feel that…because of how I was raised or the environment I was raised in, it helps me look at situations from both sides. So I'm able to see things in a different light than maybe some others may or may not" (Dr. Early, personal communication, January 26, 2015).

Dr. Early also shared how she ensures that all students are treated equally, but particularly with African-American males and discipline:

"We always see that African-American males or African-American students are always coming to the office. From that point, we talk to the teachers about what we're seeing and what we need to do to address those issues and they are given the opportunity to address things. Sometimes they feel that they are being singled out because they see - But we try to talk to them and talk to everyone in general about what they need to do and how they need to treat all students equally and how they need to treat a child as if it were their own" (Dr. Early, personal communication, January 26, 2015).

Both Dr. Highland and Dr. Middleton disclosed how their leadership agenda places equal priority on efforts to promote psychoemotional development for African-American male students in their schools. In both accounts, the participants provided a number of examples of practices aimed at strengthening student's self-concept by providing counter examples to negative stereotypes, societal ills, and toxic home environments.

In this example, Dr. Highland discusses one of the ways she addressed the achievement gap for males in her Title I high school through relationship-building measures and authentic dialogue:

"I actually had some judges out to the school to help me talk to my boys to help them understand ways they criminalize themselves and they don't really realize it. Sometimes when I sit down and talk to them about what they're doing with life, where they're going, and what's their graduation plan…there are some other

things you have to instill in them like, "listen, you have to learn to respond

without reacting, you've got to be able to speak the King's English and make sure

people understand that you're articulate-, what you wear, and how you wear it

defines who you are to everybody but to certain people in particular" (Dr.

Highland, personal communication, February 2, 2015).

Dr. Middleton takes a similar approach by using book discussions to promote

openness about societal issues pervading the Black community:

"We have a "Brother to Brother" class where our students read books to talk

about the social needs of African-American boys try to help them with some of

the social issues they face. That's one of those gang-resistant initiatives that is

taking place. I have one particular class in 8th grade that we've piloted and we're

about to go full speed with more "Brother to Brother" classes in all grade levels"

(Dr. Middleton, January 30, 2015).

Community involvement was also a measure used to support psychoemotional

development. Dr. Middleton stated:

"I try to attack it [achievement gap] from a social element and also instructional.

I've called upon businesses to help us with S.T.E.M. to partner with us for

projects. I will attend church in certain areas but I call upon pastors in the school

system or in the community" (Dr. Middleton, personal communication, January

30, 2015).

Dr. Highland further stressed the importance of psychoemotional development in

the following example:

"We've been approached by a couple of fraternities to come and do some mentoring

pieces. The Kappa's would like to come to our school as well as the Alphas and their

program and the Omegas actually have a talent hunt and scholarship contest, so they'll be

coming in to talk to my students. Some people would consider these extras - for that

psychoemotional piece - but the truth of the matter is, if you don't take care of those

needs in a community or in a school, you're going to have a bigger problem later.

Learning how to read and write, we can get that figured out but if we don't know how to

cope, if we don't know how to problem-solve, if we don't know how to resolve conflict,

that's going to get us in a deeper issue" (Dr. Highland, personal communication,

February 2, 2015).

Table 5.

Statements of Relevance: Theme 2

Interview Question (s)	Statements of Relevance			Codes
	Dr. Early	**Dr. Highland**	**Dr. Middleton**	
Questions: 3, 5, 8, 10	"I feel that…because of how I was raised or the environment I was raised in, helps me look at both sides."	"[As a student] I don't think my principal knew who I was I think it's that mothering piece, the black feminine piece…I strive to know all of my children's names."	"My passion is from my upbringing as an African-American girl growing up in Mississippi then Georgia and I really wish and hope to fill that void for children who do not have that benefit in their home."	Ethnohumanism (EH)
		"You know there are some other things you have to instill in them like, "listen, you have to learn to respond without reacting, you've got to be able to speak the King's English and make sure people understand that you're articulate."		
Theme 2		"Another thing that really concerns me about our African-American males is I actually had some judges out to the school to kind of help me talk to my boys. They often criminalize themselves and they don't really realize it."		

	"I started a Parent Involvement Committee…so we can ensure that the community and parents are involved." "We have something we call the "SNAP" program. It's a mentoring program with STEM –based initiatives."	"Some people would consider extras or for that psychoemotional piece-but the truth of the matter is, if you don't take care of those needs in a community or in a school, you're going to have a big problem later." "The more that my kids get a chance to see these community people and see that, "You know what little black boy? You can get there from here, I went to college." The more they see that, the more they can see that's an option for them."	"We have a "Brother to Brother" class where our students read books to talk about the social needs of African-American boys try to help them with some of the social issues they face." "I've called upon businesses to help us with S.T.E.M. Parents who have jobs or careers that align with the curriculum, I try to involve them…so I try to attack it from a social element and also instructional."	Psychoemotional Development (PD)

Theme 3

The focus of theme 3 was gender and leadership. When coding the participant's counter-stories, gender was expressed through practices such as other-mothering and caring. Other-mothering is defined as "the assistance delivered to blood mothers in the care of their biological children either in an informal or formal setting" (Case, 1997, p. 26). The literature also distinguished community other-mothers as leaders who use their influence to encourage community as well as parental involvement.

References to other-mothering were noted more than 11 times in Dr. Highland's interview, often referring to her students as, "my kids," or "my boys." She also acknowledged gender as an influence in exercising this particular practice in her leadership:

"I don't have any personal children but these boys are like my sons. It's almost a mothering that I see that has to happen as you become a principal, as you principal any student but black males to me again…you know how you have a heart for a certain kind of kid? I strive to know all of my children's names. I can call almost all 700 of them depending on what's going on. I think it's that

mothering piece, the black feminine piece…" (Dr. Highland, personal

communication, February 2, 2015).

When discussing the challenges she encountered after becoming principal, she

describes how gender-influenced leadership impacted the dynamic of the school culture:

"Prior to me coming to Title I High School Y, the administration was mixed; it

was two males and two females. When I took over, they dissolved the

configuration so it ended up where we have three female administrators which

really did cause some people some angst at first thinking, "We can't have three

women running a high school-not an urban high school…something may

happen." You know that whole I guess they'll be more forceful and we might

have to do something about that I guess. But what I've seen in my time at Title I

High School Y, that the three of us kind of have that 'motherwit' and that whole

mothering piece pulled together. Not saying that we don't follow the discipline

code, not saying that I don't have to make some tough decisions discipline wise,

curriculum wise but, they [the students] know that even though I have to do what

I have to do, I'm going to listen, I'm going to hear what you have to say and just

like a good parent I don't hold that against you forever" (Dr. Highland, personal

communication, February 2, 2015).

