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# Race and Gender in the Leadership Experiences of Three Female African American High School Principals: A Multiple Case Study

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RACE AND GENDER IN THE LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES OF THREE FEMALE  
AFRICAN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

by

ANGELA MOSLEY SMITH

(Under the Direction of Saundra Murray Nettles)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this multiple case study was to describe how three female African American high school principals understand the influence of race and gender on their educational leadership experiences. The study focused on the professional background, barriers each informant encountered in her pursuit of a principalship, strategies utilized to facilitate attainment of a principalship, and leadership conceptualization. Through in-depth interviews, rich narratives revealed how the dual oppressions of race and gender intersected the professional lives of the three principals involved in the study. The theoretical foundation for the study was black feminist thought as defined by Patricia Hill Collins. Black feminist thought focuses on the marginalized status of African American women and places their experiences at the center of the discourse. In examining the narratives of each of the informants, four themes emerged: 1) legacy of struggle 2) desire to nurture students 3) facilitative leadership, and 4) increasing visibility in professional circles.

INDEX WORDS: Educational Leadership, Race, Gender, High School Principal, Black Feminist Thought

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

With a grateful heart, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my grandparents, the late Reverend Dorsey L. Knight and Lillian B. Knight. I am forever thankful for your guidance and love throughout my life. Whatever I have achieved is largely because of the upbringing and opportunity that the two of you provided for me.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vi
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
Conceptual Framework: Black Feminist Thought.....	2
Context of the Study.....	6
Significance and Research Design.....	9
Limitations.....	11
Definition of Terms.....	12
Summary.....	12
II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	14
Under-representation of Women in Educational Leadership.....	14
Barriers to Females in Educational Leadership.....	16
Family/Work Conflicts.....	17
Sex Role Stereotyping.....	18
Lack of Aspiration.....	19
Lack of Mobility.....	19
Lack of Mentoring.....	19
Lack of Networking.....	22
Inequitable Selection Process.....	22
Racism/Discrimination.....	23



Strategies that Enable Women to Achieve the Principalship .....	24
Mentoring and Sponsoring .....	24
Planning and Career Development Skills .....	26
Reconciling Personal and Professional Responsibilities .....	27
Equitable Recruitment Practices .....	27
Access to Networks .....	29
Perspectives on Female Leadership.....	29
Gender Stereotypes .....	29
Attributes of Female Leadership .....	36
Evolving Role of the Principal .....	40
History of the African-American Principalship.....	42
Exemplary Historical Models of African-American Female Leadership... 45	
Jeanes Supervisors .....	45
Mary McLeod Bethune.....	46
Anna Julia Cooper .....	46
Nannie Helen Burroughs .....	47
Fanny Jackson Coppin.....	47
Lucy Laney .....	48
The African-American Woman: Life and Educational Leadership.....	48
Invisibility.....	49
Double Jeopardy .....	51
Community Service .....	52
Reliance on Spirituality .....	53

Commitment to Students .....	53
Placement in Challenging Schools .....	54
Courageous Leadership .....	56
Need to Perform Better.....	57
Struggle to Overcome Stereotypes .....	57
Summary .....	59
III METHODOLOGY .....	60
Introduction.....	60
Research Design .....	61
Sample .....	65
Data Collection .....	67
Data Analysis.....	70
Ethical Considerations .....	71
Validity and Reliability.....	72
Summary.....	73
IV DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS.....	74
Introduction.....	74
The Story Unfolds: Informant A.....	75
Route to Leadership: Awareness of Race and Gender .....	75
Leadership Conceptualization .....	82
Barriers Encountered: Awareness of Race and Gender.....	85
Strategies Helpful in Attainment of the Principalship.....	87
Summary.....	88

The Story Unfolds: Informant B.....	89
Route to Leadership: Awareness of Race and Gender .....	89
Leadership Conceptualization .....	93
Barriers Encountered: Awareness of Race and Gender.....	95
Strategies Helpful in Attainment of the Principalship.....	100
Summary.....	102
The Story Unfolds: Informant C.....	103
Route to Leadership: Awareness of Race and Gender .....	103
Leadership Conceptualization .....	108
Barriers Encountered: Awareness of Race and Gender.....	113
Strategies Helpful in the Attainment of the Principalship.....	116
Summary.....	121
Cross-Case Analysis: Emerging Themes.....	122
Theme One: Increased Visibility in Professional Circles.....	122
Theme Two: Legacy of Struggle .....	123
Theme Three: Facilitative Leadership .....	125
Theme Four: Desire to Nurture Students.....	126
Summary.....	127
V SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS .....	129
Introduction.....	129
Summary of the Three Cases.....	130
Informant A .....	130
Informant B.....	131

Informant C.....	131
Summary of the Findings.....	132
Research Question 1 .....	132
Research Question 2 .....	133
Research Question 3 .....	135
Conclusions.....	138
Implications .....	139
Recommendations.....	139
Concluding Thoughts.....	140
REFERENCES.....	142
APPENDICES.....	158
A IRB APPROVAL .....	159
B IRB COVER.....	161
C PROPOSAL NARRATIVE .....	165
D INFORMED CONSENT.....	171
E INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	178
F QUESTION MATRIX .....	181
G DATA COLLECTION MATRIX.....	183
H CODING CATEGORIES .....	185

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In public education, women constitute the bulk of the work force while men are more likely to hold positions in school administration (Harris, 2004; Coleman, 2005). The existing literature documents the various barriers that prevent women from being represented in high school principalships, as well as the factors that facilitate the attainment of these positions (Shakeshaft, 1990; Jones & Montenegro, 1983; Bell & Chase, 1993; Hill & Ragland, 1995; Curry, 2000). Missing from this discourse are the experiences and perspectives of African American women who must utilize strategies to navigate the barriers they face (Loder, 2005; Collins, 2000; Dillard, 1995, Thurman, 2004).

Collins (2000) asserted black women have generated alternative practices and knowledge tied to their lived experiences that are designed to foster empowerment and better those experiences. African American women not only experience gender bias that stems from the false premise that males are better suited to hold leadership positions (Bell & Chase, 1993; Coleman, 2005), but are also confronted by racial bias (Valverde, 2003) historically embedded in the power structures of organizations. African American women find themselves in a position of “double jeopardy” since either their gender or race may evoke negative responses from employers (Dardaine-Raggeut, 1994; Doughty, 1980).

Studies indicate the under-representation of women in the high school principalship (Loder, 2005; Thurman, 2004; Boris-Schacter & Lager, 2006; Blackman, 2000). Few studies have been conducted that focus specifically on the struggle of African

American women as they encounter the dual challenges of gender and race in their professional lives (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Collins, 2000; Banks, 1995; Lomotey, 1989).

The purpose of this study was to describe how three female African American high school principals understand the influence of race and gender on their educational leadership experiences. The study focused on the professional background, barriers encountered in the pursuit of the principalship, strategies utilized to facilitate attainment of a principalship, and leadership conceptualization. The following section of this chapter highlights the conceptual framework for the study. This is followed by a discussion of the context for the study. The chapter concludes with explanations of the significance of the study, the limitations of the study, a list of definitions, and a summary.

#### Conceptual Framework: Black Feminist Thought

Harmony between women was a theme in feminist literature in the 70s and 80s, but women of color insisted that differences in history, culture, experiences of oppression and political agenda be acknowledged and that the work of women of color be afforded scholarly attention and respect (hooks, 1989). These sentiments were also expressed by Harris (2004):

Gender and existence within a patriarchal system are commonalities between black feminist thought and feminist theory; however, it is race that divides them. Women from different racial groupings may have similar gendered interpretations of an experience, yet their diverse racial standpoints create differences.

The leadership of African American women in the high school principalship was examined through the lens of black feminist thought (Collins, 2000). Black feminist thought (BFT) is distinctive from feminist perspectives in that it acknowledges the effects of race, gender and class in the lives of women of color. Since black women have access to both the Afrocentric and feminist standpoints, an alternative epistemology used to rearticulate a black woman's standpoint reflects elements in both traditions (Collins, 2000).

According to Collins (2000) one of the purposes of BFT is to give voice to black women who are excluded from, stereotyped, and misrepresented in top positions in educational leadership. BFT aims to empower African American women by viewing the occurrences of their daily lives which is essential to understanding their perceived and lived experiences in a society where the interlocking systems of race, class, and gender determine opportunity and status. BFT rejects negative stereotypes and assumptions about black women and seeks to replace this misinformation with authentic knowledge. It provides insight into how and why black women interpret the world as they do.

BFT was an appropriate lens to examine the experiences of African American women in educational leadership within their historical, social, and political contexts. Collins (2000) maintained black women do not identify with the majority group therefore they have different life experiences and views of reality. BFT encourages black women to articulate their experiences and create new definitions about themselves that validate their own standpoints (Collins, 2000). This validation is the key to bringing about change. hooks (1989) noted, "even when black women are able to advance professionally and acquire a degree of economic self-sufficiency, it is in the social realm that racist and

gendered stereotypes are continually used as ways of defining black women's identity and behavior" (p. 194).

Taylor (2004) suggested "the politics of BFT provides a critical approach that describes the suppression and oppression of African American women"

(p. 23-24). Emerging from feminist and critical race theories, BFT asserts that the experiences of African American women are framed within these contexts (hooks, 1989). While Collins (2000) acknowledged that class (economic status) of black women contributes to their marginalized status, it was not included in this study. The rationale for this decision is because the African American women in this study are college educated and have achieved "economic self sufficiency." Thus, the focus on this study is on the ways that the dual oppressions of race and gender intersect the leadership experiences of African American women.

BFT acknowledges this "double jeopardy" that renders African American women invisible in the social structure. This metaphorical invisibility diminishes the contributions of African American women in all facets of society. The voices of African American women have been silenced and thus they must be given opportunities to "express a self-defined black woman's standpoint" (Collins, 2000, p. 91). Key to understanding the experiences of African American women in school leadership is to understand the "multiplicative impact" of race and gender (Collins, 2000, p. 91) and the ways in which these challenges impact their opportunities.

Tied to an African American woman's lived experiences, BFT facilitates understanding the challenges and triumphs of female African American high school principals and the influence of race and gender on their leadership. Collins (2000)



maintained that BFT provides knowledge that enables African American women to survive, cope with, and resist differential treatment. This knowledge allows subordinate groups to define their own reality and empower themselves to negotiate the “intersecting oppressions of race and gender which have most profoundly affected African American women” (Collins, 2000, p. 66).

BFT includes five dimensions: (a) the presentation of an alternative social construct based on African American women’s lived experience, (b) a commitment to fighting against race and gender inequality, (c) recognition of women’s legacy of struggle, (d) the promotion of empowerment through voice, visibility, and self-definition, and (e) a belief in the interdependence of thought and action (Collins, 2000). From these dimensions three key themes in BFT are identified:

1. The framework is shaped and produced by the experiences African American women have encountered in their lives.
2. Although the stories and experiences of each woman are unique, there are intersections of experiences between and among women.
3. Although commonalities do exist among African American women, the diversity of their lives as a group are multiple contexts from which their experiences can be revealed and understood.

Further explanation of the themes provides further insight into this conceptual framework. The first theme implies that people other than African American women themselves shape their identity often through erroneous or stereotypical images. These “oppressive images” have been reinforced over a long period of time and are difficult to eliminate. It is important that self-valuation, self-definition, and knowledge validation

replace these negative images.

The second theme acknowledges the “multifaceted identities” of African American women that are immersed in oppression and subordinate their status. The oppression stems from the legacy of struggle for African American women in society. Present day struggles include fighting negative stereotypes that limit opportunities and degrade self-concept as well as fighting to obtain access to employment (Collins, 2000).

The third theme encourages African American women to develop, redefine, and explain their stories (Collins, 2000). While all African American women may share experiences of racism and sexism each individual woman is likely to have a unique response to these experiences (Taylor, 2004). By studying this marginalized group, a void in mainstream educational leadership can be filled. It is crucial to understand the perspective of female African American principals considering the impact of both race and gender in their professional lives.

The goal of BFT is to bring about change in the condition of all women of color. In describing the lived experiences of African American women in the high school principalship, I sought to address gendered or racist practices and make visible possibilities and alternatives for aspiring principals to achieve advancement in educational leadership.

### Context of the Study

The principalship of African American females is intersected by a unique set of challenges associated with race, gender, attitudes, organizational structures, and policies. While the literature offers insight into the barriers faced and strategies utilized by women, it “rarely presents detailed portraits of the lives, work, vision, and impact of African

American women on the school, community, and student achievement or practices that affect their work” (Tillman, 2004, p. 126).

Peters (2003) expounded on the lack of research focusing on African American women in educational leadership and the importance of studying this marginalized group. In her dissertation entitled *A Case Study of an African American Female Principal Participating in an Administrative Leadership Academy* she offered several reasons for studying the leadership of African American women.

1. It is important to understand how a racist and gendered society impacts institutions such as schools.
2. Since little data has been collected “specifically” and “consistently” about African American females in educational leadership information is needed to accurately reflect changes in the profession.
3. Including African American women in the discussion on educational leadership dispels erroneous notions that they lack interest in leadership positions and that they are ineffective leaders.
4. Including African American women in the discussion on educational leadership is the key to understanding the “multiple jeopardies” or “multiple burdens” that impact their opportunities to acquire leadership positions.

Prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision the majority of African American administrators supervised segregated public schools. African American schools served as the instruments through which professional educators discharged their responsibility to their community.

Responsibilities included that of school manager, school supervisor, professional development coordinator, physical plant engineer, and curriculum coordinator (Echols, 2006).

African American principals were honored by the African American community for meritorious service in education, civic, and religious affairs. They relished their role as principal, teacher, and community activists (Gaskins, 2006; Echols, 2006). Roles also included motivating parents to provide resources for schools, being active in church, acting as financial advisors, marital counselors and providing leadership for community initiatives (Brown & Beckett, 2007).

After the Brown decision, many African American principals in formerly segregated schools lost their positions since their schools were often closed down (Echols, 2006; Brown, 2005; Grogan, 1999). Today, African Americans remain underrepresented in their appointments to administrative positions (Tillman, 2004; Valverde, 2003). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2002) African Americans represent only 11% of all school principals.

An important aspect of school diversification is the preparation and placement of African American school leaders (Brown, 2005). Enomoto (2000) noted that in order for women's experiences to become a part of the main body of knowledge on leadership they must be studied on their own terms. Grogan (1999) asserted that the overriding culture in educational leadership is dominated with norms that are defined as white and male.

In Georgia, statistics reveal the administrative workforce remains predominately white (68.1%) and female (57%). Almost three-quarters of elementary principals are women (72.1%) and two-thirds of high school principals are men (66.7%) (Georgia

Professional Standards Commission, 2006). While the number and percentage of African American administrators continues to increase, few African American women have been able to lead high schools. Grubbs (2002) conducted a study of 41 school districts in South Georgia and found no high school principalships were held by African American women. Current data reflects a steady increase in the number of female African American high school principals. Of the 392 high school in Georgia, 39 (19%) are led by African American women (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2006).

Understanding the obstacles encountered by these women and the strategies utilized in advancing their careers will provide valuable resources to an already scant knowledge base of women of color in educational leadership. Collins (2000) asserted it is important for African American women to address the obstacles they experience based on the dual influences of race and gender. The purpose of this multiple case study was to describe how three female African American high school principals understand the influence of race and gender on their educational leadership experiences.

### Significance and Research Design

There is a need for well-qualified female candidates in educational leadership. Research suggests that the characteristics of female leadership are essential for leading effective schools (Fennell, 1999; Growe & Montgomery, 2003; Kropiewnick, 2001; Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992). Women have unique ways of leading and place emphasis on personal relationships, interpersonal harmony, and working in egalitarian teams (Shakeshaft, 1990; Enomoto, 2000; Eby, 2004). This supports existent literature that characterizes women as relational leaders who view themselves “in relationships that are facilitative of others’ efforts rather than in control” (Grogan, 1999, p. 524).

The perspective of the women of diverse cultural backgrounds is essential to increase the knowledge base on women in educational leadership. Benham and Cooper (1998) proposed that the “voiceless” (p. 3) must be heard and the lives and contributions of diverse leaders in educational leadership must be included in any discussion relating to educational leadership. Taylor (2004) noted “today’s schools make matters worse by the exclusion of valuable voices and the allowance of inappropriate stereotypes related to race and gender to impede school performance” (p. 2).

The findings of this study will give all aspiring female African American principals valuable insight into the ways race and gender impact the leadership experience of African American high school principals. The findings in this study may also raise new questions and challenge traditional leadership theory regarding African American women in educational leadership. Perhaps it will create a new vision of leadership that considers the work of African American high school principals equally important in mainstream literature on educational leadership.

This multiple-case study unfolded the leadership experiences of three female African American high school principals. Multiple-case study is appropriate in situations where more than one case is selected to illustrate a single issue or phenomenon within a real life context (Yin, 1994; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995; Creswell, 2007). Each informant was purposefully selected (Patton, 1990; Yin, 1994) from a list of the 39 public high schools in Georgia currently led by African American women. Data were provided to the researcher by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (2006). Consideration was given to years in principalship, geographical location, school setting, and willingness to participate. Final participation was contingent upon each potential

informant's availability and willingness to share her experiences.

The overarching question for this multiple-case study is: How do three African American female high school principals understand the influence of race and gender in their leadership experience. Sub-questions are as follows:

1. What strategies do three female African American high school principals in Georgia believe facilitated their attainment of the high school principalship?
2. What barriers do three female African American high school principals in Georgia believe they encountered in their progression to the principalship?
3. How do three female African American high school principals conceptualize leadership?

#### Limitations

There are two major limitations of the study. First, although the findings of this study are instructive, they cannot be generalized to the entire population of female African American high school principals. Only three principals were interviewed for this study. However, this limitation is offset by the richness of the interview data generated and the fact that principals were located in different school systems within the state of Georgia.

The second limitation is the limited triangulation of data sources. Two observations were limited to the days on which interview data were collected, and the major documents examined were resumes of the informants. As described in the methodology chapter, the investigator relied on in-depth interviews to gather rich, descriptive data.

### Definition of Terms

1. Informant – qualitative research term that describes one or more persons participating in a study considered an expert source of information. Key informants, as a result of their personal skill or position within a society, are able to provide more information and deeper insight into events around them.
2. Feminism - a broad category used to hold multiple perspectives and methods. An underlying assumption of feminist work is the belief that women experience oppression and exploitation, and that this experience varies, considering the multiple identities a person holds (Glesne, 2006).
3. Black Feminist Thought – defined by Patricia Hill Collins (2000) as an exploration of the black female experience and “greater recognition of the interplay of race, class, and gender in shaping women’s oppression” (p. 241).
4. Critical Incident - A clearly demarcated scene defined as an incident in which the purpose or intent of the act is clear to the observer and the consequences are definite.

### Summary

The scarcity of African American women in the ranks of secondary principalships is very apparent. However, the number of Georgia female African American high school principals has steadily increased. The literature indicates that race and gender are dominant forces in the lives of African American women. By addressing these issues, understanding can be gained regarding gendered and racial stereotypes operating within organizations to prevent women from obtaining more positions as high school principals. Only through understanding the problem can innovative approaches be developed and



adopted to prepare African American women to fill the role as high school principals. According to Collins (2000), this understanding must emanate from the voices of the women who tell authentic stories of the intersections of race and gender in their lives.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

If women are to stand on equal footing with males in educational administration, a new organizational paradigm must emerge. Alternative voices, experiences, backgrounds, and histories must be acknowledged as valid. Each and every individual must be considered valuable to the organization. (Hackney 1998)

This chapter reviews the literature pertaining females in leadership roles. The first section is a discussion of the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership. This is followed, respectively, by sections on barriers to females in educational leadership, strategies that enable women to achieve the principalship, perspectives on female leadership and the history of the African American principalship. The chapter concludes with reviews of literature on exemplary historical models of African American female principals and perspectives on the life and educational leadership of African American women.

#### The Under-representation of Women in Educational Leadership

When one thinks of a high school principal, the typical image that comes to mind is that of a white male who has been in his position from 10 to 15 years (Priorities & Barriers, 2001). Although women have made progress in attaining administrative positions in schools, few women have been able to obtain positions as high school principals (Grogan, 1999; Gupton & Slick, 2004; Fennell, 2005; Loder, 2005; Boris-Schacter & Lager, 2006; Thurman, 2004). According to Gupton & Slick (2004), the decision to hire women is “often made within a social context that women are inferior in status, are objects of negative stereotypes, and though a majority of the population, are considered minority because they lack access to power” (p. 29).

Loder (2005) noted some documented gains resulting from the civil rights and women's movement, but women continue to be "woefully underrepresented in school principalships relative to their representation in the teaching force" (pg. 300). Women represented only 44 percent of public school principals in 1999 and 2000, compared to 75 percent of the teaching force during this same period (Loder, 2005). Boris-Schacter and Langer (2006) found the number of women assuming leadership positions in elementary schools has risen over the past ten years.

Despite these gains, women are still disproportionately represented in the superintendency and high school principalships. Thurman (2004) reported that women comprise 52 percent of all elementary principals, but only 26% of secondary ones. Shakeshaft (1998) reported that nearly 54 percent of secondary teachers are female, but only 26% ever serve as secondary principals. Women represent the majority in the teaching profession and educational leadership graduate programs, but are consistently absent in most influential administrative positions in public education: superintendent, assistant superintendent, and high school principal (Thurman, 2004).

In Georgia, *The Status Report 2006* revealed that most public school principals are now women. However, while women hold the majority of these positions overall, there are substantial differences among the three school levels. Women hold more than seven of ten elementary principalships, but only one in four of high school principalships. Middle schools were evenly divided between genders. High school principals were 74.4 percent male and 25.6 female (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2006).

In a descriptive study (Grubbs, 2002) designed to explore the demographics and career paths of rural principals in South Georgia, questionnaires were mailed to all 241

elementary, middle, and high school principals in the 41 South Georgia rural school districts served by Valdosta State University. The emerging profile was that of the white male with an average age of 48, 11.67 years of teaching experience, combined with 13.23 years of administrative experience.

Although African Americans comprised 32.8% of the total population, they occupied 16% of all the administrative positions in the school systems. In terms of female leadership, 18% of the female principals served in middle schools and 73% of all the women principals worked in elementary schools. Only 6.3% of high school principals were held by white females. There were no African American female high school principals, and only 6% of African American women occupied middle school principalships and 12% of the elementary principalships. These data indicate that the public school principalship in South Georgia reflects little racial and gender diversity across school levels (Grubbs, 2002).

#### Barriers to Females in Educational Leadership

Researchers identify the existence of barriers as contributing to the under-representation of women in educational leadership positions. Rossman (2000) noted barriers are variables that impede the advancement of women into administrative positions.

According to Harris, Smith and Hale (2002), identifying the problems that women in educational leadership face is an important component in the process of increasing opportunity for women who seek advancement.

Most of the literature acknowledges women in educational administration have had barriers that have made it difficult for them to obtain administrative positions in educational leadership (Tallerico, 2000; Bagwell, 1999; Buell, Schroth & DeFelice, 2002;

Byrd-Blake, 2004; Gaskins, 2006). Jones and Montenegro (1983) suggested the barriers against minorities in school administration exist and can be more overwhelming than the barriers faced by women in general. Valverde (2003) asserted that women and minorities are excluded from positions not because they lack competence, but rather because they are a deviation from the status-quo. The following expounds on some of the barriers encountered by women that were identified in the review of literature.

### *Family/Work Conflicts*

Women find it difficult to reconcile the traditional role as caretaker, mother, and nurturer with high career expectations (Rossman, 2000). Since women feel they cannot successfully navigate both, they often choose family obligations over career aspirations. Those women who do choose a career often find that work and family obligations are in conflict with one another. This leads to conflict between spouses because role expectations are reversed (Rossman, 2000). Funk (2004) found this conflict is a major source of stress in the lives of women who had the dual responsibility of family and career.

This conflict is further exacerbated by the time demands at home and work. Reports confirm the number of hours principals work has increased. Growe and Montgomery (2003) noted during the 1980s, high school principals worked an average of 53.2 hours per week. Female high school principals now work between 60-70 hours per week which makes it difficult for principals to balance their professional and personal lives. According to Grogan (1999), some women principals and superintendents do manage to arrange their schedules so that they may balance both work and family commitments. However, this “clash of priorities and values” (p. 526) eventually takes its

toll because most good administrators focus their energy and attention on the school while the needs of the family typically take a back seat to these career priorities.

### *Sex Role Stereotyping*

Sex role stereotypes condition men and women to believe that women are not suited to hold leadership positions and result in discriminatory practices that exclude women from them (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). Historically men have been thought to possess the qualities necessary to manage schools (Evans, 2001; Tallerico, 2000; Harris, 2004). These perceptions leave women aspiring to leadership positions in a “quandary” since being a leader and a woman creates contradictions: if women display politeness or passivity they “lose their credibility as leaders”, yet if they act in an aggressive, competitive manner, they “may have to deny their identity (Harris, 2004, p. 365).

Traditionally, a woman’s role is associated with parenting and caring while men are employed outside the home. These socialization processes benefit men in developing the skills necessary to lead organizations because women are assumed to be less capable, less competitive, or less productive than men. Shakeshaft (1998) comments that women have been socialized to believe that qualities frequently associated with females are antithetical to those qualities needed to manage. Socialization processes also play a key role in the attitudes others associate with minority leadership. Teachers, parents, and students have an image of the principal that is associated with the white male. Because of such pre-conceived notions, African American principals automatically encounter challenges to their leadership (Long, 2005).

### *Lack of Aspiration*

When women internalize myths associated with sex role stereotypes it may lead some women to have low aspirations for advancing in administrative ranks (Lui, 2000). Internalization of stereotypes results in feelings of doubt and diminished self-confidence (Lui, 2000; Archer & Loyd, 2002). As a result, women are less likely to leave teaching although they have credentials in educational leadership (Stone & Cooper, 2002).

### *Lack of Mobility*

Lack of mobility causes women to pursue only those opportunities that are situated in the same area where the family lives (Harris, Ballenger, & Jones, 2007). This hinders women because there are a limited number of administrative positions in some geographic locations and only those who are willing to relocate have a better chance to obtain such positions. For most women; however, moving a home and a husband are not options (Grogan, 1999). Harris et al. found that spousal support was critical to determining the level of success that women achieve in power positions such as the secondary principalship and the superintendency.

### *Lack of Mentoring*

Though women have qualities that would make them capable leaders, they still frequently do not receive the mentoring, sponsorship or networking that their male counterparts do (Harris et al., 2007; Smulyan, 2000). Research shows that usually when men sponsor women in educational administration, they select women who are passive and non-threatening (Cullen & Luna, 1993; Funk, 2004; Hubbard & Robinson, 1998).

Male leaders support and mentor each other in what is typically referred to as “the good ole boy” network in which administrative positions are filled with friends and

protégés, while ignoring women qualified women for those positions (Ortiz & Marshall, 1988). Considered a dominant influence in the hiring process, this informal power structure socializes protégés with the “tricks of the trade” well in advance of when they might actually need to use them. Those excluded from such networks are deprived of the opportunity to learn the informal aspects of the positions they desire (Bagenstos, 1987).

Female administrators expect to find some degree of resistance from male colleagues, but are “completely blindsided by the antagonistic behavior of other women toward them” (Funk, 2004, p. 4). This “Queen Bee” syndrome is considered most detrimental and difficult to understand to women who seek support from those within their own ranks (Funk, 2004). “Queen Bees” are women in positions of power and authority who attempt to keep other women out of leadership because of some perceived threat to her position and power. These threats emanate from feelings that there is an inadequate amount of power to go around and the concept of “shared power” is not an option (Funk, 2004, p. 4).

Edson (1988) revealed this concept in a study in which female administrators perceived experiences with other female administrators as negative since men seemed to help men more frequently than women did. Rather than forming alliances, women tended to draw battle lines instead. Some female administrators were considered jealous, sabotaging, and unsupportive which led to a general distrust of women who had already achieved positions.

Funk (2004) also elaborated on the idea of the “queen bee” in a study that focused on the views that female administrators hold regarding other female administrators. From the responses of female superintendents, high school principals, assistant superintendents,



and assistant principals four categories emerged that reflect contrasting views of female leaders.

The four categories were: (a) activists (b) advocates (c) isolates and (d) individualists. While the first two categories were positive and supporting, the last two diminished the value of other female administrators. Isolates were unconcerned about issues regarding gender equity, and were often treated as “tokens in their workplaces” (Funk, 2004, p. 6). They relished the fact that they were the only woman and enjoyed being able to speak from the woman’s point of view.

The individualists were not concerned with gender issues and were more concerned with alienating the men in power although most times this view alienated them from other women. Overall, isolates and individuals displayed anti-female behavior because they feared it would alienate them from the men who have recruited them into school administration. They were not affected by their “token” status and denied any experience with gender discrimination. They viewed other women coming into leadership as threats to the established male system from which all of their perceptions and viewpoints emanated (Funk, 2004). According to Funk (2004), the isolates and individualist who wanted to retain their “Queen Bee” status held the following viewpoints:

1. I am in the spotlight as the only female administrator. I do not want to share.
2. These jobs are so scarce that I will do whatever I have to do to undermine other female applicants.
3. I am fearful that if I act feminine in my administrative role that they will not accept me.

4. I do not think that she earned her promotion.

Because of this “Queen Bee” syndrome, networking among women is difficult since the pressures “many women feel working in andocentric cultures” forces women in positions of authority to become ambivalent about women’s rights and feminism (Tripses, 2004).

#### *Lack of Networking*

The lack of networking impedes the progression of women because they lack the encouragement and connection needed to gain access to positions (Helgesen, 1990; Irby & Brown, 1998). A study of female administrators serving in a public school system (Byrd-Blake, 2004) determined similarities or differences between African American, Hispanic, and white females in terms of barriers, the effects of those barriers on career advancement, and strategies to overcome barriers.

Byrd-Blake (2004) found African American principals had taught longer and were excluded from professional networks within the organization. Gupton and Slick (2004) conducted a study of the career pathway of 15 successful women administrators and concluded that strong networking helped women achieve leadership positions.

#### *Inequitable Selection Processes*

The selection and appointment process exacerbates the progression of women and minorities in educational leadership because they overwhelmingly favor men (Gupton & Slick, 2004; Shakeshaft, 1998; Schmuck, 1998). Grogan (1999) maintained that the ways in which leadership positions are filled in educational leadership reveals a “gendered” process (p. 529). She added that these processes have been designed to maintain the predominance of white, middle-class men in school administration which perpetuates the

myth that women and minorities cannot lead high schools.

Shakeshaft (1998) noted administrators hire candidates who are like them. Although this does not mean that they exclusively hire white males it does mean that they do not usually hire those who do not share the same leadership style or those whose philosophies differ from the status quo. Similarly, Shea (1983) discussed conservative hiring practices, community sentiments and fit as ways in which the selection process eliminate people who were different because of background, gender, and race. These “filtering methods” are subtle discriminatory methods embedded within recruitment, application, interview and selection criteria and decisions. They reinforce the “unspoken brotherhood of white male barriers” (Long, 2005, p. 24).

#### *Racism/ Discrimination*

Racism is documented as a prevalent barrier facing African Americans who seek leadership positions (Green-Powell, 1993). Blatant racism has given way to more subtle methods of keeping African American women and other minorities out of certain administrative positions (Green-Powell, 1993). These “insidious and invisible” (Simmons, 2007, p. 82) underground practices make it difficult for people of color to pinpoint racism. The old clichés “not a fit”, “over-qualified for our little district, and “you really wouldn’t be comfortable here” become excuses to keep qualified candidates from obtaining positions (p. 5).

According to Pecora (2006), “fit” is considered the extent to which a leader appropriately and effectively performs in a particular situation. It is used as a tool to ensure successful leadership by focusing on the special traits or training a candidate may have. However, it is often used to keep certain individuals from getting positions and care

should be taken make sure it is not justification for discriminatory and illegal hiring practices (Simmons, 2007).

### Strategies that Enable Women to Achieve the Principalship

Beason (1992) maintained that while men and women may face many of the same barriers in their career advancement, since female principals lack opportunities available to most men such as access to the “old boys club”, and role models, “they must rely on strategies that are designed to increase their visibility and develop themselves personally and professionally” (p. iv). Such “coping skill and strategies to overcome barriers” are believed to increase the numbers of women in educational administration (p. 3). Some of the strategies that women have utilized to advance careers are elaborated on below.

#### *Mentoring and Sponsoring*

Mentoring and sponsoring are cited as two of the most important strategies utilized by women for career advancement. According to Allen, Jacobson, and Lomotey (1995) there is no denying the importance of mentors and sponsors in the socialization and success of aspiring educational administrators. Green-Powell (1993) defined mentors as an authority in the field, a higher up in the organizational ladder, influential, and interested the mentee’s growth and development.

Young and McLeod (2001) maintained “women, more so than men, require encouragement to pursue careers in administration” (p. 484). Similarly, Grove and Montgomery (2003) asserted that “in order for women to succeed in acquiring administrative positions in education mentoring must occur.” They cited four advantages of this enabling strategy:

1. Mentoring can significantly enhance income and promoting possibilities for individuals experiencing these relationships.
2. Mentoring can meet the needs of both men and women and institutions, and it can also assist in attracting and retaining women and minority professionals in the academic work environment.
3. Mentoring of younger workers reduces turnovers, helps mentees deal with organizational issues, and accelerates their assimilation into the culture.
4. The mentees (those women being mentored) benefit because someone cares enough to support them, advise them and help them interpret inside information.

Allen et al. (1995) conducted a study of thirty-eight African American female administrators who revealed that mentors and sponsors contributed significantly to their career success. Those respondents who obtained mentors during the early stages of their career received the encouragement and moral support that was a critical component to their obtaining positions.

In a study of 52 African American women (Allen, 1995) who were either enrolled in leadership certification programs or already working in leadership positions, sponsors or mentors were seen by the respondents as critical to their career success. Sponsors and mentors provided access to critical professional networks and resources, endorsed respondents' membership to professional organizations, shared privileged information about how to move through the educational bureaucracy, recommended them for senior positions, and modeled the kind of behavior the respondents should follow as administrators. University professors and school principals were cited as the most

important sponsors. Without sponsors, the respondents perceived “that they would hit the proverbial glass ceiling – that is, they would be able to see the goals they want to reach, but be unable to attain them” (p. 420).

### *Planning and Career Development Skills*

Grove and Montgomery (2003) elaborated on “survival skills” that women in leadership positions or those seeking positions must acquire. These included taking time to plan for a successful career, recognizing the competition and exhibiting the skills and behaviors necessary to compete, developing confidence, increasing visibility, maintaining courage and determination in a male dominated organization, delegating effectively, meeting deadlines in a timely manner, and developing and exercising the managerial role in a manner that gains the respect of the stakeholders.

Morrison (1992) suggested four “core components for success” related to planning and career development skills. These “career enhancing techniques” enable women to successfully obtain leadership positions:

1. *Be able.* Women should make sure that they know what the position entails. They should develop good speaking and writing skills plus any other skill that will help compete against everyone else at a particular level. Never stop learning, whether it is formally, in a classroom or informally, on the job. Put in extra time and effort on every job.
2. *Be seen as able.* No one should ever allow his/her abilities to be discouraged or ignored. Display competencies in jobs that are visible and valued, especially for jobs that form stepping-stones to the top.
3. *Know what you want.* Be willing to balance, prioritize, sacrifice, and relax.