She further explained how she sought to establish relationships with blood

mothers, even when new students enroll in her school:

"When I have new kids come and register in my building, part of the registration

process is that I meet you and I meet your mother because I may not see your

mother ever again. I want to put that face with a name, I want to give her my card

- "If you have any questions or concerns, you feel free to call me…drop by the school." So it's just establishing that relationship, almost like "this is your kid, but they're my kid also for 8 hours so we're co-parenting - tell me how I can be helpful" (Dr. Highland, personal communication, February, 1, 2015).

Dr. Middleton's counter-story was also indicative of community other-mothering:

"Because I don't live there, I go into the community and try to stay connected with people who know people…maintaining connections with key people and a lot of women who are influential who I can go to help me have a workshop in a certain place. I really try to make myself visible to parents and I shop in the community even though I live in a different community. I will attend church in certain areas but I call upon pastors in the school system or in the community, I've called upon businesses to help us with S.T.E.M. to partner with us for projects" (Dr. Middleton, personal communication, January 30, 2015).

Caring was also noted in Dr. Middleton's leadership:

"I have to ensure that we all subscribe to the philosophy to care and really take that extra time to build that positive relationship - that's something we continuously work on. I teach my teachers the importance of unconditional love and believing in the children" (Dr. Middleton, personal communication, January, 30, 2015).

Table 6.

Statements of Relevance: Theme 3

Interview Question (s)	Statements of Relevance			Codes
	Dr. Early	Dr. Highland	Dr. Middleton	

Questions: 5, 11			Other-Mothering (OM)
	"I don't have any personal children but these boys are like my sons."		
	"It's almost a mothering that I see that has to happen as you become a principal, as you principal any student but black males to me again…you know how you have a heart for a certain kind of kid?"		
	The three of us have that *motherwit* and that whole mothering piece pulled together."		
	"But like I said, it's a mothering and I have this great opportunity."		
	" Part of the registration process is that I meet you and I meet your mother…		
Theme 3	"So establishing these relationships with these kids is the important piece."		
	" Because the mandates are unfunded…you have to be creative and then go back to that whole mother wit, mothering thing, knowing that there are some times when I have to make sure that my students are celebrated for doing a good job."		
		"I have to ensure that we all subscribe to the philosophy to care and really take that extra time to build that positive relationship-that's something we continuously work on."	Caring (C)
		"I teach my teachers the importance of unconditional love and believing in the children."	

Theme 4

The final theme was derived from codes suggestive of closing the opportunity gap through proactive leadership, curricular initiatives, and measures to address many of the internal barriers within each participant's school.

In Dr. Early's interview, she discussed the impact of S.T.E.M. on academics, particularly for at-risk students in her Title I elementary school:

"We have something we call the "FLASH" program. It's a mentoring program and they implement S.T.E.M. activities. We have a lot of our at-risk African-American male students involved in this as well as females and other races as well. In particular African-American males, they are involved in this S.T.E.M. activity once a month with engineers. You know those students are involved in building things, and just involved with hands-on [learning] they enjoy participating in those activities and when they come and say, "I really enjoyed it…I can't wait until the next time!" So my goal right now is to become certified as a S.T.E.M. school because I think our young African-American male students will benefit from participating or even being a part of this type of educational environment because it will be more hands-on and it will be something that most of them will be interested in" (Dr. Early, personal communication, January 26, 2015).

Dr. Middleton employs a similar approach to closing the opportunity gap in her Title I middle school:

"We are really closing the achievement gap quite a bit with our reading, language arts, social studies, and science. Math for some reason continues to be an issue but I try to find out what their interests are and I try to promote S.T.E.M. because most of our young males are very interested in these types of careers. For our at-risk or failing students, we also assign them an advisor who can be that one adult in the building they can go to and track their progress" (Dr. Middleton, personal communication, January 30, 2015).

Although Dr. Early and Dr. Highland identified comprehending and deconstructing standardized test questions as a major issue among their African-American students, they approached the opportunity gap in two distinct ways. Dr. Early's strategy includes integration and collaboration:

"We started analyzing data and providing that information to all and talking to everyone. Sometimes, as administrators we see things but then if we do not put the data right in front of the teachers and allow them to see it themselves, they're not looking at the big picture. Once they're able to see it, then we talk about the differentiation and flexible grouping and flex learning. So for us, it's not particularly about subgroups; it's about closing the gaps for everyone; regardless of white, black, male, female…and meeting them where they are" (Dr. Early, personal communication, January 26, 2015).

In her counter-story, Dr. Highland presented a new perspective as it relates to African-American males and historical understandings of the opportunity gap:

"When we look at the achievement gap historically, we usually think about blacks to whites. The number of the majority kids in my school is actually quite a minority. Oftentimes the Caucasian male students will pass the test the first time out of the gate however, a lot of times they don't graduate or they may drop out of school even though they've got the "test figured out." With African-American males what we're seeing is, kids who are struggling with the assessment, will at the end of the day, stay in school and get a certificate of attendance or take an extra summer school to get it done. So if we can get them to a certain point like the 11th grade, we can get them through but the issue is that they're struggling

with the assessment so one of the things we're working on is getting kids to deconstruct the assessment, understand what questions are asking, doing simple things like annotating inside of a test booklet so that way they can really break down test questions and come up with the most logical answers" (Dr. Highland, personal communication, February 2, 2015).

The final code under Theme 4 was related to professional development. All three participants identified culture and class as barriers to educating African-American males and indicated the need for professional development centered on developing the cultural competency of teachers and staff. The following examples illustrate the participant's actions to foster this much-needed knowledge in very different ways.

For Dr. Highland, professional development is a work in progress:

"I am a new administrator but I do realize that the cultural competence of my staff probably is not where I would like it to be. Not just the demographic make-up but when you still talk about issues of poverty and class that adds a different dimension to it. Something I see all time is where teachers create a conflict by how they talk and how they respond to the students and the child is the one who loses because the adult is going to be right. At one time, if it wasn't English or Math, it couldn't be paid for; so bringing in Geneva Gay, Bill Hooks, or Gloria Ladson-Billings to work with your staff on looking at culturally-responsive teaching and education just wasn't something we could afford to do because it wasn't fundable. But they're [Central Office] starting to see now that those things are very important so we're seeing a resurface of that so right now, one of the things I'm working on is actually bringing in a behavior specialist to kind of talk

about those situations where it doesn't have to escalate based upon your response

of what you see happening" (Dr. Highland, personal communication, February 2,

2015).