4. *Help others to help.* Find people who can help even if they are in unrelated jobs. Women need to get a plan, and a strategy. Let the boss and others know what it is, so they can contribute to it, not create it.

#### *Reconciling Personal and Professional Responsibilities*

Grogan (1999) affirmed that female administrators need both emotional and practical assistance to be able to fulfill the demands of work and home. A study of 21 rural principals in Nebraska and New Mexico supported Grogan's conclusion. Grady (1992) asked eight opened ended questions that sought to highlight the positive experiences as principals. One common theme that emerged from the data was the importance of family support.

Women reported that their husbands played a very important role in the success of their experiences. The respondents commented "husbands [had] been [their] stronghold and saw [them] through". "The support [they] receive is unconditional support, absolute understanding. They also "understood the difference an educator can make in people's lives" (p. 8). Harris et al. (2002) noted that women in educational leadership must internalize the belief that "they are not all things to all people" because of the demanding pace of both work and home (p. 3).

#### *Equitable Recruitment Practices*

Shakeshaft (1998) developed strategies that focused on training programs and organizational structures in which women work. She noted conscious raising, recruitment, networking, and general administration courses and workshops would help alleviate the lack of support, encouragement, and lack of preparation and experience that often impedes a woman's progress to the high school principalship.

Since recruitment is viewed as a major hurdle to women, Bagenstos (1987) suggested that recruitment activities must be more aggressive so women will not feel that it is pointless to aspire to positions as high school principals. Recent literature calls for universities to work closely with school districts in preparing leadership programs that create equitable opportunities for everyone (Cook, 2007). Recruitment efforts have typically included self-selection, chance opportunities that were considered informal and casual. Districts must develop clear written policies that include specific, definable criteria about recruiting, selecting, and vacancy requirements (Bagenstos, 1987; Bicklen & Brannigan, 1990).

School districts must expand efforts by recruiting outside the district, establishing in-district training programs, formal internships, and financial incentives to defray costs of preparation programs (Robinson, 2004). Realizing a need to improve the recruitment process, many school districts now utilize training programs that “foster leadership development of talented teachers” (Robinson, 2004, p.31).

In Georgia, the “Rising Stars” program was designed to “ensure that Georgia’s schools are led by highly capable leaders who can improve student achievement amid rising expectations and changing conditions” (Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI), 2005). It is a collaborative effort of state leaders from higher education, regional educational service agencies (RESA), and school districts to develop desired leadership competencies (GLISI, 2005). Such programs and initiatives will likely increase the opportunities for women and minority candidates to apply for and achieve positions in the secondary principalship. Recent literature also calls for universities to work with school districts in preparing leadership programs that will create equitable



opportunities for everyone (Cook, 2007).

#### *Access to Networks*

Holtkamp (2002) summarized a number of strategies that women can employ in order to become successful administrators. Women must be able to turn negative experiences into positive ones, join professional organizations that will keep them abreast of current trends and practices, and foster relationships that will strengthen professional networks. Such networks allow women to share their experiences with those who can identify with their struggles and provide needed support and encouragement (Helgesen, 1990; Gupton & Slick, 2004; Harris et al., 2002). While it is difficult to establish networks in male-dominated organizations, Holtkamp (2002) suggested “rubbing elbows” (p. 4) by joining organizations which will increase visibility in these professional circles.

### Perspectives on Female Leadership

#### *Gender Stereotypes*

Logan (1998) asserted “today’s schools open a window of opportunity for women to move into educational administration” (p. 1). Women are increasingly well prepared, are obtaining the necessary certification to apply for the positions, and are often among the last two or three candidates. However, women do not get the job (Logan, 1998). Societal perceptions and myths regarding gender continue to prevent qualified and motivated female aspirants from obtaining principalships in high schools (Shakeshaft, 1990; Williamson & Hudson, 2002). Gender is a deterrent to the advancement of women in educational leadership and factors cited in the research nearly two decades ago may continue to account for the low representation of women at the high school level

(Hamilton, 2001).

Gendered roles identify women with the home and the care of children and men with the working environment (Young & McLeod, 2001; Harris et al., 2002; Tallerico, 2000). Literature regarding women in educational leadership includes references to the correlation between gender and the low numbers of women in educational leadership positions especially at the high school level (Bell & Chase, 1993; Young & McLeod, 2001; Nogay & Beebe, 1997).

The literature on gender and administration suggests gender influences access and entry into positions of school leadership as a result of discrimination and role expectations (Smulyan, 2000). Men were thought to possess leadership traits more suitable for leadership while women possessed traits more suitable for teaching (Harris et al., 2002). The adult male role is typically defined by traits such as dominance, achievement, autonomy, and aggression, whereas traits such as emotionalism, passivity, timidity, deference, and self-abasement define the female role (Cullen & Luna, 1993; Northouse, 2004).

To understand the impact of gender in the lives of women principals Smulyan (2000) conducted a study of three women principals (two white and one African American) and concluded that “gender is a powerful dynamic that did indeed influence the three principals’ personal and professional lives” (p. 593). She noted that gender affected four aspects of the participants’ work: their entry into the principalship, their relationship with the community they served, their role within the larger institution within which they worked, and the ways in which they balanced continuity and change in their school.

Smuylan (2000) asserted the entry into the principalship of the participants reflected “gendered patterns, an extended teaching career, lack of administrative preparation, and a push into the principalship by a male mentor” (p. 595). Gendered expectations were seen as a factor undermining the effectiveness of these principals in their leadership role. Parents and teachers were accustomed to traditional authoritative styles of management and questioned the facilitative actions and behaviors of the women in the study that present a challenge to the “norm” in educational leadership.

Characterized as not being “true leaders” or “real administrators” when they exhibited warmth or chose not to make unilateral decisions, participants cited the difficulty in trying to dispel such perceptions. When the principals in the study displayed directness and personal distance, they were labeled “cold and unfeminine.”

Gender is cited as a factor influencing access and entry into positions of school leadership because of discriminatory practices and role expectations. Many studies confined women to particular stereotypes or defined them primarily by their relation to men (Harris, 2004; Evans, 2001). Peters (2003) cited studies that suggested males are intellectually superior to women, are more emotionally stable and are more achievement-oriented and assertive than women. Women were not thought to possess the qualities considered necessary for effective leadership. Women tended to focus on the needs of the individuals within the organization while men focused on the most efficient means to complete tasks. These types of male behaviors were considered rational, logical, and unemotional.

Women were also characterized as lacking the aggressiveness needed to lead and manage especially in high schools which contributed to the imbalance of men and women

at this level (Peters, 2003). Male gendered stereotypes placed men at the forefront of educational organizations because they are viewed as most able to lead. Such traditional models of educational administration focused on aggressiveness, independence, competitiveness, and forcefulness (Enomoto, 2000). These traits were viewed as essential in good leaders (Hackney, 1998):

Though promotion and hiring practices of women in school administration have gradually loosened so that more women hold positions at higher levels of power and decision-making, the field remains predominately male. Policy makers have not adequately altered the organizational structures to incorporate the feminine leadership disposition (p. 2)

According to Shakeshaft (1998), when compared to their male counterparts, the following profile emerged regarding women in educational leadership: (a) Women principals tended to attain the principalship at an older age than men: over 40 years old as compared to early 30s for men. (b) Women principals taught longer than men before entering administration: Fifteen years versus five. (c) Women were more likely to continue graduate education while serving as principals than men. (d) Women principals often had higher levels of preparedness, but were paid less than men.

Nearly ten years later, the review of contemporary literature corroborates these facts. For women to be seen as a leader in their field, women must have more credentials than male counterparts, be better prepared, and be more knowledgeable (Harris et al., 2002; Holtkamp, 2002).

Gender differences between male and female leaders suggest negative stereotypes of women because society conditions men and women to believe that women are not as

capable as men of holding leadership positions. As noted by Hackney and Runnestrand (2003) “early leadership theories failed to include the social, historical, and cultural context of women” (p. 1).

Gostnell (1996) highlighted the major ideas of traditional leadership theory which excluded women and separated educational leadership into two gender distinct professions. Traditional leadership theory included trait theory which asserts that one must be born with leadership capacity. Situational leadership theory posits that leadership can be taught and that as situations change so then does one’s leadership. According to power theory, the leader has a greater impact upon others than anyone else in the organization through the use of formal and informal power. Organizational theory views leadership as a role in a hierarchical organization. The skills and competencies needed are directly related to organizational goals and structure. She maintained that the models cited above fail to address the relationship between one’s place in the hierarchy relative to the influences of race, gender, or class.

In the 1970s and 1980s the literature focused on gender-based models of leadership in an effort to explain the scarcity of women in educational administration. These models include the individual perspective model, the organizational perspective model, and the social perspective model (Estler, 1975; Schmuck, 1998).

The individual perspective model focuses on the personal traits, characteristics and qualities of women. Its basic premise is that women themselves are the cause of their under-representation because they lack the drive, desire, self-confidence, and assertiveness to obtain positions. The organizational perspective model purports that discrimination within the organization based on the achievements of men who are

avored by promotional practices limited opportunities for women. It is the cultural and social norms in the women's place model that placed women and men in different areas of work and pay status (Grove & Montgomery, 2003; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996).

Hargreaves (1996) noted that female principals are depicted as submissive and dependent. Women who must solve every problem and feel a need to "mother" or "rescue" are often perceived as soft, weak, indecisive, and incompetent. Women who display professionalism and intensity are viewed as cold, distant, and perfectionist (Hackney, 1998; Schein, 1973; Smuylan, 2000). Shakeshaft (1998) suggested women who want to succeed in educational leadership are advised to act like men. When women demonstrate these behaviors they were likely to be ignored, denied, or punished. Schmuck (1998) addressed this conflict and the tension it often created for female leaders who behave in ways that are inconsistent with their gendered role:

Women who have achieved positions which are held predominately by men have realized, consciously and unconsciously, that there are social roles and expectations governing the role of females from the culture. They must become abnormal women; they must transcend the social expectations of femaleness in order to aspire to the socially prescribed role of leader. And because they do not fit the expectations of the attributes of leaders, they are also abnormal administrators. Their position as administrators makes them insiders to the organization, but their abnormal status as women makes them outsiders in their organizations." (p. 356)

Female principals also must contend with negative perceptions from teachers and superintendents as well as the resistance to leadership traits that are most often associated

with femininity such as the ethic of care and collaboration (Nogay & Beebe, 1997; Grogan, 1999). Harris et al. (2002) conducted a study of sixteen female principals that focused on the challenges they faced because they were women. The participants reported that sometimes parents, students, and teachers held different expectations for them than they did for male administrators. Parents viewed the women as easier to intimidate while students perceived them as easier to manipulate. The principals also reported resistance from other women who “lashed out” when change was deemed frustrating. School personnel frequently sought the advice of other males and the women felt they were given fewer opportunities to make mistakes (Harris et al.).

Attempts to characterize female leadership only in the context of male counterparts are considered outmoded and useless. Sinclair (1998) suggested that a more “engendered” model of leadership is needed that values the experiences, insights, and understandings of women:

There is an overwhelming need to reconstruct the concept of organizational leadership, to look for leadership in new places...we can do so by reappraising leadership through the lens of gender and sexuality. Examining men’s and women’s experiences reveals how traditional understandings of leadership have become exhausted-cynically exhorted, barren of meaning and unable to offer us hope. (p. 30)

### *Attributes of Female Leadership*

A shift in leadership theory in the 1990s to a transformational leadership style that empowered others and facilitated change in schools support women's leadership styles (Grogan, 1999; Holtkamp, 2002; Harris et al., 2002). Women have unique ways of leading (Grogan, 1999; Shakeshaft, 1990; Enomoto, 2000; Fennell, 1999). Eby (2004) indicated women place emphasis on personal relationships, interpersonal harmony, working in egalitarian teams. Existent literature characterizes women as relational leaders who view themselves "in relationships that are facilitative of others' efforts rather than in control" (Grogan, 1999, p. 524).

Characteristics of female leadership once thought to be weaknesses are now considered ideal attributes of successful leaders (Grogan, 1999; Holtkamp, 2002; Harris et al., 2002; Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992). Caring, effective communication, collaboration, and team building are now touted as necessary leadership traits in order to motivate and inspire teachers and students to meet the increasingly complex demands of today's high schools (Grogan, 1999; Shakeshaft, 1990; Enomoto, 2000; Fennell, 1999).

Korcheck and Reese, (2002) noted "the type of leadership needed to establish a strong learning community is an opportunity more women educators need to embrace. For it is women who appear to intuitively know not only what is required to create and maintain a learning organization, but also how to actually do it" (p. 34).

According to Lynch, (1990) women must be capable of managing the demands of the career. Women must perceive that they are capable and then carry out the duties with intelligence and confidence. In addition, women must learn to successfully negotiate barriers because this controls ones upward mobility in the organization. A final attribute



is being able to “fit” in the organization. Women must demonstrate that they possess the qualities that organizations are seeking in those who will fulfill leadership roles.

Fennell’s (1999) study of six women principals revealed personal characteristics of female leaders. These included having a clear sense of their vision and beliefs which are compatible with the district’s mission and vision. Respondents in the study placed importance on modeling the behaviors that leaders wished to be carried out in the organization, using power to influence others in a positive manner, having good listening skills, establishing rapport by supporting teachers and offering help when needed, building lasting relationships, utilizing sensitivity, and developing school pride and spirit in the community.

Kropeiwnick (2001) found that women leaders were devoted to careful listening and commitment to creating an optimal setting characterized by reciprocity and cooperation. Decisions were made in a humanistic, caring and empowering manner that placed value on the needs of the people who would be affected by them. Empowerment was often viewed by women as one of the most valuable components of their leadership (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992; Kouzes & Posner, 1995). Women also transmitted warmth, helpfulness, concern, and satisfaction, by using language that encouraged community building and expressed courtesy, gratitude, respect, and appreciation (Harris et. al., (2002).

Wyatt (1992) identified the following characteristics of good high school principals:

1. Innovative
2. Enthusiastic

3. Creative
4. Knowledgeable
5. Raised toward action
6. Trusts Others
7. Encourage leadership in others
8. Place students' welfare and learning first
9. Share power, planning, decision making and accountability
10. Able to be tough when necessary --about purposes, goals, practices, and professionalism.
11. Accountable for student learning
12. Remove roadblocks to effective teaching and learning

Harris (2004) identified four attributes that women in the principalship must possess. These included setting priorities and not allowing other tasks to take precedence over them. This allowed women to achieve the balance of both work and family without neglecting either. Another important attribute was delegation of responsibility to accomplish the varied tasks in a school day. Not only did this alleviate the stress of having to make decisions singularly, but it also helped foster a sense of ownership and cooperation in the organization (Harris et al., 2002).

Grove and Montgomery (2003) noted that “women as visionary leaders must keep in mind the advantages they possess over their male counterparts by way of facilitative leadership” (p. 1). Holtkamp (2002) cited a study conducted by the Hagberg Consulting Group that found women were better leaders than men in the areas of creativity, articulation of a clear vision, goal setting, setting high standards, and assuming

responsibility. Women are also perceived as being better at managing a diverse workforce because of less traditional values, greater tolerance of differences in others, greater enthusiasm, motivating others by showing appreciation for the efforts of others (Chliwniak, 1997).

A number of scholars corroborated the finding that women, more frequently than men utilized the approach of care and responsibility for others when resolving ethical and moral dilemmas (Beck, 1994; Gilligan, 1982; Schmuck, 1998). Kropiewnick (2001) reported female leaders “utilized the ethical perspective of care and responsibility with varying degrees” (p. 18).

Fennell (1999) conducted a study of six women principals who perceived that leaders need a strong sense of mission to ensure that the vision of the organization is fulfilled through building rapport with faculty and establishing lasting relationships. Fennell also concluded that women approached power differently from their male counterparts. Women viewed power as non-hierarchical, and did not seek to exert power over people.

Despite the preference of leadership styles that are more frequently associated with women, men continue to be hired in secondary principalships at a higher rate than women (Loder, 2005; Thurman, 2004; Grubbs, 2002).

Harris et al. (2002) asserted that if women are to be successful in the male-dominated public sphere, women in educational leadership must effectively integrate the best of what is stereotypically feminine with the best of what is stereotypically masculine. The result will be a woman’s way of leading that is empowering, inclusive, and serves as a new model for educational change.

### *Evolving Role of the Principal*

The role of the principal has evolved in a number of ways. No longer is the principal considered a mere manager of people and schools who hoards power and exerts authority over others. This leader dominated view has shifted to a view of leaders engaging in power sharing with subordinates. Harris (2004) defined this type of leadership as less bureaucratic, more interactive process.

Because of the complex problems faced in increasingly diverse schools, new thinking and new ways of leading are required to navigate these issues. Gaskins (2006) noted while it is important that all potential principal candidates understand the new role of the principal, it is even more incumbent for African American women. Such an understanding may be important in becoming a successful candidate for the high school principalship.

Turner (2007) asserted that the role of the principal has been characterized as one of the most demanding positions in educational leadership. Once only considered a disciplinarian, principals today must possess a diverse range of skills and knowledge in order to be successful leaders. Fullan (1997) suggested that today's principals must be instructional leaders, change initiators, managers, personnel directors, problem solvers, and visionaries.

The Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI, 2005) defined eight roles that are critical for leaders to meet the elevated expectations for student achievement, drive change in the school culture and sustain school improvement:

1. *Data Analysis Leader* – demonstrates the ability to lead teams to analyze multiple sources of data to identify improvement needs, symptoms and root causes.
2. *Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction Leader* - demonstrates the ability to implement a systems approach to standards-based environment prioritizing curriculum standards, developing aligned assessments and planning instruction to improve student achievement.
3. *Performance Leader* – demonstrates the ability to strategically plan, organize, and manage school systems and processes necessary to improve student achievement.
4. *Operations Leader* – demonstrates the ability to effectively and efficiently organize resources, processes, and systems to support teaching and learning.
5. *Relationship Leader* – demonstrates the ability to identify and develop relationships among customer and stakeholder groups and communicate school goals and priorities focused on student learning.
6. *Process Improvement Leader*- demonstrates the ability to identify and map core processes and results to create action plans designed to improve student achievement.
7. *Change Leader* – demonstrates the ability to drive and sustain change in a collegial environment focused on continuous improvement in student achievement.

8. *Learning and Development Leader* – demonstrates the ability to guide the development of professional learning communities to develop leaders at all levels of the organization.

These roles were developed to improve the quality and supply of educational leaders in the state of Georgia. They are included in this chapter because a consistent theme in the review of literature is that women preparing to enter into the principalship should understand the necessary skills and leadership traits that will facilitate the attainment of high school principalships.

#### History of the African American Principalship

Recent focus has been given to the legacy of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision and its impact on education today (McCray, 2007; Murtadha & Watts, 2005; Karpinski, 2006). One unintended consequence was the demise of the African American principal (Karpinski, 2006):

Brown had a tragic consequence: the displacement, dismissal, and demotion of thousands of African American educators, in particular principals in the South. Although the lack of diversity in today's teaching force has multiple origins, a reexamination of one of its roots deepens our understanding of the past, illuminates the present, and bears the future. (p. 237).

Historically, African American principals headed all African American schools. After the decision in 1954, the number of community African American schools decreased and few principals survived the transition (Tillman, 2004; Siddle-Walker, 2003). School desegregation contributed to the decreased number of African American principals (Long, 2005). Post-*Brown* statistics show during 1963-1970, drastic decreases

in the number of African American principals occurred all across the South (McCray, 2007; Karpinski, 2006). African American principals who were retained were given positions as coaches, teachers, central office staff, or assistant principals (Karpinski, 2006).

Although the goal of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision was “to remedy educational inequities” in schools (Tillman, 2004, p. 102), it became the catalyst to fire and demote thousands of southern African American principals. Tillman (2004) asserted that African American principals were being threatened with extinction as a result of desegregation. While there have been modest increases in the number of African American principals since the 1970s, they are still underrepresented relative to the number of African American students in the population (Karpinski, 2006; McCray, 2007). African American principals represented only 9.8% of all principals nationally (National Center for Education Statistics, as cited in Tillman, 2004).

The literature characterized the work of African American principals prior to the *Brown vs. Education* decision. Tillman (2004) indicated that the African American principals were “transformers, translators, and cultivators” (p. 133). Black principals were “idols” and were called “professor” or “fessor” which were signs of reverence and respect (Brown & Beckett, 2007, p. 17).

Murtadha and Watts (2005) noted that “black educational leaders created schools where none existed, struggled against the perpetuation of unequal educational environments, or built viable alternative schools” (p. 591). They added that African American leadership was based on the moral imperative to overcome the social barriers of poverty and racism. After the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, these same

principals sought to eradicate segregation and educate African American children while facing resistance and hostility. It was the African American principal who was one of the most powerful influences in both the schools and the community (Karpinski, 2006; Brown & Beckett, 2007; Gaskins, 2006; Echols, 2006).

African American principals were role models, and respected community leaders. They developed resources through the acquisition of money, and other materials, introduced new curricula, and instilled in African American children resiliency, self-reliance, self-respect and racial pride (Tillman, 2004; Korcheck & Reese, 2002). Principals were also given the autonomy to manage their schools without interference from all white school boards and superintendents. They hired and fired personnel and understood how to operate within the power structure (Murtadha & Watts, 2005; Siddle-Walker, 2003; Karpinski, 2006).

In the post-Brown era African American principals face challenges that are more complex (Brown & Beckett, 2007; Gaskins, 2006; Karpinski, 2006). The schools serve as a microcosm for the communities surrounding them and are characterized by low test scores, locations in decaying neighborhoods, lack of parental support, and discipline problems (Murtadha & Watts, 2005; Siddle-Walker, 2003).

An emphasis is now placed on the leadership of African American principals and how they are able to influence the academic achievement of students. According to Brown and Beckett (2007), research on contemporary African American principals demonstrates they share a commitment to the education of all students, a compassion for, and understanding of their students and of the communities in which they work.



### Exemplary Historical Models of African American Female Leadership

Murtadha and Watts (2005) conducted a historical analysis of African American female leadership and found that in every period of U.S. history, they had been agents of change who believed strongly that education, social justice, and their moral imperative were all intertwined. Through service in churches, service organizations, and women's clubs, these leaders emerged as dominant forces in improving the lives of their people and became increasingly recognized as educational leaders as they built schools that responded to the needs of black children, families, and communities.

#### *Jeanes Supervisors*

One of the earliest vehicles that provided leadership opportunities for African American women was the Jeanes Supervisors (Green-Powell, 1993) which began in 1907 with a million dollar endowment from wealthy Philadelphia Quaker Anna T. Jeanes to provide education for African American students in the rural South. Jeanes Supervisors were women who served in the dual capacity of teacher and principal from 1907 to 1967. The program began in Georgia in 1908 and began with six women and grew to fifty-three by 1939 (Green-Powell, 1993).

Although this role was explicitly defined by guidelines established by the General Education Boards, African American women used this role to enhance historical ties between African Americans and social institutions to improve educational equality (Tillman, 2004; Green-Powell, 1993). Jeanes Supervisors were viewed as leaders in their communities. Duties included introducing new teaching methods and curricula, organizing training sessions for professional development, and serving as assistants to the superintendents (Tillman, 2004; Green-Powell, 1993).

They were professional leaders who used their experience to develop strategies that would improve other black schools. Jeanes Supervisors were also heavily involved in the communities in which they lived and worked. They worked with churches and other community groups to improve sanitation, health, and communities in general (Tillman, 2004; Green-Powell, 1993).

### *Mary McLeod Bethune*

At the turn of the century, a number of African American women served as exemplary models of school leadership. Mary McLeod Bethune is credited “in the entire history of blacks, [to have] set a record of influence that no one has yet approached” (Berry, 1982, p. 290). Bethune developed a strong desire to build her own educational institution despite her lack of experience and financial resources. With only \$1.50, she started her own school in Daytona, Florida, (1904) which later became Bethune-Cookman College.

Through her hard work and dedication, the school served as the “rallying point” for African Americans. Community meetings, conferences, and forums were held on the campus as a means to improve the lives of the African American community. Her reputation as an educator facilitated her appointment to the advisory board of the National Youth Administration by President Franklin Roosevelt.

Under her leadership thousands of black students went to high school and college (Murtadha & Watts, 2005).

### *Anna Julia Cooper*

Anna Julia Cooper served as principal of the well-established M-Street School in Washington, D.C. which was the city’s only high school for African American students.

Cooper worked to strengthen the curriculum especially in the classical subjects even though this view was in opposition to the vocational and industrial education that Booker T. Washington proposed for African Americans (Tillman, 2004). Because of her initiatives, the number of African American students attending Ivy League schools was dramatically increased.

### *Nannie Helen Burroughs*

Educator, civil rights advocate, and religious leader, Nannie Helen Burroughs expressed the discontent of African American women in church who were “once enslaved by white men and were now suppressed by black men” (Murtadha & Watts, 2005, p. 602). Like many female leaders of the time, Burroughs found great opposition to her school by the male leadership of the National Baptist Conference who eventually withdrew support for her institution because of objections to her leadership style. Heavily influenced by Anna Julia Cooper, Burroughs opened the National Training School for Women and Girls in 1909 in Washington, D.C.

The curriculum placed importance on vocational education and racial pride. The importance of history was also stressed as each student was required to take a course in African American history. While the school began with a meager 31 students, some twenty five years later over 2000 students had attended the high school (Murtadha & Watts, 2005).

### *Fanny Jackson Coppin*

Fanny Jackson Coppin (1837-1913), “one of the most influential African American educators of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century” (Tillman, 2004, p. 108), served as principal of Philadelphia Institute for Colored Youth which was the highest educational

appointment for any woman in the nation at that time. A former slave and domestic worker, Coppin first gained national recognition for opening evening schools for newly freed slaves at Oberlin College.

The school became a beacon of African American achievement and was considered one of the best secondary schools in the country. High academic standards, a rigorous science curriculum, and a classical college preparatory curriculum contributed to the school's national and international student body (Murtadha & Watts, 2005). The school was one of the earliest examples of the connection between African American leadership and student achievement (Tillman, 2004).

### *Lucy Laney*

In Georgia, after teaching for ten years in cities such as Macon, Savannah, Milledgeville, and Augusta, Lucy Laney began a school in a church basement in Augusta (New Georgia Encyclopedia). This school became known as the Haines Normal and Industrial Institute in Augusta which was the first school for African American children. Laney solicited money to expand her school and developed a rigorous liberal arts curriculum. More than 900 students were enrolled at the school during its peak, and today Laney High School now stands at the site in tribute to her contributions to education (New Georgia Encyclopedia).

### The African American Woman: Life and Educational Leadership

Nearly three decades ago, Doughty (1980) asserted that the African American female administrator at the high school level was virtually invisible. Today, African American women find themselves at the bottom of the occupational ladder because of the impact of race and gender (hooks, 1989). Thirty years of gender based research has

focused little on the dual impact race and gender has on the lives of African American women. In the available literature on African American women in educational leadership several themes are salient.

### *Invisibility*

Pollard (1997) suggested the minority status of women resulted in processes that alienated and isolated them in the academic workplace. BFT uncovers these processes and utilizes the stories that African American women tell as a means to empower and give voice to the silenced (Taylor, 2004). Breaking this silence is the process by which African American women seek to reclaim their humanity, by giving new meaning to their lived experiences, in a system that gains part of its strength by marginalizing black women.

According to the United States Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics School Staffing Survey (SASS) only 11% of principals are African American (2002). Similarly, according to the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) 16% of principals in the United States are “educators of color”, 11% are African American, 4% are Hispanic, and less than 1% Asian. By contrast, the student population has become increasingly diverse. Nearly 55% of students in public schools are African American and Hispanic (Fenwick, 2001).

Traditional educational research focused almost exclusively on the impact of gender when considering the under-representation of women in educational administration (Grogan, 1999; Simmons, 2007). The influence of race has been marginalized and African American women are grouped into studies relating to all women in educational leadership. Simmons (2007) asserted “racism is perceived as a

historical artifact and not as the powerful shaper of all our lives it actually continues to be” (p. 2).

Coursen (1995) noted that the literature is “strangely silent.” Similarly, Gostnell (1996) noted that the experiences of African American women in the field of educational administration provide primarily statistical and non-contextual studies of African American women. Franklin (1999) utilized Ralph Ellison’s idea of invisibility to identify the struggle many African American men and women experience when their talents and worth are not valued or recognized because of racism and prejudice.

More recently, Bloom and Erlandson (2003) utilized the metaphor of “invisibility” to characterize the African American female principal’s struggle for equitable recognition. According to Simmons (2007), “the issue of invisibility is exacerbated by race and gender for African American women, and has been particularly noted in public school administration” (p. 7). Voices of African American women should be heard because their social positions and experiences are different than that of white women:

Asking questions from a white woman’s view highlights the unwanted outcomes of such practices: a) perpetuating the practice of intellectual and cultural exclusion by creating the appearance of acceptance in women’s studies using an ethnic additive model, and b) failing to acknowledge that white women retain white privilege; women of color do not hold such privilege, thereby making African American women’s experiences similar in some ways to women in general but deviant from the white female norm. (p. 344)

Gostnell (1996) underscored this point. In order to understand the meaning of

African American women's leadership, "one must not only listen to their personal stories, but must also become aware of the historical, political, and social context that undergirds their individual experience" (p. 43). BFT "holds the view that society operates within power structures that seek to maintain the status quo by marginalizing particular groups in society" (Taylor, 2004, p. 82).

BFT relies on the importance of narratives and storytelling as a means to resist oppressive structures. Compared to mainstream research, research related to African American women is sometimes considered unremarkable, dubious, and unlikely to be published in professional journals. Conclusions are ignored or dismissed and seldom included as part of administrative theory because it is considered risky business (Morrison, 1992; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003).

### *Double Jeopardy*

Although African American women share with African American men the discrimination faced in their struggle for equality in America, and the limited access to public institutions as experienced by women in a male dominate society, they are still different from black males and white women. African American women experience role conflict because they are "pulled" by two sides, yet are not considered by either side (white female or African American male) as sharing in their struggle (Dardaine-Raguet, 1994). This dual burden of racism and sexism create special challenges for African American women (King, 1988):

Black women have long recognized the special circumstances of our lives in the United States: the commonalities that we share with all women, as well as the bonds that connect us to the men of our race. We have also realized that the

interactive oppressions that circumscribe our lives provide a distinctive context for black womanhood. For us, the notion of double jeopardy is not a new one. Near the end of the nineteenth century, Anna Julia Cooper, who was born a slave and later became an educator, earned a Ph.D., often spoke and wrote of the double enslavement of black women and of our being confronted by both a woman question and a race problem. In 1904, Mary Church Terrell, the first president of the National Association of Colored Women, wrote, “Not only are colored women handicapped on account of their sex, but they are almost everywhere baffled and mocked because of their race. Not only because they are women, but because they are colored women.” (p. 42)

This idea of “double jeopardy” or “double bind” has been explored by several of researchers (Doughty, 1980; Dardaine-Ragguet, 1994). It is based on the premise that black women face even more discrimination than African American men since either their gender or race may evoke negative responses from employers. Sometimes African American women find that they are placed in positions where they feel they must choose their “ethnicity over womanhood” or the reverse (Gaskins, 2006, p. 48). Gostnell (1996) claimed that the dual challenges of racism and sexism are ever present reminders of an African American woman’s status.

### *Community Service*

The leadership of African American women, their lives and work are historically embedded in the community. Studies that provide an alternative portrayal of leadership of African American women found they have a commitment to understanding the community and its cultural norms. Focus is placed on how to use knowledge for the



educational achievement of all students (Lomotey, 1989; Franklin, 1999; Dilliard, 1995; Pollard, 1997). Gostnell (1996) cited a 1987 conference that explored the leadership of African American principals. The panel of women noted that for African American women, the community was an important forum for leadership development.

The leadership narratives of African American women were “rooted in anti-institutionalism, rational resistance, a sense of urgency, deep spirituality, and a strong sense of community” (Murtadha & Watts, 2005, p. 594). Leadership was provided for organizations and movements to improve the plight of African Americans (Banks, 1995; Loder, 2005; Collins, 2000). Many African American teachers and leaders considered their work a part of a larger religious or spiritual mission.

#### *Reliance on Spirituality*

African American women were guided by “deep spirituality” and “openly acknowledged God and faith” (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003, p. 364) which often translated into a commitment to “uplift the race” because education was viewed as a means by which one could improve their circumstances in life (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). Female African American leaders tend to rely on spirituality as a means to cope with stress and make sense out of adverse situations. Because of the tremendous demands placed on them for the success of all students, they feel they need “deliberate intervention requiring the use of power” (Bogotch, 2000, p. 2).

#### *Commitment to Students*

Lomotey (1989) identified three qualities of African American female leaders: (a) commitment to education of all students (b) confidence in the ability of all students, and (c) compassion for all students. Dilliard (1995) conducted a case study of an African

American secondary principal who embodied these ideals. For this principal leadership meant setting high standards for students, holding teachers accountable for making sure students reached the expectations, confronting those who held low expectations for students' behavior and academic achievement, teaching classes, and "othermothering" which involved consistently nurturing, protecting, encouraging students, and holding herself responsible for their daily success (Collins, 2000). Caring leadership was strongly connected to her cultural heritage and her status as an African American woman (Tillman, 2004).

Common themes emerging from the stories of African American female principals are caring and empowering practices involving direct interaction with the students and a commitment to their achievement. The review of literature revealed that these practices are now preferred qualities in educational leaders. Many relied on their "cultural consciousness" to guide leadership practices, and motivate both parents and students.

Although they worked under strenuous and challenging conditions (failing schools, low-income backgrounds) they still were committed to educating the children. Consistently, the women wanted to relate to the students by treating them as though they were their own children or members of their family (Tillman, 2004; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Loder, 2005; and Reitzug & Patterson, 1998).

### *Placement in Challenging Schools*

According to Hobson-Horton (2000), African American women administrators typically obtained their first administrative position in their mid-forties after having taught for 12-20 years, tended to be more deeply involved in church activities than

professional organizations, and were often assigned to schools that were considered “problematic” (Pigford & Tonnesen, 1993).

African American women tended to be offered positions in challenging schools and were perceived as a “messiah”, because they are hired in schools where men have failed and hiring a minority woman is the only option. When they implement plans to improve schools that are often in conflict with central office objectives they become “scapegoats” (Yeakey, Johnson, & Adkinson, 1986, p.21) or “sacrificial lambs” (Bloom & Erlandson 2003, p. 347) because they are then considered too controversial and difficult for the central office personnel to work with. Promotions are denied and often demotions and non-renewals occur (Gostnell, 1996).

Bloom and Erlandson (2003) conducted a qualitative study of three African American urban female principals who recounted this experience. One principal reported that she had been reassigned after her efforts to restructure her failing and district-neglected school were showing signs of success:

The politics in the district were astounding. The purpose of the schools [in the school district] was to maintain the status-quo of high ranking administrators. I was like a little fiefdom for a few. No one [at Central Office] wanted change or improvement. When I started stirring the pot, and parents became too involved, and the students wanted more opportunities, and the teachers were expected to teach, I got the boot. I became the problem. (p. 354)

Wesson (1998) concurred that female African American principals were hired in troubled schools with inadequate financial resources, high levels of poverty, low levels of achievement, and large numbers of African American students. Long (2005) found that

more than half of all African American principals were concentrated in urban areas, placed in schools with predominately minority populations and considered ethnic experts who are viewed as an expendable resource during crisis (Edson, 1988; Yeakey et al., 1986).