Dr. Early's efforts to foster the cultural competence of her staff are based on data

and direct conversations:

"When it comes to our students and the population, during our faculty meeting it's

not actually professional development but during our faculty meeting we always

address several issues that are going on in the building. We have a discipline

[data system], we use to analyze trends and see who is coming to the office, and

how often they're coming to office and what teachers are sending them up to the

office. When we're doing this data analysis, certain teacher's names are more

pervasive than others. We try to talk to them and talk to everyone in general

about what they need to do and how they need to treat all students equally and

how they need to treat a child as if it were their own" (Dr. Early, personal

communication, January 26, 2015).

Dr. Middleton's professional development is based on the current goals and

initiatives occurring in her school:

"We've been awarded a 1.65 million 21st Century program grant for the next five

years because of our goals to close the achievement gap. The professional

development that we've been doing is centered around S.T.E.M. and showing the

connection between the interest of the students in the school and those types of

jobs one day. We try to do a professional learning there. We address literacy

through our writing professional learning. Our Positive Behavior Intervention

and Support (P.B.I.S) is something we continuously revisit those fundamentals

with our faculty. We have unit building time where the teachers create units and

plan collaboratively. For the teachers who need a little more support with

behavior and classroom management, we do have those courses each semester at

the central office but our teachers who have scored exemplary with the state

department are facilitating those classes. New teachers have professional

development workshops at the board office and learn about various topics" (Dr.

Middleton, February 2, 2015).

Table 7.

Statements of Relevance: Theme 4

Interview Question (s)	Statements of Relevance			Codes
	Dr. Early	Dr. Highland	Dr. Middleton	
Questions: **Theme 4**	"Once we started analyzing data and providing that information to all and talking to everyone about closing the achievement gap not with the different subgroups but just ensuring that everyone; regardless of white, black, male, female…that everyone was met where they were."	"The number of the majority kids in my school is actually quite a minority." "Caucasian male students will pass the test the first time out of the gate however, a lot of times they don't graduate or they may drop out of school even though they've got the "test figured out." "Their issue is deconstructing the assessment…understanding what questions are asking."	"Part of that closing the gap is keeping them in school, providing the discipline, and also providing instruction that is culturally relevant to them." "We are really closing the achievement gap quite a bit with our reading, language arts, social studies, and science. Math for some reason continues to be an issue. "I try to find out what their interests are and I try to promote S.T.E.M. because most of our young males because they're very interested in these types of careers."	Closing the Gap CTG

		Professional Development (PD)
"During our faculty meeting its not actually professional development…but we always address several issues that are going on in the building [related to] discipline and office referrals from AA males." "I don't think they [teachers] actually understand...our children." "Sometimes they feel that they are being singled out because they see- when we're doing this data analysis, certain teacher's names are more pervasive than others.	"The cultural competence of my staff probably is not where I would like it to be." "Teachers aren't realizing that the way they speak to the students creates conflict." "Culturally-responsive teaching and education just wasn't something we could afford to do because it wasn't fundable."	

Summary

As a result of the first interview, participant counter-stories revealed four initial themes related to African-American female leaders and their perceptions of the opportunity gap. For the first theme, each participant identified class, culture, counterproductive policies and negative perceptions as a barrier to addressing the opportunity gap. For theme 2, the participants provided several examples that provided a broadened view of the influence of race in their leadership; however, the blank spaces in Table 5 indicated the need to gather additional information to support this theme. Next, gender was a reoccurring theme for Dr. Highland, the high school principal. The missing information from Dr. Early and Dr. Middleton signaled the need for further exploration during the second interview. Codes suggestive of proactive leadership in closing the opportunity gap shaped Theme 4. Subcategories included under this theme were related to curricular initiatives and actions to foster professional development led to this understanding.

Findings: Interview 2

According to the explication process, a follow-up interview was necessary to solidify themes from the statements of relevance. More information was needed in order to strengthen the initial findings of gender and race expressed in the participant's

leadership. Therefore, the follow-up interview consisted of three questions aimed at
gathering more information or counter-stories that either supported Critical Race Theory
or the existing literature. Table 8 displays the protocol used to gather this additional
information.

Table 8.

Follow-Up Interview Questions

Interview Question	Construct	Critical Race Theory
	Leadership Behaviors	
1	How do you enlist others to subscribe to equality for all students, but particularly African-American males?	Counter-story telling Permanence of racism
2	What effect do you believe gender has on your leadership style?	Counter-story telling
3	How does the perception of your leadership by your African-American students affect your decision-making?	Counter-story telling Interest convergence

The results of the second interview are presented according to the following research
question:

     In what ways do the African-American female participants in this study
understand their influence on the opportunity gap among African-American male
students?

     The findings from the follow-up interview will be presented and will be followed
by a summative table. Table 9 illustrates the coding and additional statements of
relevance used to support the final emergent themes.

Theme 1

Counter-stories during the first interview, revealed that a number of policies "run counter to overall goals" (Dr. Highland, personal communication, February 2, 2015).

In her second interview, Dr. Middleton shared an additional illustration of a counterproductive discipline policy enforced at the local level:

"I try to balance discipline as much as possible without sacrificing the instructional piece [which includes] not giving the students too many chances but being proactive on the front end but also holding the teachers accountable in a firm way…I've found that this approach works but now we are under the 'Disproportionality Rule' and I have a lot more pressure coming from Central Office to balance disciplinary referrals. I can't necessarily use what I want or what I've been using that has been effective in terms of discipline" (Dr. Middleton, personal communication, February 5, 2015).

Theme 2

The second theme revealed from the participant's counter-stories was their leadership based on same-race affiliation. During the first interview, several sub-categories were included within this theme including, ethnohumanism and psychoemotional development. In the second interview, leaders provided several additional examples in which they take proactive measures to ensure equality, fairness, and success for African-American males in their schools.

"What you have to do is engage them [the teachers] in a conversation that sometimes pushes them to see the students in a different light aside from the one that may be portrayed in the media or from their own personal experience…this generation of African-American males has potential - they are bright; they're not

necessarily what the stereotypes point them out to be" (Dr. Highland, personal communication, February 5, 2015).

Dr. Middleton's second interview strengthened this finding as she discussed the results of interest survey data among African-American males:

"Some might assume that African-American males interests many have said they only want to become major league athletes and things like that but what I have noticed at our school that with our initiatives such as S.T.E.M., a lot of our students that are African-American male express strong interest in S.T.E.M. type careers and with our Georgia College 411 data, when we push ourselves with S.T.E.M. we are actually getting a lot more buy-in with the academic piece. I don't know if there are many middle schools doing that but that has been one of the highlights of my particular experience as a principal because it was almost expected to see that even though we had this data with Georgia College 411, we didn't really recognize that as a gender an African-American male interest as strong as it is whether it's computer programming and coding, gaming, or other science-related fields, there's definitely a strong interest so we try to maximize on interest as well for all students but that was just one of those shocking things that has come to the light for us over the past two years" (Dr. Middleton, personal communication, February 5, 2015).

Theme 3

When coding the participant's counter-stories in the first interview, gender-based leadership was expressed through practices such as caring leadership and other-mothering but only evident in Dr. Highland's counter-stories. The second interview provided

additional examples to strengthen this theme. In the following response, Dr. Early

discussed the role of caring and nurturing in building relationships with her African-

American male students:

"I think that when working with students, I provide that nurturing and I think a lot

of them feel that I care. I take the initiative to speak with individual students

when I see that there are issues. For instance, today I saw an African-American

male student crying at the end of the table. I went to him and had a conversation.

They smile, they enjoy me coming around and I think they try to do better when

they see me. No one has ever disrespected me. When I come around and I ask

them to do something, they do it. The nurturing and motherly approach helps me

with dealing with many of the students in my building, particularly African-

American males" (Dr. Early, personal communication, February 5, 2015).

Similarly, Dr. Middleton's second interview revealed the influence of other-

mothering in her approach to interacting with African-American male students:

"I'm not a mother - I don't have children of my own. So to me, the children are

mine. I know that my motherly side is there…I try to keep from letting it

overshadow the work that has to get done but I think they view me more like

mom at home" (Dr. Middleton, personal communication, February 5, 2015).

Table 9.

Statements of Relevance: Follow-Up Interview

Interview Question (s)	Statements of Relevance			Codes	Theme
	Dr. Early	Dr. Highland	Dr. Middleton		

Question(s): 1			"I've found that this approach works but now we are under the 'Disproportionality Rule' and I have a lot more pressure coming from Central Office to balance disciplinary referrals."	(NP) (P&C)	Theme 1
Question(s): 1, 3	"As an African-American female, I feel that I have to work harder than other administrators."	"What you have to do is engage them in a conversation that sometimes pushes them to see the students in a different light aside from the one that may be portrayed in the media…" "This generation of African-American males has potential- they are bright; they're not necessarily what the media portrays them.	Some might assume that African-American are mostly interested in becoming major league athletes; but, the data revealed they express interest in S.T.E.M. type careers."	(PD)	Theme 2
Question(s): 2	"I think that when working with students, I provide that nurturing and I think a lot of them feel that I care." "I take the initiative to speak to the students if they are having issues." At times I have to tell them, "Don't play with me." But they know I care; I rarely have instances where the students disrespect me.		"I'm not a mother- I don't have children of my own. So to me, the children are mine. I know that my motherly side is there… I try to keep from letting it overshadow the work that has to get done." "I think they view me more like mom at home."	(OM) (CL)	Theme 3

Summary

The second interview gleaned more evidence to support the "Policies and Context" category under Theme 1. Similarly, additional statements illustrating the influence of race on the participant's decision-making and leadership practices helped to strengthen Theme 2. In addition to race, gender was also a recurring theme for the participants in this study and expressed through practices such as other-mothering, nurturing, and caring. This finding was confirmed with significant statements from Dr.

Early and Dr. Middleton during the second interview. For the final theme, the second

interview did not yield any new data; however, enough information was provided during

the first interview cycle to support the codes for Theme 4. To generate the emergent

themes, the researcher initiated the next step in the explication process that involved

clustering these units of relevant meaning. This process is illustrated below in Figure 2.

Figure 2.

Clustering Units of Relevant Meaning

- Black and White Teachers
- Policy-context mismatch
- Negative perceptions
  -External
  -Internal (self)

Theme 1:
Class, Culture, Counterproductive Policies & Counterintuitive Perceptions
(The 4C's)

Theme 2:
Race-based leadership

- Ethnohumanism
  - "How I was raised helps me."
- Psychoemotional Development
- Community involvement
- Examples of success

Theme 3:
Gender-based leadership

Theme 4:
Transformational Leadership

- Other-mothering
  - "Like my sons..."
  - Unconditional love
- Caring
  - Relationship-building

- Closing the Gap
- Breaking the test code
- Integration and collaboration
- Professional Development
  - "Data Talks"
  - Cultural responsiveness

Emergent Themes

As a result of the first and second interviews, participant's counter-stories

revealed four themes related to African-American female leaders and their perceptions of

the opportunity gap. These themes were: 1) The 4 "C's" - Class, Culture,

Counterproductive Policies, and Counterintuitive Perceptions, 2) Race-based Leadership,

3) Gender-based Leadership, and 4) Transformational Leadership. During the first

interview, each participant identified teachers, policies and mandates, and negative

perceptions as a barrier to addressing the opportunity gap. Responses from the second

interview offered more specific details that refined the researcher's understanding of the

policy-context mismatch prevalent in the featured Title I schools. For the theme of race-

based leadership, the participants provided several examples in the first interview which

provided a broadened view of the influence of race in their leadership; however, instances

of ethno-humanism and same-race affiliation in the second interview strengthened the

theme of race-based leadership practices for the principals in this study. Next, gender

was a reoccurring theme in both interview sessions. In the first interview, other-

mothering was intertwined in the leadership practices of only one participant. However,

in the second interview, additional examples of caring and nurturing helped to solidify

the theme of gender-based leadership practices. Finally, during the first interview, the

participants identified examples suggestive of a closing of the opportunity gap in their

schools. There were no responses in the second interview that corresponded with any of

the codes for this theme; however, responses to other questions from the second interview

reinforced proactive leadership measures to close the opportunity gap. The data

presented in the previous sections shows the culmination of the understandings gleaned

from this process.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

In Chapter IV, the researcher discussed the findings and emergent themes as a

result of interviews with three African-American female principals and their perceptions

of the opportunity gap. The next chapter will explicate the relationships among the

findings, existing literature, and Critical Race Theory to suggest the direction for future

research efforts.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter expands upon the findings and conceptualizes each emergent theme within the frameworks of Critical Race Theory. The researcher also discusses how the presented findings can inform practices, policies, and procedures relating to the opportunity gap in Title I schools. Chapter V concludes by outlining recommendations for future research on race and gender influences in educational leadership.