Moses (1997) referred to this trend as tokenism. These administrators were only assigned to programs and schools that targeted African American students. In these instances, African American women have positional power without the real political power within the organization to affect change. Undermined by colleagues, and superiors, the African American female principal was under close scrutiny and often set up to fail (Grimes, 2005). While such placements may benefit the community, they are considered detrimental to career mobility because they restrict opportunities for the individual to interact with potential sponsors from among higher ranking, typically white male administrators, thus impeding further promotion (Valverde, 2003).

These placements occur because African American women are viewed as unshakable, physically and emotionally immune to challenges or superhuman, capable of solving every problem and dealing with every crisis (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Doughty, 1980). Conversely, when they are deemed strong and unshakable they are stereotyped as unfeminine, domineering and demanding.

### *Courageous Leadership*

Leadership qualities of African American principals identified in the literature included characteristics of courage, strength, and perseverance (Jones & Montenegro, 1983; Bell & Chase, 1993). While these qualities are not limited to only African American women, they are mentioned as a necessity more frequently than white women

because of the dual burden of race and gender inherent in public school administration (Simmons, 2007).

Bulls (1998) conducted a study in which participants reported strength was necessary because of situations where they had to struggle to survive. Participants also reported a strong sense of accomplishment, and a need to be “better” rather than merely equal to white counterparts. The idea of being better is connected to the feeling that many African American principals must prove their competence. Brunner and Peyton-Clair (2000) noted, “You get tired as a person of color, qualified and competent, especially as a woman of color, having to engage daily in the mental and emotional battle of legitimizing yourself to others” (p. 541). Similarly, Allen et al. (1995) reported that African American women believed that they had to be twice as good as and better than others with the same aspirations.

#### *Need to Perform Better*

Hobson-Horton (2000) conducted a study of four urban female African American principals and discovered the informants felt that they had to be twice as good as a “majority principal” (p.162) and had to work harder to dispel negative stereotypes to prove their competence. The informants cited frequent attempts by parents and staff members to challenge their leadership by making “peculiar allegations” and questioning “routine decisions” (p. 162). All informants in the study reported experiences where they were viewed as less competent because of their race.

#### *Struggle to Overcome Stereotypes*

According to Bagwell (1999), African American women have always struggled to overcome “preconceived notions” (p. 16) about who they are. These stereotypes, myths,

and misconceptions regarding African American women often forced them to struggle to prove their abilities and self-worth (Gaskins, 2006). Jean-Marie (2003) suggested that African American women are perceived through a distorted lens and are viewed by a “specific set of grotesque caricatures that are reductive, inaccurate, and unfair” (p. 3).

Such gendered-racist stereotypes include the emasculating Sapphire who is considered harsh, loud, uncouth which in turn makes others seem more professional, charming and polished. Another stereotype is that of the “mammy” who is distinguished by her work and physical attributes. She is submissive to her employers and is depicted perpetually smiling, devoted, and contented with her life. Her identity is defined only by her ability to provide labor for others (Collins, 2000).

To overcome these stereotypes, African American women sometimes feel pressured to give up their cultural identities. They are pushed to serve one category and must therefore hide their true selves to placate others. This “shifting” occurs to accommodate differences in class as well as gender and ethnicity (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

They must become “bicultural” or able to function in two cultures simultaneously, but not compromise themselves, their culture, or their inner self in the process. Furthermore, African American females are challenged by “a quadruple jeopardy, being black, female, educated, and isolated, is a daily source of stress for the African American female” (Grimes, 2005, p. 3).

To cope with these difficulties, resiliency is a quality often associated with the leadership of female African American principals. Defined as the ability to recover from negative experiences and utilized as a survival mechanism for difficult situations, African

American women reported having developed resiliency because of constant encounters with racism (Etter-Lewis, 1993).

### Summary

This review of the literature documents the fact that entry into the high school principalship is problematic for all women, but more difficult for African American women who must overcome the challenges of both race and gender. Many of the factors cited in the literature nearly three decades ago, is still relevant to women in educational leadership today. The review of the literature documents the “gendered” perception of school leadership once based on the premise that men were more suitable for leadership because of traits that were only associated with masculinity. Though women are now believed to possess the qualities associated with effective leadership, women still remain under-represented in the high school principalship.

Despite documented barriers, the literature offers insight into strategies that facilitate the attainment of principalships. However, there is a significant gap in the literature that focuses on the specific experiences of African American women and the ways they negotiate barriers and implement strategies to overcome obstacles. Little attention is given to racism and the impact that it may have in the professional lives of African American women in educational leadership.

As schools become increasingly diverse and the enrollment of African American women in leadership preparation programs increases, it is necessary to include the perspective of contemporary African American women so that an accurate and full accounting of their experiences may enable future aspirants to obtain high school principalships.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology used in this study. It includes an overview of qualitative research and multiple case study design. The chapter also includes discussion of participant selection, data collection procedures, data analysis processes, and verification strategies. A qualitative case study design, incorporating critical incidents, was used for this study to illuminate the insight of three female African American high school principals and give “voice” to their leadership experiences in the context of race and gender.

It is important to understand the perspectives of African American women in educational leadership. In understanding their point of view, the dynamics of the processes that prevent the attainment of principalships are revealed. The overarching question for this multiple-case study is: How do three African American high school principals understand the influence of race and gender in their leadership experiences? Sub-questions are as follows:

1. What strategies do three female African American high school principals in Georgia believe facilitated their attainment of the high school principalship?
2. What barriers do three female African American high school principals in Georgia believe they encountered in their progression to the principalship?
3. How do three female African American high school principals conceptualize leadership?



## Research Design

Since the case study is a form of qualitative research, it is useful to begin an examination of this design within a broader context. According to Denzin and Lincoln, “the field of qualitative research is defined primarily by a series of essential tensions, contradictions, and hesitations” (2000, p. ix). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) broadly define qualitative research:

Qualitative research is a multi-method focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Accordingly, qualitative research deploys wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand. (p.2)

Qualitative research describes social phenomena as they occur naturally. No attempt is made to manipulate the situation under study. Qualitative research focuses on understanding the meaning people have constructed based on lived experience. Qualitative research generates knowledge through inductive inquiry by seeking theory that explains the data. Researchers focus on the emic perspective; that is the perspective of the participants in the study.

Qualitative research design is emergent, flexible, and responsive to the changing conditions of the study. Final results are descriptive and narrative and expressed in words, pictures, charts, or diagrams. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) enumerated qualitative research is inherently multi-method in focus which “reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question and adds rigor, breadth, complexity,

richness, and depth to any inquiry” (p.5).

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) outlined five phases in which research is conducted. Phase one involves the researcher acknowledging historical and research traditions that will guide the work while also confronting ethical and political conceptions of self and others. The researcher must demonstrate that personal interests will not bias the study. In phase two the researcher selects a paradigm; also referred to as an “interpretive framework” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 22) or “conceptual framework” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995) specifying how the researcher will conduct the research. In the conceptual framework, the researcher links specific research questions to larger theoretical constructs to illuminate the significance of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

The researcher then moves to the next phase of the research project which involves choosing a specific strategy of inquiry. The research design must include an empirical problem or research question, the purpose of the study, and strategies that will obtain the desired information. This research design must be a flexible set of guidelines that connects paradigms to strategies of inquiry, and specific methods for collecting and analyzing data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Phase four involves utilizing multiple sources of data collection: interviewing, direct observation, analysis of artifacts, documents, and the use of visual materials (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Glesne, 2006, Creswell, 2007). The researcher must develop data management methods to handle the large volumes of data that can be generated in qualitative studies. In the final phase of research, the investigator constructs interpretations and evaluations of the data using fieldnotes

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) cited a number of challenges to qualitative research. Qualitative researchers are called “soft scientist” (p. 8) as the research is criticized as unscientific, exploratory, and subjective. Critics argued that qualitative researchers have no way to verify the truth of the participant’s statements since the research lacks scientific rigor.

Proponents of qualitative research argued the differences in qualitative and quantitative research lie only in methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Rigor of qualitative studies is ensured through systematic research design, data collection, and data analysis. Qualitative researchers should maintain meticulous records throughout a study and completely document all processes (Miles & Hubberman, 1994; Yin, 1994) to ensure the methodical integrity of qualitative research.

This dissertation employed a multiple case study design as defined by Creswell (2007). Multiple case study is appropriate when more than one case is selected to illustrate a single issue (Yin, 1994). Case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. Each case is selected so that it either predicts similar results or produces contrary results but for predictable reasons. This case study examined the phenomenon of the African American female in the high school principalship, and her leadership experiences as situated within the contexts of race and gender.

Like qualitative research in general, case studies are criticized for lacking rigor, allowing “unequivocal evidence or biased views” (Yin, 1994, p. 21) to influence the work, and lacking generalizability.

Yin (1994) enumerated there is no basis for scientific generalization because “investigator’s goal is to expand and generalize theories and not to enumerate frequencies” (p. 21). The case study design is particularly useful for this study because it illuminates the lived experiences of African American women embedded in historical, social and political contexts.

Examining these experiences through the lens of black feminist thought (BFT) provides understanding of the influence of these contexts on the leadership experience of African American women. Knowledge is created to diminish the marginalized status of African American women and facilitate their emergence from racial and gendered stereotypes which have erroneously defined the role of the African American woman in educational leadership.

There are four basic assumptions of BFT that pertain to methodological issues in this study and form the basis for acknowledging and interpreting the multiple realities within ones environment (Collins, 2000).

1. The researcher must value the concrete explanations of the informant’s experience of marginalization. Concrete experiences are the knowledge and the intuitive understanding of one’s world and the words used to interpret the world.
2. The use dialogue as a means of data collection: dialogue is the basis for asserting knowledge claims.
3. The ethic of care includes talking with the heart that promotes connection and builds trust through emotions and empathy.

4. The researcher must demonstrate the ethic of personal accountability by taking responsibility for ensuring that the informant's interpretation is understood by all.

The researcher must acknowledge and respect other ways of knowing.

These assumptions provided the framework for giving voice to the informants because it placed the experiences of African American women at the center of the analysis. To give voice, I provided the informants with opportunities to explore their own realities. Collins (2000) asserted that African American women must find their own authentic voice as a means to develop positive self identification.

BFT focuses on the everyday experiences of African American women and the interlocking nature of race and gender in their lives. Such experiences are often not included in the mainstream literature relating to women in educational leadership. According to Gostell (1996), the reality of African American women is "defined by complexity and contradiction, by an acknowledgement that racism is a constant that must not become an excuse for giving in or giving up" (p. 71).

BFT offers a different view of African American women that encourages them to value their own knowledge base since it does not evaluate those experiences "in relationship to their degree of deviance from the experiences of white or black men, or of white women, but as having meaning, coherence, and the legitimacy in and of themselves" (Gostnell, 1996, p. 74).

### Sample

Three female African American principals in public high schools in Georgia were "purposefully selected" (Patton, 1990; Yin, 1994) as part of this case study. Patton (1990) noted "the logic and power of purposeful sampling leads to selecting information-rich

cases for study in depth. Information rich cases are those cases from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, 1990, p. 46).

The informants in this case were selected from a list of female African American high school principals provided to me by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission. The pool included 39 women who are currently serving as high school principals in public high schools in Georgia. I selected three women with consideration of the following criteria: (a) administrators who have been in their high school principalship for at least one year, (b) administrators whose districts are within a two hour drive of the researcher, and (c) administrators who represent diverse school settings including suburban, urban, and rural schools.

The informants participating in the study ranged in age from 42 to 48 years old. One of the informants is married and two are divorced. All of the women have two children. The informants were appointed principals at various stages in their educational career. Informant A became principal after thirteen years in education. Informant B became principal after five years in education. Informant C had spent 18 years in education prior to her appointment.

All of the women were the first female high school principal at their current school and two are both the first female and first African American principal. As indicated in the literature, two of the informants lead schools with a history of academic failure and high poverty levels (Wesson, 1998; Long, 2005). Informant A is entering her second year as principal. Both Informants B and C are in their fifth year as principal.

## Data Collection

After the Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board granted approval (see Appendix A) to conduct the study, initial contact was made with the potential informants and appropriate school district personnel via telephone. Each potential informant was contacted to introduce the researcher, describe the study, and request participation. After confirmation was received from the potential informants, inquiry was made with the superintendent or designee regarding procedures for formal approval to conduct the study. District letters of informed consent (see Appendix D) were then emailed.

The letter included a formal introduction of the researcher, details of the research project, a formal request for participation in the study, and criteria to establish confidentiality. Confidentiality was assured by assigning pseudonyms in all written reports for the name of the informants, schools, and school districts. Once consent was granted by each informant (see Appendix D), interviews were scheduled at a time convenient to the informants. All interviews were conducted in the school office of the informants. Each informant was asked to provide a copy of her resume to provide insight into her professional background. The informants emailed resumes to me upon request. A copy of the interview protocol (see Appendix E) was provided to the informants prior to the interview.

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews that incorporated critical incidents. The interviews were used “to elicit and collect stories that served as windows to the informant’s world” (Dodge, Ospina, and Foldy, 2005, p. 291). Thick, rich descriptions were incorporated into data analysis which is one of the central components

of BFT. The goal of the interviews was to develop a comprehensive view of the informants' leadership experiences and the ways in which they navigated the dual challenges of race and gender in their professional lives. Questions were developed with consideration of the overarching research question and sub-questions. A matrix was developed to show the relevance of the interview questions to the research questions guiding the study (see Appendix F).

Interview questions also reflected the review of literature and theoretical considerations of BFT to illuminate each informant's knowledge regarding the ways that race and gender intersected her leadership experience. Glesne (2006) suggested developing the order of questions to promote a level of trust that allows informants to be open and responsive. The first questions were designed to gain understanding into the personal background of the informant and how it had influenced her decision to become an educator. The next series of questions probed her leadership experience and were designed to generate a detailed story about the factors that influenced or impeded her development as a school leader.

The in-depth interviews incorporated critical incidents to access the various stories the informants told about their experiences in educational leadership that "confirmed, explained, entertained, informed, defended, or challenged the status quo" (Riesman, 2002, p. 657). This storytelling allowed each informant to construct her own reality in her voice. Collins (2000) underscored the importance of expressing "voice or a self-defined viewpoint" (p. 99) by noting that BFT reflects an effort for African American women to reject the controlling images created by racism and sexism and replace them with constructed knowledge that combats such contradictions.



Riesman (2002) noted the informants' stories about their work create knowledge regarding beliefs, values, and emotions that reflect their social reality.

According to Collins (2000), the use of stories and narratives is one of the primary means to unfold the lived everyday experiences of African American women. BFT asserts that this knowledge is gained through real life experiences that empower members of marginalized groups to resist differential treatment and negotiate the interlocking systems of racial and gendered oppression (Collins, 2000). Knowledge produces insights which can enhance future practice in educational leadership.

The interviews were arranged and conducted according to the protocol established by Creswell (2007). The interviews were conducted in each informant's school office. Each interview lasted approximately two hours and was audio-taped for immediate transcription. Each tape was labeled with the date, informant pseudonym, and duration of the interview. All of the tapes from the interviews were stored in a locked desk drawer in my home office.

As each interview was completed, I transcribed the tapes. Preliminary notes were made regarding the early themes emerging in the data. The transcripts were emailed to each of the informants. In instances where additional clarification or information was needed, I posted the questions directly onto the transcript using the comment feature in the word processing program. Each informant returned the transcript with corrections or the additional information that was requested. This member-checking technique was utilized to verify and validate information transcribed and to insure that the authentic voice of each informant was heard (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995). Backup copies of all the transcripts were stored on a portable drive.

Since no single source of information can be relied upon to provide a comprehensive perspective of the phenomenon under study, (Glesne, 2006; Yin, 1994; Creswell, 2007) interview data were triangulated through field observations of the informants in their school settings and document analysis of their resumes. A data matrix (see Appendix G) was created to convey the multiple forms of data collected for this study.

Observations are considered fundamental in qualitative research because they are used to “discover complex interactions in natural social settings” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 80). No predetermined categories or observational checklists were used (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Rather “broad sweep” (Glesne, 2006) observations were made. I spent several hours in each informant’s school as an observer with no formal interaction in the research setting (Creswell, 2007).

Each woman had shared that she conceptualized leadership as transformational and facilitative so I focused on ways this leadership was evident in the school setting. During the observations, fieldnotes were recorded that provided insight into the informant’s daily leadership role and corroborated information that was shared in the interview. Resumes of each informant were a means to corroborate the various roles that the informant revealed she had held during her career.

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed according to the methods outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994) and occurred simultaneously with data collection. Glesne (2006) acknowledged this process enables the researcher to reflect, focus, and shape the research as the study proceeds. Miles and Huberman (1994) defined data analysis, “as consisting of three

concurrent flows of activity: (a) data reduction, (b) data display, and (c) conclusion drawing/ verification. These take place concurrently during the course of qualitative research in a continuous, interactive and iterative process (p. 10-11).

Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, and transforming the data into organized, reduced components. Data reduction occurred continuously throughout this study as I examined the transcripts, highlighted sections, and coded the data from which emerging themes were drawn. Codes names and labels were assigned using “in vivo codes” (Creswell, 2007) which are names that are the exact words used by the informants. Coding categories (see Appendix H) were designated by color highlighting the transcripts. Each coding category was represented by a different color.

Once codes were developed, cross-case analysis was conducted. Themes were revised based upon the most salient details emerging from the informant’s leadership experiences. The themes revealed how each informant perceived specific leadership experiences that related to strategies for gaining entry into high school principalships, ways to overcome barriers, diminishing stereotypes, and leadership conceptualization. In providing insight into each informant’s marginalized status, BFT views this knowledge as a means of empowerment to enable African American women to overcome the intersections of race and gender in their lives.

### Ethical Considerations

General safeguards to maintain the integrity of the study were utilized. To establish confidentiality of the informants, pseudonyms were assigned for the names of the informants, schools, and school districts in all of the written reports. All transcripts were secured and were available only to each informant and myself. Interviews were

taped recorded to ensure the accuracy of the informant's stories. Tapes were labeled and stored in a locked drawer in my home office. Written informed consent was obtained from the informants and district gatekeepers prior to conducting the study.

### Validity and Reliability

The goal of this research project was to give "voice" to three female African American high school principals because of their marginalized status in the male dominated arena of educational leadership. It was important that the interpretations made were consistent with the reality of each informant as revealed in the interview. While questions were framed by me, it was the story of the informants that emerged. Etter-Lewis (1993) maintained all women must tell their own stories in their own words. In consideration of this assumption, methods outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used to establish the trustworthiness of this study.

These standards included credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. Credibility and transferability relate to the study's believability. These two standards are used to determine validity. Triangulation of three data sources was used to gain insight into each informant's leadership. These sources included in-depth interviews, observations of the informants in their school settings, and document analysis of their resumes. Each informant's views of the credibility and accuracy of the data in the transcripts was solicited through member checks.

Reliability is defined as "the goodness of fit between recorded data and the phenomena in the setting being studied (Merriam, 1988) and is achieved by establishing confirmability and dependability. Confirmability refers to the neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias,

motivation, or interest, and dependability indicated the findings are consistent and could be repeated. An audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) provided a transparent description of the research steps taken during the study. I maintained complete records of all of the procedures utilized in this study. These records include copies of each transcribed interviews, data reduction procedures, interview protocols, coding procedures, copies of emails relating to correspondence with each informant, and theme analysis notes.

### Summary

This chapter described in detail the procedures that were followed during this study. I specified the questions that guided the research, then provided an overview of qualitative research and the case study design. Descriptions of the sampling strategy, data collection and data analysis methods were provided. Procedures for establishing the validity and reliability of the study were outlined. The chapter concluded with the procedures that addressed ethical considerations. The multiple case study design used in this study was appropriate for examining the leadership of the three African American principals since it enabled them to tell rich narratives regarding the ways race and gender intersected their professional lives.

## CHAPTER IV

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this multiple case study was to describe how three female African American high school principals understand the influence of race and gender on their educational leadership experiences. Each informant unfolded her experiences that had shaped her leadership in her own words. The overarching question for this multiple-case study is: How do three African American high school principals understand the influence of race and gender in their leadership experiences? Sub-questions are as follows:

1. What strategies do three female African American high school principals in Georgia believe facilitated their attainment of the high school principalship?
2. What barriers do three female African American high school principals in Georgia believe they encountered in their progression to the principalship?
3. How do three female African American high school principals conceptualize leadership?

In order to produce rich narratives, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were utilized. Although an interview protocol (see Appendix E) was used, each of the informants was given the freedom to unfold her story as she desired. Each informant's narrative is presented individually to reveal her unique story as it relates to her personal and professional background, leadership conceptualization, barriers encountered, strategies utilized, and recommendations to other African American females aspiring to the high school principalship. The chapter concludes with cross-case analysis of common themes that emerged in each informant's narrative.

The structure of the data analysis supports one of the assumptions of black feminist thought (BFT) that even though there is uniqueness in the individual stories, there are also commonalities or intersections among African American women. Other assertions related to BFT are discussed in the cross-case analysis of emerging themes common in the individual narratives.

### The Story Unfolds: Informant A

#### *Route to Leadership: Awareness of Race and Gender*

I met Informant A in her school office and was immediately struck by her cordial, outgoing demeanor. She invited me into her school office and we began a very candid conversation that lasted over two hours. Informant A is the principal of a small rural high school in eastern Georgia. The school is designated Title I, has not made Adequate Yearly Progress for two consecutive years, but the system has recently applied for and received charter system status.

The school has a student enrollment of 470 students: 95% are African American and 5% are white. Informant A is entering her second year as high school principal after having served 13 years in various roles in a neighboring predominately white district. She is married, has two teenage sons, and is 47 years old. She is currently pursuing her doctorate degree at a university in Georgia. Her ascent in educational leadership is via an atypical path.

My background is actually having been 13 years in the military and then when I got out of the military I did some community education. I worked at a non-profit agency which was an alcohol and drug abuse agency for teen moms who were pregnant and I was doing community education in terms of their parenting.

I say all of that to say that I have never taught in the public school setting which is going to make an interesting dynamic.

Because there was not a traditional teaching background from which to draw experience, Informant A recalled relying on a gamut of other experiences to prepare her for her current principalship.

I had been in my former system for 13 years. I spent two years as a middle school counselor after I left the position I mentioned earlier working at the alcohol and drug abuse center with parent teens that were parents getting off of drugs. From that I then took on a position at a child advocacy center where for two and a half years. I was their child advocate and executive director and in that capacity I worked with at risk kids who had been sexually abused and testified in their court cases. The interesting thing about that then led to me doing child abuse prevention training in two neighboring school districts and through that that's when a school social worker asked me if I had ever thought about coming into the school system. That opened up the door for me becoming the middle school counselor for two years. That then led to a position to be a high school counselor where I was for four years. That then opened up a another opportunity because of my work with at risk kids to be a counselor and assistant principal at the alternative school where I was for four years. With that I then had the opportunity to be the assistant principal at the second largest high school in the county. I was there as an assistant principal for four years, and then I was given the opportunity here to become the principal of this high school.



When asked how it was that she decided to pursue a principalship, Informant A acknowledged that while her military experience as an officer had provided valuable training to her in terms of how to lead and manage, she was content with being a counselor until individuals encouraged her to pursue a position in administration.

Becoming an administrator was really by virtue of individuals putting me in that path. Individuals just began asking, particularly my husband, asked if I had ever thought about going into administration and after having already been a military officer my thought was I've already been there and done that, but the more I was involved with other very good administrators, I started thinking that this might work because I can now have an impact on a greater number of kids from a policy and procedure standpoint and school wide improvement.

While Informant A was encouraged by others, even people in high level administrative positions to pursue a principalship, she remained skeptical that an African American woman could actually obtain that role in a predominately white school district.

I knew that going into administration meant that I had to be the right fit for the right school. That was not any easy road as an African American. My former district is a predominately white community and it was an interesting experience. I did not think that I would end up in a high school principalship because of how politically motivated that particular role seems to be in different communities. I had applied for different principalships in the county which were elementary and middle, but I had some interesting experiences on those interview committees.

When asked to elaborate on some of those “interesting experiences” Informant A shared a critical incident that she called “particularly telling” and directly related to her status as an African American woman. She elaborated that she has always done things “dually” in her career. She explained that when she was in the military she still was heavily involved in community work. She applied for a position as an elementary school assistant principal because she thought it would be a “good segue into administration.” Because of a very strong resume, she felt that she had a good chance to obtain the position. She recalled the principal of the school had shown her around the building. She had made it through the preliminary interview with the superintendent, and felt confident that the final interview with the twelve member school council would be successful.

Well, I didn't get that, and I didn't get the next two or three assistant principalships that I went for, but it just so happened that the school counselor at the school that I thought I was going to get, knew some individuals in the school council that had interviewed me and she had shared that I should not give up; however you do need to know some of the individuals on the council. ONE felt that some of the things on your resume could not possibly have been valid because of all the things that I have done regardless of the fact that I had references for each of the items on there. The young lady also told me that one of the gentlemen on the committee, in fact the only white male on the committee, had said that someone with my rich experience would be better served in the predominately African American community which was an adjoining county and that was an interesting wake-up call.

She elaborated that she was “stunned” on two levels. Because she was not a native southerner, she did not think that someone would articulate those sentiments in a meeting, and she was a respected, hard-working member of that community. She refused to “water down” her resume and decided that she would wait on her time. She continued to apply for positions and related another incident in which she was told that she had too little experience.

I had one interview for the assistant principalship at the middle school in that same county and so they offered me the half time position so that I could still be counselor at the alternative school. They told me that I did not have enough leadership experience for the half time assistant principalship at middle school which was predominately white. They told me that they needed somebody with more leadership whereas the other participants were not military officers, had not done the things in the community and it was all just a little strange to me, BUT I am a firm believer that divine intervention prepares you for the right opportunity.

Despite not being able to break into a full-time administrative position, she expressed that she continued to apply for positions at the local high schools and was undeterred by the fact that she was not selected. She viewed these as opportunities to make district personnel aware of her interest in educational leadership.

I did have an interview at a high school which was predominately white high school as well, and they also had offered me a part time assistant principal position as well, and I thought maybe I will go ahead and put my name in the hat and if nothing else I would have gotten good experience and the county will see that I am interested. In this particular county I was accustomed to going to

counselor's meetings and in the whole county there were only two black counselors or I would go to administrative meetings as a representative of the alternative school and see only three or four other African Americans. I was accustomed to this at this point. Being in the military as an officer I was accustomed to it too.

Informant A was finally selected as an assistant principal of one of the high schools in the district where she served for four years. She said that she had a great principal, white male, who both supported and encouraged her. Because she was the only African American administrator at the school, she recalled feeling the need to "validate at least credentially" that she was qualified for the job. Her white colleagues were older and did not like putting their degrees on the wall because it seemed "pretentious" them.

I put my degree on the wall because then when someone walked into my office it went past the race thing. I have found that with many white administrators that they have not had to do that.

When the principalship at this same high school became available in March of 2007 she applied for it. Once again doors were closed to her as she sought to ascend to higher ranks. She mentioned that there seemed to be an erroneous perception that she would not be able to relate to white students.

Some felt that I would not be able to relate to white students because I am an African American woman with an inner city background who had worked predominately with at-risk kids.

She then shared that she had a very candid conversation with her husband about the need to start sending her resume to other districts. In a few hours from the time that she submitted her resume through Teach Georgia, she was contacted by the superintendent and would later receive the job.

Now I am entering my fourth year as an AP, and I've gone through a couple of principalship interviews now, and I've gotten through the superintendent, but I am not quite getting through the school council. I'm finding out that I am ending up the top two or three, and getting responses when I go back to the assistant superintendent, "Well, just wait, it will be the right fit for you. They are looking for the right person" or "you didn't have enough teaching experience like they needed," or "you were in the top two, however, just hold on." The last time that that happened was in March 2007 and at that point that I did not get the principalship at a predominately white school in a community that we had spent thirteen years in. I shared with my husband maybe I need to start putting my resumes in other counties, and the first county that I did was this county, and I put the resume in online at Teach Georgia about two o'clock in the afternoon, and by about five o'clock I got a call from the superintendent.

Informant A shared that she put those challenges behind her because she was entering into a new position with its own set of dynamics and issues. She recalled being well aware of the myriad of problems that had plagued her new school. The community was racially divided and the school had a history of academic, discipline, and faculty issues that would need to be addressed. Informant A talked about the importance of her leadership in combating these problems and moving both the school and the community

in a positive direction. As both the first African American female principal in the school's history she said she wanted to get beyond racial and gendered stereotypes and lead in such a way that make an impact on all stakeholders.

As African American females, if we go to the principalship with a spirit of service, and put all the race stuff aside, then really they will transcend the role because they will be able to make an impact.

### *Leadership Conceptualization*

Informant A relishes her role as a principal because she feels that when you see African Americans in principalships it is sometimes because the central office feels that they need something different or that the student needs to see someone like themselves that they can emulate. She directed my attention to the many photos and notes on the wall of her office.

When the kids walk in, I want them to realize like the pictures you see behind you, that always reminds me, the little letters and things that I receive from kids, it always reminds me why I am here and that is to serve students.

As she spoke about her leadership she was very passionate in her desire to build a sense of community and restore pride in the school. Her focus in her two years as principal has been to maintain the stability of the teachers, create a climate that supports character development, create leadership roles for students and teachers and establish discipline. Although aware of the perception that women cannot successfully handle discipline particularly at the high school level, her experiences have proven it to be untrue. She conceded that initially some personnel and board members did not want a female.

They felt that the discipline at the school was so significant that they needed a male.

I am a strict disciplinarian, and the students understand that when I call...and I handle all of the discipline except for the seniors because I felt that it was important for me as a principal to set the tone. We are going to talk, but you are going to be disciplined because my role is to prepare you for life. Life has consequences and when you break the rules these are the consequences. So we'll talk. We'll help you to discuss how you are going to change your behavior, but you will get your discipline and the next time I expect better.

Even though she is a strict disciplinarian, she conceded that she still has a nurturing spirit with the students that comes from not only being African American, but stems also from being the eldest of her two other siblings. When I entered her office for the interview soft music was playing in the background which she said was to ease the student's sense of trepidation when they came into her office for discipline. She smiled candidly as she relayed that when they come in, she wants to focus on solutions to the problem instead of the problem that got them into the office.

She also indicated that she refers to all of her students by their last name with the title "Mr." or "Miss" because this breeds respect and enables the students to see the best in themselves. When I conducted observations in the school of Informant A, I noticed a bulletin board in the area outside of the school office that celebrated student successes in athletics and academics. The board was covered with newspaper articles and pictures of students. Informant A viewed this as a means to show students that they are cared about and valued. She also shared she viewed it as a way to raise student expectations.

Informant A attributes this nurturing spirit to both her gender and race.

I really think that that nurturing and that relationship building come from both the African American culture and from being female. Cause remember, historically it was African American women in the plantation house who were nurturing the babies of the leaders and such and so it is a natural way to be. As a mother I teach my two sons to be self-reliant. I think that my training as an African American mom has impacted my leadership here because I want them to become leaders of themselves. Don't just give me a problem, give me a solution and then we will come up with plan to work the solution. This is what I do with my sons, and I find it very much in play in my interactions with the students here.

Informant A believes strongly that her ability to effectively communicate with faculty, staff, and students is one of the keys to her success at the school. In trying to improve the school climate, she shared that her communication and human relations skills had enabled her to establish good relationships, build "buy-in" and trust in her leadership. Everyone has an important role to play in the success of the school. She is a strong advocate of distributive leadership and acknowledged that she thinks it is more innate in female leaders.

I believe in distributive leadership and I feel as a female administrator, the research seems to show that female administrators are more inclined to distribute the leadership than a good percentage of the male administrators are, and so I think that I believe in that type of leadership where teachers know that they have to be club sponsors. They have to participate on sub committees for major programs like honors day, black history. They have to participate in learning communities and be department chairs which is difficult in a small school.



I had the opportunity to attend what Informant A referred to as “Admin/Faculty Planning Sessions.” In these sessions, members of each department met with Informant A and her assistant principal. She co-facilitated the meetings and listened as teachers shared their concerns about curriculum or other school issues. Throughout the sessions there was a strong sense of collaboration as teachers and the two administrators worked on solutions to some issues they were having. Informant A shared that these weekly meetings were one way that she wanted to show teachers that their efforts and ideas were valued and that they did have a tremendous role to play in the overall success of the school.

*Barriers Encountered: Awareness of Race and Gender*

When asked about barriers that she had encountered in her leadership experience, Informant A mentioned racism as a constant constraint. She cited racism encountered in her former school district in the hiring process and the racial attitudes that prevail in her current district. She added that she does not allow those attitudes to hinder her success, but views them as an opportunity to rise to greater heights. She noted that her leadership is critical in dispelling negative perceptions about her and the school and that she relies on spiritual guidance to help her in these situations.

Barriers make me realize that everything rests with me. I tended to deescalate situations rather than escalate them. For me having that spiritual foundation gives me the opportunity to realize that all any parent wants to know is that you are being fair to their child. All any community person wants to know is that you are doing the best with their tax dollars. So with that in mind I don't personalize things because I know that if I keep the students first everything else will work

itself out.

Informant A shared an occasion when the Chamber of Commerce used her school to host their annual banquet. She recalled some members of the white community who walked through the halls and were surprised at how well maintained the facility was.

I could not help but wonder what were your expectations. With us being a predominately black school it was obvious that they did not expect for it to look better than the one up the street. I was proud of the fact that the kids took pride in the school and that is why it continues to look as good as it does even after five or six years.

She also spoke candidly about not yielding to negative perceptions about African American women. She addressed the perception that some people have regarding the “angry black female in general.” To combat that perception she shared she has always tried to build relationships with people. She believes that being difficult to deal with simply “sabotages your leadership.” Informant A affirmed that she has nothing to prove to anyone. Her military background taught her to always have “her ducks in a row.” For her that translates into having a “good plan” so that people are willing to share their insight and commit themselves to the school’s mission. She shared that being an African American woman has really enabled her to lead in a way that perhaps a white male could not because she is able to relate to the students’ struggles because of her own impoverished background.

She told the story of an irate parent who had been in her office upset because of some discipline that her son had received. The parent thought the student should have been able to “confront” the teacher “man to man.”

She responded to her very candidly that although her child might be able to confront adults in that manner at home, that at school that would not be tolerated because he is first and foremost a student who has rules that must be abided by. She explained to the parent that such confrontational behavior would not be tolerated. Informant A called this a “keeping it real” conversation with a single parent who had come to defend her “wayward son”, but left realizing that I was not the enemy that she would have equated with a male administrator.

### *Strategies Helpful in Attainment of the Principalship*

When asked about strategies that other African American females could use to obtain a principalship, Informant A discussed some factors that she had utilized in her leadership experiences. She cited effective communication as the key to help her successfully “forge bonds with students, teachers, parents, and community stakeholders.” Because she was the only female interviewed for the position at the time she applied, Informant A strongly feels that the interview committee saw that most of her skills as a leader revolved around relationship building which was something that was needed in that community to improve the parenting and student relationships. Communication is what she called her “key” because she views the teachers and students as part of her extended family.

Your education and your degrees might get your foot in the door, but it is how you relate to people and how you relate to students that will determine your long term success.

Informant A also placed emphasis on having mentors who are not necessarily other African American women. She asserted that African American women in

leadership positions should have different mentors for different reasons. She placed emphasis on having both African American and white mentors because they are typically the ones in top leadership positions at the central office. She cited her relationship with the director of a regional educational service as being instrumental in her ascent in educational leadership. Informant A elaborated on the importance of male and female mentors.