Summary of Findings

Missing from the dialogue concerning the opportunity gap are the voices of African-American female leaders. Traditionally, research studies have focused on components of leadership that explain styles that cover racial or gender differences. An initial review of literature revealed cultural and historical influences in African-American female leadership. These underpinnings were the basis for explaining leadership behaviors such as caring, other-mothering, and spirituality. As an aspiring African-American female leader, this researcher wanted to explore how these behaviors, beliefs, and practices are enacted to address the opportunity gap. More specifically, the researcher hoped to gain insight on how the participants use their leadership platform to address the opportunity gap for African-American males in Title I schools.

For this study, three participation requests were sent to superintendents of seven African-American female principals of Title I schools. Two of the principals immediately agreed to participate, however, three of the principals who were sent a request, did not respond. One prospective participant requested written documentation

for district approval and agreed to participate once the Superintendent's approval email was forwarded to her. In the end, an elementary, middle, and high school principal accepted the invitation to participate. The participants' had a mean age of 41.3 years. Each principal had at least 10 years in educational leadership. The demographics for each school were predominately black student populations and designated as Title I. The initial interview lasted between 30 to 45 minutes. The interview protocol was semi-structured and participants were not provided this protocol prior to interviews for the purpose of allowing authentic counter-stories to emerge. During the follow-up session, the participants were asked three additional questions based on the information presented in the first interview cycle. All participants agreed to be audio recorded and were offered a transcript after the interview cycle ended.

Data analysis occurred within the guidelines of Hycner's explication process. After transcribing and bracketing occurred, the researcher initiated the first phase of the process by delineating units of general meaning. During the next step, these general statements were reduced to units of relevance after applying the research question. Clustering the units of relevant meaning involved grouping related statements together, then assigning a code to each group to use for further synthesis. Once all possible relevant statements were identified and coded in the remainder of each interview transcript, the researcher determined a general theme for each cluster. After summarizing each interview, the researcher conducted member checks with each participant as a means to confirm the interview accounts and report the initial findings. More information was needed to solidify the themes; therefore, the researcher conducted a follow-up interview to support these emergent themes.

Once the explication process was applied to the data from the second interview, the original themes were modified resulting in four themes informing African-American female principal's perceptions of the opportunity gap in a Title I elementary, middle, and high school. These themes were: 1) The 4 "C's" - Class, Culture, Counterproductive Policies, and Counterintuitive Perceptions, 2) Race-based Leadership, 3) Gender-based Leadership, and 4) Transformational Leadership.

<div align="center">Conceptualizing Each Theme</div>

The Four C's

The participants identified a number of perceived barriers to addressing the opportunity gap including teachers, policies and mandates, as well as negative perceptions. Dr. Early's disproportionate teacher demographics are illustrative of two aspects of Critical Race Theory. The first is permanence of racism being the pillar of Critical Race Theory that acknowledges racism and its existence in the field of education. The second area is whiteness as property/privilege and refers to the unspoken advantages of whites over minorities. According to the presented research, whiteness as privilege is expressed in culturally insensitive teachers and teaching practices (Heggins, 2004; West-Olatunji et al, 2010). Dr. Early provided several examples to suggest her role as principal often involves acting as a cultural mediator by addressing negative perceptions held by members of her staff as well as external stereotypes in her counter-story involving the parents and their view of an African-American student. In contrast, class differences among African-American teachers and students were evident in Dr. Middleton and Dr. Highland's schools. This finding refutes many research studies that consider same-race affiliation a necessary component in closing the opportunity gap and suggests that both

black and white teachers could benefit from professional development to develop their understanding of educating students in Title I schools.

Next, a policy-context conflict was evidenced in a number of the participant's responses. This finding is an example of the interest convergence, the tenet of Critical Race Theory that suggests that majority interests are preserved in educational policies and mandates. Although minority student populations receive additional funding to combat low socioeconomic backgrounds, mobility issues, and other barriers, the majority holds much of the power in determining how those resources are used and distributed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This finding is also consistent with historical examples of African-American female leaders doing "more with less," often soliciting the support of church and external forces to pool financial resources and instructional materials (Tillman, 2008).

Aside from negative external perceptions, each participant shared examples to suggest that in some cases, these negative perceptions arise from the African-American males themselves. This evidence could not be grounded in Critical Race Theory but confirmed much of the research claiming that the opportunity gap transcends achievement and standardized test scores. This requires a shift in societal views as well as the views within the African-American community.

Race-Based Leadership

Race-based leadership was the next theme uncovered during data analysis. Statements and counter-stories from both interview sessions provided examples illustrating the influence of race on the participant's decision-making and leadership practices. Consistent with the findings in the presented research studies as well as three

areas of Critical Race Theory, the African-American female principals in this study used their same-race affiliation and ethno-humanist role identity to address negative stereotypes, foster positive self-concepts for African-American male students, and enact leadership "extras" to address the opportunity gap for African-American males in their schools. This theme suggested that the African-American female principals are aware of racial and gendered inequalities in their building and take proactive measures to ensure equality, fairness, and success for African-American males in their school. The participants provided a number of examples of practices aimed at strengthening their student's self-concept by providing counter examples to negative stereotypes, societal ills, and toxic home environments. Highland's counter-stories run parallel with the findings in both Dillard (1995) and Sernak's (2004) research on caring leadership among African-American female leaders. In both studies, the principals exercised their power not for personal gain, but to uplift their race through relationship building, attending to the needs of school and community, and encouraging collective caring. Moreover, Bloom and Erlandson (2003) identified caring as a necessary component of leadership in schools with predominately Black students because this type of leadership considers and begins to address both internal and external barriers impeding the success of these students. This example also confirms the literature behind caring leadership and supports the notion of ethno-humanism, a leadership style unique to African-American leaders (Lomotey, 1993; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). The mission for such leaders is to meet both academic and cultural goals through a commitment to academic excellence for all students, confidence in their student's abilities despite academic and social barriers, and compassion with respect to students and their individual communities.

Gender-Based Leadership

In addition to race, gender also informed the participant's leadership behaviors through acts of other-mothering and adopting a caring leadership approach. The examples from the counter-stories are consistent with the findings of Case's (1997) study involving two African-American female principals. The principals in this study employed other-mothering by empowering at-risk students, revamping the reputations of their schools, exploring ways to gain the respect of blood mothers, and enlisting community support and involvement in the schools. Like the Black female leaders in segregated schools, both principals extend their leadership to the community, using their insider status to establish successful outcomes for students.

Also consistent with Case's (1997) findings, both Dr. Highland and Dr. Middleton can be categorized as community other-mothers because of their age and how they demonstrated their understanding of traditions and culture to foster community respect and exercise widespread power. Dr. Highland provided several examples to demonstrate this understanding by the community networks and partnerships she has established with local churches, county officials, fraternities, and judicial officers in the same way Dr. Middleton makes herself visible in *Rural, Title I School District* although she lives in a different community. Dr. Early's difficulty with fostering the community networks for her school could also confirm Case's (1997) notion of age in distinguishing community other-mothers among younger African-American female principals.

Findings within the theme of gender-based leadership also substantiated Loder's (2005) study that concluded that motherhood and values of caring and nurturing are significant to how African-American females interpret their roles as educational leaders.

Examples from both interviews demonstrated how the participants approach many of the obstacles associated with African-American males through a caring leadership approach, encouraging staff to use positive relationships, unconditional love, and relationship building as a means to curtail behavior issues and maximize instruction.

Transformational Leadership

The final theme was centered on the participant's proactive pursuit to close the opportunity gap. These actions encompass all three categories of Leithwood's (2003) transformational leadership model which calls for radical leadership that sets the direction of the learning organization, develops people, and redesigns the organization. Bass (1990) and Tillman (2008) also asserted that black leaders often exhibit transformational leadership to rally for social change through innovative thinking and creative problem solving.

The participants demonstrated leadership that set the direction for their Title I schools by modeling high expectations for all students, addressing negative stereotypes through authentic dialogue or in Dr. Middleton's school, through book discussions and implementing measures to close the opportunity gap through curricular initiatives such as S.T.E.M. An effort to foster the teacher's cultural competence was another example of transformational leadership aimed to develop people. Although funding prevents professional development from occurring on a continuous basis, each participant approached this need in her own way. Dr. Early's use of data and direct conversations is her attempt to foster the cultural competence of her staff. Dr. Highland takes a similar approach by engaging her staff in conversations and raising awareness for this need at the district level. On the other hand, Dr. Middleton approached professional development

systematically in alignment with the current goals of her school. Finally, the participants

worked to redesign the organization by promoting collaboration and creating productive

community relationships as evidenced in Dr. Middleton and Dr. Highland's display of

community - other mothering.

<div align="center">Findings Not Consistent with Literature</div>

According to the presented literature, spirituality played a prominent role in the

leadership of African-American females. However, a review of the data did not yield a

relationship between the leadership practices and spirituality among the participants in

this study. Many of the responses indicated an acknowledgement of spirituality through

the participant's examples of church involvement, prayer, and spiritual connectedness but

the overarching theme was that spirituality was a private practice, intentionally kept

separate from their administrative work. For Dr. Early, prayer was involved in decision-

making while Dr. Highland stated her leadership practices were "predicated on morals,

values, and acceptance for all students" and instilling these same beliefs in her students.

Of the three participant's, Dr. Middleton was most vocal about her spiritual beliefs but

also asserted that her religious beliefs were most exercised privately.

Another atypical finding was the presence of other-mothering in Dr. Highland's

leadership. It is common for nurturing and caring to play out in the elementary setting

when younger students are involved, however for the elementary participant in this study,

this finding did not emerge until the second interview.

Research Question

In what ways do the African-American female participants in this study understand their influence on the opportunity gap among African-American male students?

Construct 1: Leadership Practices

From their counter-stories, the participants revealed how race and gender influenced their practices, interactions, and decision-making in their schools. All three principals associated gender with leadership practices such as other-mothering, caring, and nurturing. One participant referred to her African-American male students as her sons, viewing her relationship with student's families as a co-parenting partnership. Race played an equally important role. The participants demonstrated a commitment to race in a number of ways first by responding to negative perceptions by acting as "cultural mediator." For one of the participants, her upbringing and background allowed her to analyze situations from multiple perspectives. Similarly, the participants demonstrated a commitment to race by taking action to foster not only academic and behavioral needs, but also psychoemotional needs by engaging African-American male students in authentic dialogue about issues of race in society, implementing a strong community involvement piece, and fostering a positive self-image by providing positive African-American male role models. Finally, transformational leadership was linked to a number of measures to close the opportunity gap including curricular initiatives, community involvement, and various forms of professional development.

Construct 2: External Influences

All three participants indicated that a policy-context mismatch is prevalent in their Title I schools. This theme suggested that governing bodies impose mandates and requirements that do not necessarily match the context of urban schools. Policies requiring parental involvement for example, do not consider mobility issues in rural areas. Other federal entanglements tied to before and after school programs may improve academics and help prepare students for standardized assessments, but are not consistent with research regarding students' metabolic and physiological health. One participant suggested that in some cases, district mandates create opposition not just for African-American males but also for students in general. Title I attendance mandates for instance, run counter with the district's tardy policy of students who reach a certain number of tardies are suspended for three days. Finally, policies prohibiting cell phones in schools conflicts with the research surrounding the benefits of technology integration and digital citizenship.

Construct 3: Barriers

Teachers were identified as one of the internal barriers for African-Americans in Title I schools. This finding substantiated three components of Critical Race Theory including: permanence of racism, interest convergence, and whiteness of property/privilege. This example also confirmed many of the findings in existing literature that suggest culturally insensitive teachers and teaching practices often lead to disciplinary and academic ramifications for African-American males (Fitzgerald, 2006; Heggins, 2004; West-Olatunji et al, 2010). One participant shared that although many teachers in her building use their 'color-blind' approach to justify equality in their

classrooms, this approach is actually counterproductive to meeting the needs of African-American males. She asserted that culture and race should be taken into account when building relationships, identifying learning styles, and planning lessons. According to Critical Race Theory, this practice would be considered as a critique of liberalism, which suggests the intentional omission of race further perpetuates segregation.

Class was identified as another barrier for African-American males in the Title I high school. This finding refuted much of the research identifying the importance of same-race affiliation among teachers and students in urban schools. For one participant, although her teaching staff and student populations are predominately black, she viewed class differences as a major barrier for African-American males in her school. In her counter-story, she expressed how differences in backgrounds and experiences often result in lowered expectations and negatively impacted student-teacher relationships in her school.

Other findings challenged traditional understandings of the opportunity gap and standardized testing as an internal barrier for African-American male students. One of the participants revealed that in her school, although African-American males have difficulty deconstructing standardized assessments, graduation rates among African-American males were higher in comparison to their Caucasian counterparts. Although an isolated finding, it presents a new perspective and the need to reevaluate the manner in which the opportunity gap is defined.