What it does to have male mentors is open you up to the idea that leadership is going to be predominately male in the high school setting. It brings your name into the discussion when you are mentored by men. In terms of women mentors, they give you better insight into what it is going to take to stay there once you make it there.

When asked what could be done to encourage more African American women to pursue the high school principalship Informant A cited encouraging more diversity in leadership programs as a possible solution. This could be achieved by encouraging African American teachers coming out of classrooms to participate in programs such as the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement which trains leaders to impact school improvement and student achievement. Since high school principalships “are more politically driven” than at other levels, Informant A mentioned community involvement as another means for people to see African American women in leadership roles.

### *Summary*

Informant A emerged as strong, charismatic, self-assured leader in a rural high school. She is trying to overcome past academic failure and a racially divided,

impoverished community. As an African American female principal she viewed her leadership as an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of her students.

In her story she elaborated on the ways that race and gender impacted her leadership. Her desire to nurture and relate to her students is attributed to her African American culture. Her collaborative leadership practices are related to gendered perceptions regarding the ways women lead. Informant A acknowledged that although racism had been a barrier in her leadership experiences, she had utilized strategies such as effective communication skills and mentoring to help her obtain the principalship. To increase the number of African American females in the high school principalship, she encouraged diversity in leadership programs, greater access to leadership training programs, and community involvement.

#### The Story Unfolds: Informant B

##### *Route to Leadership: Awareness of Race and Gender*

When I arrived at the school of Informant B, she was making rounds in the school which she told me was a part of her usual morning duty. She came into the office, immaculately dressed in a blue business suit. Her demeanor conveyed a strong, confident leader as she invited me to follow her back to her office. The office was warm, inviting and extremely organized. It was decorated with sorority paraphernalia. I shared with her that I was a member of the same sorority. With that knowledge she immediately became more relaxed about the interview which set the tone for a casual, conversational interview regarding her leadership experiences.

Informant B is the 42 year old principal of an urban high school in southwest Georgia. The school is designated Title I and has not made Adequate Yearly Progress for

two consecutive years. The school is currently in Needs Improvement 3 status. They are mandated to offer public school choice and supplemental educational services in the form of tutoring. The school has a student enrollment of 866 students: 79% are African American, 19% are white, and 2% other.

The school itself is a series of contrasts. It is located in the heart of what Informant B called “CME” which she said means “crime, murder, and execution.” This presents a complex set of issues, but Informant B was insistent that despite problems with rival gangs in the surrounding neighborhood, the school is neutral ground. She described the student body as a mixture of some of the most “affluent as well as impoverished students in the city.” The school offers an honors magnet program which is an advanced academic college preparatory program available to all qualifying students in grades 9-12. The school is a former Georgia School of Excellence. Informant B is the divorced mother of two children, and is currently in her fourth year as principal.

She is the first African American female principal in the school’s history, and is a self-described “fighter” and “underdog”. She added that she “fights” to get the teachers the resources they need, and she “fights” on behalf of all of the students to correct the disparities in the curriculum to “level the playing field” by providing all students with the opportunity to participate in advanced courses and creating a climate of high expectations in all classes.

Her road to educational leadership is through a circuitous path. Informant B began her career in education after she began a family and wanted to “get out of the rat race of business”. Informant B recalled that she had been a troubled child from a divorced home and would fight and get in to trouble at school. She shared that she had discipline at home

and supportive teachers at school who encouraged her, but at the time she could not see it.

I had so much love and support. I had it at home, but sometimes we fail to see the support at home. Then I had very supportive teachers that really did care about me and saw some things in me that I really did not see in myself.

After being assigned to the alternative her senior year, the principal encouraged all the students to think about their future. He told Informant B that she should consider a career as a teacher which is something she declared “she would never do”. When she decided to consider a career in teaching, it was this same administrator who would be instrumental in her getting her first teaching job.

Well, when I had this change of heart and I decided that I would change careers, and I decided to take the TCT, the person administering or the person assisting with the administration of it was that principal that I had had at the alternative school as a senior. We laugh...I was chosen. Of course we laugh, and he told me...now I didn't have an education background, but he said to me, if you pass this TCT I will give you a job. I passed the TCT...first attempt. I went in to see him and he gave me my first teaching job.

After substituting and becoming a paraprofessional, Informant B remembered her most rewarding experiences came as a math teacher at the alternative school.

I taught math at the alternative school, and I mean that it was probably one of the most rewarding experiences that I have had in education. A lot of the kids had been labeled lost kids or just kids who were very difficult to work with.

I really did not have any difficulties or very few difficulties with the students that I served. I think that was because there was a great deal of respect that was given to the kids. So for me I would just have to say that it was getting the respect and modeling the respect. This helped to build a relationship and a rapport with the kids.

Informant B credited her foundation at the alternative school for preparing her to deal with at-risk, impoverished kids. The time at the alternative school as both a teacher and director was instrumental in showing her how to deal with and how to relate to the students.

I was listening. I was teaching, and providing options and sharing myself, my misfortunes, my bad decisions. I was sharing those things and the kids listened and they could somewhat identify. Not that everyone has to have that kind of background in order to be successful, but it happened to be my background. So I wasn't afraid to share that I was a product of this system.

She credits the discipline she received at home from her parents as paramount in her development as a leader. She attributes the discipline she received as child with her ability to respect and respond to the students in her school. She noted that when she was growing up discipline was paramount in the African American community because people believed in "not sparing the rod." Informant B shared that because of that discipline she has a better understanding of the students in her school.

It is those things that help me understand and respect the children that we have right now. I understand that they will not always be these children making these bad decisions, so we don't want to break them of that spirit that they have because



that same spirit is what can propel them forward and can be a driving force in their lives.

Informant B shared that people began to notice her skill and encouraged her to pursue leadership. Leadership was not something that she had ever considered. Informant B recounted that she only had two years teaching experience and going into administration was not something that she desired. After continued encouragement, she pursued a master's degree in educational leadership.

I was kind of thrown into it because my administrations kept saying that I needed to go into administration. It really was not something that had been pressing on my mind. I knew that I had not taught but about two years when I started working as the alternative school director and of course after they continued encouraging, I said well I will give it a try. I went on and got my masters in leadership and from there the responsibilities were placed on me because others...not so much that I was seeking it, but others saw something in me and encouraged it.

After a very short time in educational leadership, she was named assistant principal at her current school where she served five years before becoming the principal at the age of 38. Not only was she the first African American female, but she was also the youngest principal in the school district. She credited her quick promotion to her willingness to work hard and volunteer her time to perform tasks "that she wasn't getting paid to do."

### *Leadership Conceptualization*

As Informant B spoke about her leadership, she was extremely proud of her practice. For her, leadership is a matter of transforming the lives of the people she

encounters. She articulated that from her vantage point leadership consists of listening carefully and relinquishing some control by following the lead of others.

I am an excellent follower. I am an excellent listener. When I say that I am a follower...many of us in administration are under the assumption that in order to lead, you have to lead all of the time. I don't share that belief. I truly believe that in order to lead you have to first be willing to follow. You have to. When you are a follower you understand that you do not know it all...that the person on your right may be a custodian or a nutrition worker...or the person on your left a classroom teacher or even a student...have ideas that when shared with yours or when put together with yours makes a wonderful idea.

Shared governance lies at the core of her leadership philosophy. Informant B conceded that there are some decisions that she makes alone. She added that many decisions impact the people she serves and to have their participation is essential to having "buy-in." She asserted that her school is a collaboration of "a lot of folk." She recounted a story about when she first came up with the idea to have a fall festival at the school in an effort to boost community relations.

Many faculty and staff believed that she "was crazy" to have the student body and community in an open area because of rival gangs in the community, many who were students in the school. She met with faculty to address their concerns and collaboratively they put forth a plan to make it work. What began as a two hour event has now grown into a half day occasion with officials from the local university, fire departments, and health departments. She radiated a huge smile when she stated that there had been no incidents, no fighting and the school had received only positive feedback for their efforts.

*Barriers Encountered: Awareness of Race and Gender*

When asked about barriers that she encountered in her leadership experiences, Informant B asserted that she does not view difficult situations as barriers but rather preparation. These metaphorical storms serve as motivation for her. She attributed slavery as having played a major role in facing challenges with strength and courage.

Slavery played a major role in my development as a person. I say that because in my life experiences I find it is in my storms that I really and truly find out what I am made of. It is in the difficult times that character develops and strength and all those things. So when I think in terms of slavery and all of the things that our ancestors went through...there was a tremendous amount of strength to endure the things they endured. I think in terms of that no quit attitude, I keep going in spite of conditions.

She conceded that trying to obtain a principalship was not easy, and that her job is still difficult. She described it as a “battle,” and asserted that when difficulties arise, she does not try to avoid them but faces them directly.

When things that are meant to be obstacles are placed in front of me I, I don't try to go around them. I don't try to go under them. I go full fledge ahead. I try to gather my thoughts and solicit the help from whomever I need it. Whatever the problem is I try to tackle it because I know on the other side is going to be something wonderful. I don't fear it. I don't fear those difficulties.

She acknowledged that racism still exists in what she referred to as a “white male dominated society.” She said that she has found that in spite of that one must continue striving and working hard “to make things happen for ourselves and for our children”.

She asserts that she has the confidence to be an influential leader despite the circumstances.

Informant B then shared several “difficult situations” that she had encountered in her leadership experience. Her current school had always been predominately white male dominated school system in terms of its leadership. She shared that she was both the first African American and first female principal of the school. As the assistant principal she recalled how she had worked alongside two white colleagues in the principal and the assistant principal. Her work consisted of “the jobs that no one else wanted” such as irate parents, and the bulk of the curriculum work. Rather than bemoan the assignments Informant B decided to undertake the tasks and make sure her work was exemplary.

I did many of the things that I guess that guys just did not want to do. Rather than complain about that, rather than get in a corner and cry and feel that I have been mistreated...I did them. Whatever I did I wanted to make sure that it was done extremely well. I realized that everything I did would be heavily scrutinized...it would be under a microscope. Not only that but I took great pride in the quality of the work.

She asserted that in the end she was “thankful for having been given the dirty jobs” because they were necessary to her development as a leader. When the principalship at the high school became available because of her predecessor’s impending retirement, she felt that there was some assumption that she would not be interested in the principalship perhaps because of her race and gender. She recalled how she was kept “out of the loop” and how the white male assistant principal was taken to administrative meetings at the central office level and it appeared to her that there was preparation for

him to become principal.

My predecessor who was retiring never asked me if I was interested, although I had done most of his job. He never asked me if I would consider running for the principalship. Perhaps that is because I am an African American woman, but he never asked me. It was very obvious to me that grooming that was going on.

There was preparation that was being made for my other colleague who was a white male.

Informant B recalled she was encouraged by teachers to apply for the position and decided to submit her application on the very last day. A total of four applicants applied for the position. The interview panel consisted of sixteen members who were teachers from the school. After the initial interview, the field of four was narrowed to two people: Informant B and the white male assistant principal. She emphasized that they underwent an extremely rigorous interview process with the superintendent.

We had...and I promise you when I say this...we had at least twelve to fourteen interviews with the superintendent after that initial interview. One on one...we had at least twelve to fourteen additional interviews...now I don't believe that that is common.

Despite the number of interviews, Informant B praised the superintendent for her leadership and her desire to do what was in the best interest of the school.

I applaud my superintendent because I truly believe that she was also aware of the "good ole boy" system and it took a lot out of her to do the right thing for this school. That is why I say I was chosen.

She asserted that she was “chosen” as if by some divine power because district politics were clearly against her. She had no mentors in the district who were in positions of power to help her. After she was named principal she recounted how she had open challenges to her leadership. She talked about a situation in which a number of the people on the staff left when she was named as principal. She attributed their decision to leave to a number of factors that included a lack of faith in her leadership, her race and her gender. She added that she was undeterred by teacher flight. She noted that she had a different vision for the school than her predecessor had and she needed people who would support her efforts. She viewed this situation as a blessing.

Obviously they did not believe in me or did not believe in the vision that I had for the school because it was certainly different from that of my predecessors. They left and I welcomed that and sometimes God moves people out of your way and that worked for me. I guess that I would just have to say that it came from everywhere. It came from within the race as well as outside the race. So I don't know that it was just because I was African American, or if it was that I was a woman.

Informant B recounted that some people who opposed her were still in her building. She shared that she had difficulty with negative attitudes from not only white faculty and staff, but with African Americans as well. She shared a story of a “rocky relationship” with a custodian who was in his 31<sup>st</sup> year at the school. He had never worked for a female before and was often unresponsive when she asked him to complete certain tasks.

Informant B felt that he was operating under erroneous assumptions that because she was an African American woman, she would be aggressive and difficult to work for. In trying to resolve the tension between the two of them she said that she told him that he should do the same things for her that he had done for the other principals for whom he had worked. Even though she said he spoke rudely to her, she did not take it personally. Rather than engage in a power struggle or exert her authority she said she handled the situation with a respectful demeanor.

I think it was pretty much that I had to go in and do what I do best and that is to lead and treat people with respect. They realized that I was able to do what I needed to do without being aggressive. I am more assertive than aggressive because I think that aggressive has such a negative connotation, but I meant business. I was always very professional in the way I dealt with that situation.

She said that once the faculty and staff realized that she truly cared about them, they were able to develop a level of respect that enabled them to build trust and create what she now calls a “family environment.” She shared that in her leadership experience she has tried to exert influence by “not being a dictator” and not requiring anything of the faculty that she is unwilling to undertake.

I am in the halls. I am in the classrooms. I even cover classes. There is nothing in this building that I won't do. That's another thing...I mean I do it all. I did not become a principal and then all of a sudden I could not pick up paper in the hallway. I don't have to call a custodian. I pick it up. There is truly nothing that I would not do. I serve in the lunch line. That's how you develop relationships with kids. So for those of us who understand that we want to make sure that we keep

that connection with the kids, we are in the classrooms. If I ask teachers to step into the halls then I am out there with them. I don't tell them to do something and then I come and sit behind a desk and do something else. They have somebody who is willing to get out there on the front lines with them, and they are my colleagues...I am not their boss.

She was very passionate about emulating the characteristics that facilitates relationship building in her school.

You have to build that relationship, and I think the relationship that I was speaking to earlier deals a lot with the kids, but you have to build relationships with the adults as well. If you are leading and no one is following you then you are not leading. So you have to present yourself in such a way that people want to follow you.

### *Strategies Helpful in Attainment of the Principalship*

When asked about the strategies that other African American females could use to obtain a principalship, Informant B discussed some factors that she had utilized in her practice. She referenced that a woman seeking a high school principalship should have integrity and confidence in her ability to lead. In terms of professional preparation, she added women must view "everything as preparation" and she insists that "true grooming takes place in difficult situations."

She insisted that leadership training must include "on the job" experience which the new performance based leadership requirements should address. She offered that women must realize that they don't know everything and that they must be willing to solicit help when needed. She stressed also that women interested in a principalship must



be “visible.” She suggested getting involved in student activities especially in ways that are outside the classroom.

That is where the true training comes from, getting in the trenches and working with kids and working these adults.

She added that she frequently visits community churches at the request of students, and that she was most proud of the fact that she had take a group of students on a tour of Europe last year. She continued that women must be effective communicators, and cautious of developing “clicks” that perpetuate negative stereotypes.

Don't lose sight of that thing that people view as a negative. RE-channel that energy and turn it into something positive. The fact that I wasn't afraid of working, the fact that I wasn't afraid of responsibility, the fact that I did not always extend my hand saying what am I going to get out of it if I do this for you. The fact that I did not ask for those things was one of the reasons that many people think that I was able to move up so quickly. I did not mind going to school and trying to learn. I did not mind volunteering my time. Working on the elementary level gave me an opportunity to see that I did not want elementary kids. I did not want it. It was not me and that year and a half was tough. It gave me a chance to be exposed to the lower levels and know that...Lord please don't let that be your plan for me. Communicating, not being afraid of responsibility, not being afraid of hard work, having integrity. There is a way to say anything that you want to say and even when you don't agree...we have been stereotyped as being argumentative and of also being very “cliquish” if I may say...which is another thing that can be very detrimental to anybody in a leadership role. You

cannot be cliquish. You cannot when we are in classrooms because the ascent to leadership starts before you even think about leadership. It starts long before. Everything that occurs in our lives is preparation.

This informant mentioned that sometimes women become “disgruntled” and “disheartened” when they cannot get into administration and this is a perfect time to “self-evaluate” and “not give up” because sometimes those negative attitudes come across in various circles. She suggested that women must network and build relationships with people and overcome their fear of the job if growth in the numbers of African American women in high school principalships is to occur.

### *Summary*

Informant B is a strong, confident leader who is undeterred by the issues that she faces at her urban high school. She is the first female and African American principal in her school’s history. As an African American female principal, she firmly believes in influential leadership that builds respectful relationships. She entered education as a second career and began her practice at an alternative school. In her story she acknowledged that she does not view difficulties as barriers, but rather as preparation.

The informant referenced her culture as having contributed to her strength as a leader. She cited challenges to her leadership that she attributed to race and gender. Strategies in her leadership practice that enabled her to become a principal included exuding confidence, getting on-the-job training in leadership preparation programs, soliciting help when needed, networking, and community visibility. Informant B concluded that African American women must not be afraid to pursue the goal of principal.

## The Story Unfolds: Informant C

### *Route to Leadership: Awareness of Race and Gender*

I met with Informant C on what I assumed would be a quiet Saturday morning in her school office. When I arrived on campus, I was first impressed by the sprawling campus. It was a huge facility. She would later tell me that the main hub of the building is over 250,000 square feet. This does not include the sports complex or the four trailers behind the school. There was a flurry of activity going on. A volleyball tournament was taking place in the gymnasium and picnic was underway for families and students who were a part of the ROTC program.