Construct 4: Professional Development

All three participants identified culture as a barrier in educating African-American males thus creating a need for professional development centered on developing the

cultural competency of teachers and staff. In each school, professional development was reserved for instructional purposes in the core content areas. In times past, Title I funding could not be allocated for professional development beyond the instructional aspects of the school setting. These restrictions illustrate interest convergence and the theme of an existing policy-context mismatch in urban schools in that the interests of the majority compromise the needs of the minority.

Discussion

With regard to leadership practices, the participant's counter-stories revealed leadership practices that were influenced by both race and gender. The participant's demonstrated a commitment to race in a number of ways by acting as a cultural mediator either when addressing negative perceptions among parents and teachers or by enacting leadership "extras." These extras extend beyond instructional leadership but also include measures to foster psychoemotional needs, which according to Case (1997), is critical for children of poverty.

Gender-based leadership practices included other-mothering and caring. These findings were consistent with the research involving ethno-humanist role identity and also substantiated Loder's (2005) study that concluded that motherhood and values of caring and nurturing are significant to how African-American females interpret their roles as educational leaders.

Federal mandates and policies were identified as an external barrier in Title I schools. A policy-context mismatch is the theme suggesting that governing bodies impose mandates and requirements that do not necessarily match the context of urban schools. This theme confirmed the interest convergence component of Critical Race

Theory. Interest convergence maintains that majority interests are preserved in decision-making. Although minority student populations receive additional funding to combat low socioeconomic backgrounds, mobility issues, and other barriers, the majority holds much of the power in determining how those resources are used and distributed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Further findings of this study identified teachers as an internal barrier for African-American males in Title I schools. This finding substantiated three components of Critical Race Theory including: permanence of racism, interest convergence, and whiteness of property/privilege. This example also confirmed many of the findings in existing literature that suggest culturally insensitive teachers and teaching practices often lead to disciplinary and academic ramifications for African-American males (Fitzgerald, 2006; Heggins, 2004; West-Olatunji et al, 2010). Class was identified as another barrier for African-American males in the Title I high school. This finding refuted much of the research identifying the importance of same-race affiliation among teachers and students in urban schools. Another interesting development from the counter-stories called attention to graduation rates and standardized test scores. It was revealed that while African-American males struggle with assessments, they tend to graduate in higher numbers than their Caucasian counterparts. Although an isolated finding, this information could inform future research by adding a new dynamic to discussions involving student achievement indicators at the high school level. For these reasons, a redefining of the opportunity gap is needed to properly address present-day hindrances to success for African-American males in Title I schools.

Finally, the findings of this study suggested that professional development is necessary to foster cultural competencies of teachers and staff. This knowledge is not limited to Caucasian teachers but is also relevant for African-American teachers struggling with issues of class in urban schools. Due to a policy-context mismatch however, Title I funds can only be used for professional development in the core content areas.

The Opportunity Gap

This research identified various dynamics that affect the outcomes of African-American male students in Title I schools. However the need to redefine the achievement gap is the theme most responsible for bringing the discussion surrounding the opportunity gap full-circle. The opportunity gap is defined by how race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or other factors contribute to or exacerbate lower educational expectations and achievement for particular groups of students. Opportunity gaps can take on a variety of forms that may appear when defining the issues contributing to the variance in achievement. This is indicative of the fact that participants in this study suggested that certain polices pose a barrier in urban schools by placing restrictions on funding for critical needs areas or underfunding mandated programs. Thus, closing the gap in opportunity is the pre-requisite for bridging the gap in achievement for African-American males in America's public schools. Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds often do not have the financial resources to compete academically with students from economically advantaged backgrounds. Therefore, it is imperative that policies, funding guidelines, and mandates at the federal, state, and local levels align with

conditions in urban school districts to address the possible policy-context mismatch revealed in this study.

As each of these factors are considered, African-American female principals and leaders alike, should commit to the closing of the opportunity gap through progressive leadership practices that nurture the psychoemotional needs of at-risk students and foster increased real-world learning opportunities that prepare all students for success in both school and community. For the participants in this research, these progressive leadership practices include relationship-building through caring and other-mothering, addressing negative stereotypes by engaging students in authentic dialogue and literature and fostering a positive self-concept by providing examples of success through community partnerships and mentoring.

Finally, the opportunity gap suggests that African-American students as well as other minority student populations may also be subject to prejudicial or biased views that deny equitable access to learning opportunities. This study elucidated the role of student interests in informing curricular decisions. Consequently, the implementation of S.T.E.M. and project-based learning resulted in positive learning experiences for African-American males in two of the featured schools. In addition, the participants indicated that poor student-teacher relationships also contribute to the opportunity gap as cultural misunderstandings and issues of class result in lowered expectations and increased disciplinary issues. Moreover, through the pedagogy of project-based learning and the implementation of authentic assessment practices, educational opportunities will equally serve both high achieving students and those at risk. In this context, more students will develop creative, critical thinking skills that draw a direct connection between what they

are learning and how it can be applied beyond the context of the school setting. By making the classroom more relevant in the lives of students, academic and behavioral outcomes will be improved and thus close the opportunity gap. The four themes that resulted from this study confirmed or refuted tenets of Critical Race Theory's permanence of racism, interest convergence, whiteness as property, and critique of liberalism. These themes also supported much of the literature surrounding race and gender issues among women of color in educational leadership, particularly in the area of caring leadership and other-mothering.

Recommendations

African-American female leadership remains an understudied topic in educational discourse. This voice not only adds value to topics related to race and gender issues, but can also provide an insider's voice on educating African-American students across various school contexts.

Educational Policy

To better address the opportunity gap, educational stakeholders could use Critical Race Theory to analyze existing policies at the federal and district levels. At the federal level, many mandates and policies conflict with the dynamics of Title I schools. In rural areas, mobility issues and limited access to resources present additional challenges for school districts and educational leaders. Similarly, when scrutinized under the lens of Critical Race theory, many state and local mandates may reveal interest convergence and color-blindness (critique of liberalism) when discussing the disparities of African-American males and their counterparts. At the district and local levels, board policies regarding discipline, dress code, or curriculum could also contain underlying prejudice or

set students up for failure. Policies restricting cell phones in high schools for instance, may not consider single-parent homes or other family dynamics that are common in urban schools. Such policies also conflict with research encouraging mobile technology and other digital media that can enhance learning and engage students.

Research

While this research focused on African-American female principals in Title I schools, the study featured a small sample size of an already marginalized minority community. It would be of benefit to the field of education and educational leadership to repeat this study using a larger sample of participants in similar and different geographic locations. These variables could present added insight into the perceptions of the opportunity gap among African-American female principals in Title I schools.

As with similar research studies, the participant's race and gender influenced many of their leadership practices and decision-making, however little is known about how these intersections influence learning outcomes. Therefore, quantitative studies are needed to explore a possible correlation between same-race affiliation and academic outcomes. Longitudinal studies could analyze the effects of leadership practices and student achievement data to discover if these practices positively affect African-American male students in Title I schools.

Finally, cultural competence is critical to the existence of adverse organization or community. As it is defined in many educational organizations, diversity has morphed to include attributes focusing on organizational and structural barriers, along with the individuals that are included in the identified sub-groups. Initiatives are usually part of this granular approach to differences that often values it holistically. Differences among

divergent groups are recognized as identifying traits that in fact include commonalities that are vital to the development of a culturally competent environment. With the recent developments surrounding the opportunity gap, the need for highly qualified, culturally competent teachers is more apparent than ever. However, it does not exist without the need to understand and value the differences to promote social, behavioral, and academic learning. Since diversity does not necessarily have the same meaning to all people, cultural competence should encourage the perspectives of minority groups to be represented in educational organizations as much as the majority groups. Professional learning must also be part of any diversity initiative to ensure the mentality of "us versus them" does not become entrenched, which could impede and delegitimize the effectiveness of culturally competent initiative.

Developing this competence requires an examination of ingrained biases and social prejudices along with the development of cross-cultural concepts. As evidenced in this study, class can pose as a barrier to educating African-American males even among same-race teachers, educators of all races and backgrounds must be trained to foster the competencies needed to meet the needs of a challenged population. Once the concepts are embraced through continuous improvement initiatives, the students that have been disenfranchised now have ardent supporters that appreciate them for who they are.

Conclusions

Despite the struggle for equality and justice for all, African-Americans continue to face adversity 61 years after the ground-breaking *Brown vs. Board of Education* court decision ended segregation in public schools. The resilience of African-Americans is a predominant theme in history. Although race and gender have created obstacles and

caused division in American society, the participants in this study, these conditions fueled the vehicle to address the opportunity gap for African-American males in their schools. Whether it is acting as a "cultural mediator" or going the extra mile to meet psychoemotional needs in addition to attending to academic concerns, these leaders' take proactive measures to ensure fairness and success for African-American males in their schools by enacting roles of mothers and cultural mediators for African-American males in their Title I schools. As society and the nature of education become increasingly diverse, future research possibilities are endless. The perception of the opportunity gap for instance, creates a conundrum as they balance this perception with the nurturing nature of their decision-making. As more African-American female leaders manage complex educational organizations, the study of the prevailing leadership styles they develop and the potential effect on the academic and behavioral outcomes can add value to the discussions surrounding African-American male students in addition to race and gender.

Epilogue

Do not look into my face and see the color of my skin

and not see the content of my character.

Do not look at my history and see the darkness of my past

and not see the brightness of my future.

Do not look at the losses of my mistakes

and not see the profits of my achievements.

Do not look at the distance I have yet to travel

and not see the origin from which I have come.

Do not look at the foolishness of my youth

and not see the wisdom of my older age.

Do not look at the poverty of my family

and not see the riches of its love.

Do not look at the child I once was

and not see the Black Man I have become!

--Million Man March Commemorative Poem

By definition, bricks are materials necessary for building. However in my eyes, historically and symbolically, bricks represent opportunity amidst obstacles, hope at the crossroads of desperation and despair, and a testimony to follow the test. Harriet Tubman crumbled the bricks designed to build systems of oppression and fashioned them to create the Underground Railroad. Matriarchs such as Fannie Jackson Coppin uprooted the bricks crafted to mount walls of division and separation and used them to construct schools for African-American children. Upon the bricks of negativity and judgment cast

by society, single-mothers have etched portraits of college graduates, entrepreneurs, CEO's, educators, and engineers. As I complete this dissertation and earn my doctorate in educational leadership, I am dually inspired by these historical examples and the women featured in this study to transform the bricks of my race and gender into stepping stones bridging the gap in opportunity and achievement to establish the foundation necessary for our black boys to evolve into strong, black men.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs	
Institutional Review Board (IRB)	
Phone: 912-478-0843	Veazey Hall 2021 P.O. Box 8005
Fax: 912-478-0719 IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	Statesboro, GA 30460

To: Jennifer Dunbar
                           Dr. Devon Jensen

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
                           Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees
                           (IACUC/IBC/IRB)

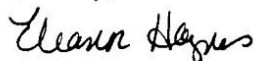**Initial Approval Date:** 2/2/15

Expiration Date: 1/31/16

Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research –
                           Expedited Process

After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H15219** and titled **"African-American Female Principals and Perceptions of the Opportunity Gap"** it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable. You are authorized to enroll up to a maximum of __**3**__ subjects.

***Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research. – Description:* This study's purpose is to investigate how principals in an elementary, middle and high school setting use their leadership platform to address the achievement gap for African-American males in their schools.**

 If at the end of this approval period there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period. Total project approval on this application may not exceed 36 months. If additional time is required, a new application may be submitted for continuing work. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,

Eleanor Haynes

Eleanor Haynes
Compliance Officer

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Jennifer Dunbar. I am a Doctoral candidate at Georgia Southern University. I am writing you today to ask that you consider participating in my qualitative research study entitled, *African-American Female Principals and Perceptions of the Achievement Gap*. The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of the ways in which you use your leadership platform to address the achievement gap for African-American males in your school. The benefits of this research are threefold. First, the findings that emerge from this study can assist both rural and Title I school districts in reevaluating existing educational programs and aid in designing new initiatives to improve outcomes for low-performing African-American males. Secondly, with the recent identification of the achievement/opportunity gap, this data can support all school districts in developing the cultural competence of teachers and staff through professional development and culturally sensitive pedagogy. Finally, this research can facilitate necessary dialogue in the on-going debate of gender and race among educational leaders.

Using Critical Race Theory as a basis for the research, this study will involve two interview sessions with questions related to your leadership style as well as the external and internal barriers associated with your administrative role. Each interview will last approximately 45 minutes and will be conducted at your respective site. Interview data will be audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. A second interview will be conducted using questions that derived from the data and themes uncovered in the initial analysis. Deidentified or coded data from this study may be placed in a publically available repository for study validation and further research. You will not be identified by name in the data set or any reports using information obtained from this study, and your confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

Your participation is voluntary and there is no penalty for deciding not to participate in the study. If at any time you decide to withdraw your participation, you may do so without penalty or retribution. You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number H15219.

If you have additional questions about this study, please contact the researcher named above or the