The high school is situated in a large suburban district in north Georgia. It opened in 2004 and has made adequate yearly progress each year. The school has an enrollment of nearly 1100 students: 48% African American, 38% white, 6% Asian, 4% Hispanic, and 1% other. The school is the county's most diverse high school. She pointed out to me the seventy four flags that hang in the commons area near the front entrance of the school. Informant C shared that there were 74 different countries represented in her school.

When I met her she seemed very quiet and soft spoken. As the interview proceeded she became very passionate about her story and emerged as a no-nonsense, strong-willed leader. She is an "old school principal" who "does not play" because of what she termed "the seriousness of the business she is in". She was very specific in the details of her leadership experiences. The interview lasted nearly three hours. She led me into a large, impressive office decorated with cultural art and school mascot paraphernalia.

Informant C is entering her fifth year as principal of the school, and shared how the demographics of her school is slowly evolving because of some disappointment among parents that the school was not going to be majority white.

It is interesting because the white families here did not realize that the school was going to have so many black kids so that has created its own issues, and of course now we have a 15% drop in white enrollment because of white flight and I have been one who has been very honest, painfully so and people do not want honesty. Quite frankly, they would not have put me here if this school was going to be majority white.

Informant C is the first and currently the only African American female principal in the school district. There are nine other high schools in the district. Informant C is the divorced mother of two college aged children. She is 48 years old. She has a specialist degree, and had completed all requirements for a doctorate degree except the dissertation.

My mother was not well, and in fact I did not finish my own dissertation because my mother became ill. That's why I am doing this today to help someone finish what I did not finish. We still don't think it is Alzheimer's because she still knows us all these years later. When she was ill, I shut down. I was at the point of writing the dissertation. I had done everything but the dissertation, so I am one of those ABD's.

Informant C comes from a family of educators, but had no desire to become a teacher herself.

I certainly felt that I would never end up teaching because everyone else was a teacher in the family on both sides. My mother taught, and was an elementary

school principal before integration, and my father was a county extension agent. He taught 4-H to students; my sister taught, my uncles, aunts everybody taught so surely I am not going to be a teacher.

She wanted to become a lawyer, but said that she “chickened out on the LSAT”. Through her mother’s encouragement she completed education coursework and began her teaching career in 1986 as a high school remedial English teacher. She had planned to make it a short career, but developed a passion to help her African American students and ended up teaching for ten years. She indicated that she had a responsibility to reach these students by challenging them with a rigorous curriculum in a caring and nurturing environment.

I realized that it was really where I needed to be...that the African American students for whom I served as a teacher really needed teachers who cared about them and I just adored them.

Informant C said she developed a passion for literature that she wanted to share with more students as she pursued a master’s in literature. She recalled making a request to the department chair to teach honors English and was told that she would have to justify why she wanted the class.

I recall around the fourth year I was very much into my master’s in education and was learning so much more as an adult about literature than I had as an undergrad. I ended up asking my department chair if I could teach honors English. She basically had me...because I would have been the first African American to teach an honors 11<sup>th</sup> grade class at the school...had us to come in one afternoon to justify why we wanted to teach advanced English. That was for my benefit

because I was the outsider looking to teach something that others had taught.

Following ten years in the classroom, Informant C accepted a position as assistant principal in this same urban school district. The district was plagued by a myriad of problems and she recalled knowing after her first year in administration that she did not want to pursue a principalship in that particular system.

As the years progressed as an administrator quite frankly it was unfortunate what I was seeing, and I did not want to be an assistant where I was not allowed to really get my job done and really hold kids accountable because the kids were running too many of the schools.

After she made it clear that she did not want to be a principal, she indicated that she felt she was retaliated against and was transferred to the worst high school in the county. As she described the school, Informant C became emotional and fought back tears.

It was a very tragic situation that had unfolded there. I label the school a John Doe school because people had forgotten about it. It just makes me want to cry when I think back about the school. There was a lot of prostitution in the community; a lot of drugs. Kids were not coming to school. Kids were ugly to teachers saying whatever they wanted to say. Parents were absent. Parents were inept at dealing with their kids, and I came in...you know...as this administrator who held kids accountable. The teachers were glad that I was there because when students cursed teachers they went home. In my worldview kids don't get to curse adults; adults don't get to curse kids. Having done that for three years, I knew long before the three years that I was going to have to leave.

Because of her mother's illness she accepted a position in her current district as a hearing officer because it was close to the interstate and provided easier access to her mother. After two years she conceded that she became burned out with the routine of the hearings and pursued another position. She became an instructional assistant principal at a middle school and was there only six months before deciding to apply for the principalship at her current school despite rumors that someone had unofficially been given the position even though no interviews had taken place.

I know how the games are played, and I am just real honest about it. I don't play the game by pretending. I play it by putting it out there forthrightly this is how I know things work out. So I went to the superintendent and I told him that I was aware who was going to get the new high school because this was the talk and this guy was actually making decisions for the school, and of course the interviews had not happened yet.

Informant C shared how she had developed some close relationships with colleagues at the central office during her time there as hearing officer. She underscored the importance of those relationships because they were instrumental in her obtaining the principalship. Because of her relationship with the superintendent she recalled being able to have a very candid, forthright conversation with him regarding school district politics. She was also called by a colleague and told to submit her application on the deadline date when it was discovered that she had not applied. She applied and obtained the principalship. She chuckled as she recalled comments that her competition had made regarding her appointment.

Well, we got both...we got two for one...we got black and female. I responded that well...we got two for one, we got instruction and discipline.

### *Leadership Conceptualization*

Informant C recounted the difficulties in opening a new school. The school opened with 600 ninth and tenth grade students. She had one assistant principal, and was responsible for all of the instruction. She noted that she had a reputation for being diligent and that district officials were aware that she would get the job done no matter what. She felt an obligation to get the work done despite the difficulties. She recalled opening the school without “basic things they needed” and “having to fight for resources.” Although she conceded she had a “great” county office and the support of the superintendent, she was put in a position of having to fend for herself because there was no structure in place to help her with “the pangs of opening a new school.”

They only gave me one assistant principal, and quite frankly they did that because they knew they could. They knew that I could. They knew that I would. They knew that I would get it done. It just speaks to the fact that we always have to be better.

As the years progressed, she has developed a reputation among teachers, parents, and students of being mean, stern, and strict. She noted this is the case because she is an enforcer of policy. She implemented a new dress code that has transformed the climate of the school.

We implemented a new policy for our students whereby they have to have their shirts tucked in and their pants on their waist, and we gave them the first week to get used to that. What it did for us this year is it changed the whole atmosphere of



our school because it is hard to act like a thug when your shirt is in your pants and you have on a belt. It is hard to have this persona or this image when you look like a real student.

Despite this perception, Informant C noted that she has a need to “connect with kids” but they still must understand that there are boundaries that they cannot cross at school. She elaborated that African American female principals tend to focus on the “nurturing piece” and that she is a “warm demander”. For her, students must understand that she cares about them, but she firmly believes in holding them accountable. Her desire to temper discipline with compassion stems from the lessons she learned from a family of black educators. Informant C shared that her mother’s colleague and former principal, who was the subject of her research for her dissertation, spoke candidly about an obligation to be surrogate parents to students.

When I look back on that now and that research it is pretty interesting to look through that lens called change...called time because things are so very different now in so many ways because of course before the schools were integrated, there was really no separation between home, community and the school and church...there just wasn’t, and now there is a disconnectedness...particularly in the black community that is really painful and when I have parents who are not requiring their student...their children to be accountable for academics and their behavior. It saddens me; it makes me mad on the one hand. I get a little upset too.

At this point in the interview, Informant C paused and seemed to be considering her words very carefully. She leaned forward and spoke in a near whisper.

We have to be parents and families for our kids regardless of whether or not a parent or student wants us to. It is that need to maintain a sense of a community in spite of there not really being one where we are all connected from out there to here because the kids are coming and going. We have such transience now. Parents are moving in and moving out. We have kids on the withdrawal list everyday. We have kids on the enrollment list everyday. It is that need to have that family dynamic in the building and the kids see that from me typically when they are in my office. I have had one or two kids along the way to call me “mama.” Last year one little girl...I was “tee-tee.” When you connect with them on that level...they want to work for you...they want to please you. So I parent whoever needs parenting. I parent parents. I parent teachers. I parent the students. I parent the administrators...whatever I need to do and I don’t mean coaching...it’s parenting sometimes having to come down off the principal’s role and have a heart to heart as a mother would to a child.

She added that she applies these same standards to teachers and they must be willing to do the work that is required because academic achievement is first and foremost, but she conceded that she turns over many teachers each year, and that she still has some on staff “who absolutely do not like me.”

Well, ultimately I have turned over a lot of teachers, partly because the first group who came in, many of them were surprised. I had these white teachers who came because their schools were too...whatever...too black...too whatever. So I lost some because of that; I lost some because they weren’t...I continue to lose some when they are not effective because I don’t allow them to stay here year after

year. I will help them as much as I can, but there are some things that I have learned about supporting teachers. Just like with kids you can only motivate a person to a certain point. It has got to be internal. It is intrinsic to a large degree. You can inspire but that ongoing inspiration comes from the inside, and we are required to do so much from our school system.

She said that ultimately all decisions are made with the needs of the students placed at the forefront. She said that she tries to accommodate teacher needs and cited specifically how she is careful to give them “some of what they want” when they give her requests for classes that they want to teach.

I tell them that you will get some of what you want, but it is rare that you will get all of what you want because if I do that then I am building a schedule based on your needs rather than student’s needs and all of us are servants. That’s just what we are. We are servants. Everyone one of us in the building...150 adults in the building...94 teachers...4 counselors...7 on my administrative team because I include the graduation coach and the ILT because I have four assistant principals. But custodians, cafeteria staff and paraprofessionals are all servants; that’s all...nothing more than that. When you lose sight of what you do ultimately you position yourself to be a school and a school system that no one wants to be a part of, and I have lived through that.

She believes in “holding people accountable” and admits that it is her expectation that both students and teachers “work at a higher level.” She added that she expects teachers to perform their jobs and does not put up with “nonsense like a poorly written test” or “inappropriate learning environments” or “holding a test for two weeks”. She

shared that she is compelled to address issues when they arise and “not let them fester.” She recounted an instance when she met a teacher in the hall with knee shorts on and she sent her home to change because it was inappropriate. She explained why some teachers choose not to stay.

They are not used to being held accountable. That is what I hear all the time. They are not used to being held to a standard. I tell them that I don't ask you to do anything that I don't do. There are times when I work seven days a week, and I am not going to ask anyone to do that. In other words, I am going to try to be doing more than what I am giving you to do, but my job is not on the front line like yours in the classroom.

She recalled another instance of how she had asked teachers to share their concerns which generated rich feedback. One of the overwhelming concerns was that as a faculty they did not “socialize” enough. While this was not high on her priority list she found monies, and created a committee to schedule functions throughout the year. She added that she is “learning to do those types of things” but that they do not negate the fact when issues arise they must be addressed. Informant C spoke very passionately regarding her relentless commitment to making sure they provide students with what they will need to be successful.

We are in such a serious business and I tell them that I have a sense of urgency that I can't even articulate. There is such fear and in particular with African American kids because we lose so many of them to all the negative elements out there. When I talk to them in here and I talk to them about the stats and how many of them are in prison and all of that. Some of them...they can't break that

cycle...while we have them we have to give them the full picture of what education can do and ultimately the teachers are the ones who are with them everyday...you've got to let them know that you care enough to expect them...and don't expect failure from them...you just don't. I am not relenting on what we have to do.

*Barriers Encountered: Awareness of Race and Gender*

Informant C shared that her principalship is constantly hindered by challenges that relate to her race and gender. She recalled the situation with the first assistant principal. She said that she had wanted an experienced assistant to come with her, but there was no one who “wanted to work for a woman.” She took a white male from a local school who immediately felt “entitled very quickly into the process and set out to be principal very soon and was able to get a job.” She said he perceived that she “was difficult to work for.” Informant C related that there was a notion that she was a “black bitch” because she would not allow him to think in any way that he was “running the school”. She continued that central office and others who know her, respect her leadership and strength. She added that in African American women strength is sometimes misconstrued.

There are those who see that strength as a negative. If I were a white male then it wouldn't be...the same skills I have I would be called brilliant. So it is that same old double standard that we live, but then that is all I know.

She added that although she would be offended by such perceptions she did not fear them because that was not an accurate portrayal of her.

I would be so offended by that, but I don't have that fear. I have never been fearful. My mother was not fearful so she did not raise us to be and her statement was you know 'I did not give you all any scary milk'. As I have lived through this here, there is no doubt that even if I were a white female it would be okay. It would be more okay.

She insisted that she is never "ugly" in conferences so people cannot say that she was rude to them because then that becomes the issue. She continued that even though they use the "black bitch" language, it does not really apply to the way she handles a situation. She noted that regardless of how disrespectful parents are when they come to her, she is careful not "to go down that road to with them". She noted that effective communication is essential because you have to be able to make the "difficult decisions" without being rude. She shared a story in which a parent was upset because her child's car had been towed.

One parent said to me well, I know we were wrong, but I really do want a refund. I want you to reimburse me. I said Ma'am you know that I am not going to do that. I said this is really unfortunate that your child's car was towed. I really hate that it was towed, but I am not going to reimburse you because the rules were made very clear. My voice comes down several decibels, and I smile, and I say no. She could not leave out of here and say that I was rude to her, but she made it clear that she was entitled to whatever.

She added that gender sometimes means people do not take the leadership of women seriously, so they can make demands and get what they want. She added that she refuses to be dismissed in that manner.

The things that they come at me with are all because I am a black person. The female means I can walk over you that is what that means. Female means surely she can't be that strong and black women are always considered stronger than white women. It means that when they come to me they are going to get some special treatment or they think they are because they are going to come at me with a nice smile; they are going to compliment me on something, but I am not supposed to be intelligent enough to read between that and know what they are getting at. When the answer can be yes the answer is yes, or if the answer is no I don't make it yes to appease anyone; it doesn't matter the race.

These challenges come to her on all fronts. Informant C recounted a story of an African American custodian who showed his "disdain for having a black female principal".

One of the issues that has really been quite telling is not even about teachers; it's about custodial staff. That has been with a black custodial staff.

She needed someone who would maintain the huge facility. She hired someone who had been an elementary lead custodian. She believed that problems arose with the custodial staff because they had been accustomed to doing what they wanted without any accountability from their former principals.

He was messy; he was of course unintelligent. I think he had been in special education here in the county. His wife worked here in the county as a cafeteria manager and she was used to saying what she wanted to say and having her way. When I saw how he was communicating, I would address him, and when things weren't clean, I would address that and he wasn't used to that so he told several

people that he couldn't work for that black woman there. That black woman is crazy because the other principal that he had worked for at the elementary school had let him come and go and do whatever he wanted to. So he and his wife decide that I was going to get fired because they were from the county and I was a transplant and they were going to call the central office and get me fired.

She added that she has had three lead custodians in her five year tenure at the school. Informant C believes she now has someone in the position who will be successful. She offered additional insight into her struggle with keeping a lead custodian.

I watch that piece because these were black people who had been used to the shucking and jiving. I don't shuck and jive. I am just about the business. I came to the county because I wanted to work in a real school system in a real school where kids were learning because I had been where the kids weren't learning and the teachers weren't teaching. The gender piece was really ugly but that was with a black man who because of his lack of education and his lack of experiences with leadership that looked like me. In as sense...no not in a sense...they made it clear that they would prefer to work for a white man. That is that old mentality that is kind of stuck in the forties and fifties which is quite sad so the gender and race piece was visible in as much as I was dealing with that with my lead custodian. With the educated populous it has been just a few along the way where it has been obvious but you know it is always there.

### *Strategies Helpful in Attainment of the Principalship*

When asked about the strategies that enabled her to obtain the principalship she cited the relationships that she built in the district as a hearing officer that are still



instrumental to her success. Despite constant challenges to her leadership, Informant C reiterated that she is able to endure these situations because of the relationships she has established at central office.

What I like about where I am is that I am able to get my job done. No one is hovering over me asking me why a student got this consequence and the teachers don't...they know not to call the county office. They know because the county office wants us to make sure that teachers are doing what they are supposed to be doing. Here, parents do call the county office because they are thinking that they are going to get something that they aren't getting here, but they get sent back to me and so I would say the antitheses of that question is that I am in system now where to a large degree I am able to be more effective because I am able to do my job. I don't have that hovering or second guessing of what I do and I make mistakes now and I will be the first to admit that. When they call the county office I am not in a panic because parents call all the time, and that is why I didn't want the job down there because I thought well I deal with that out here. Parents want what they want when they want it, and I can't stop what I am doing to give it to them. I've got a job to do and I have a whole school; they have one child. So the central office has a sense of that and they allow us to do our jobs and that is wonderful.

Recently, she added that she has been encouraged to attend superintendent's school even though she has no desire to ever become superintendent. She was recently recommended to serve on a panel of aspiring administrators at a local regional educational service agency. She spoke about how grateful she was that when an assistant

superintendent retired, and they had tapped her to replace him. She shared that she did not because she would then miss out on her first graduating class, but it meant so much to her that central office saw something in her leadership that they liked.

I have had some powerful experiences out here...positive that have allowed me to be okay with the nonsense when race and gender are an issue.

In building relationships, Informant C says that she is also building leadership capacity and relished the fact that nearly sixteen people from her school have been promoted. She said that as a black woman she had tried to help many people, but has grown somewhat weary. She took great pride in mentoring assistant principals in the district, but added that too many of them become “entitled” too quickly. Nonetheless, she added that she feels an obligation to help others.

In terms of why there are not more African American women in high school principalships, Informant C offered the following insight.

I would think that the gender part of that is probably more compelling than the race. Now in urban districts you have women running high schools and it just is not an issue. Here, in the sixth largest district in the state the mentality has not changed because the leadership has not changed that much whereby you have this white structure in place.

She added that few women have applied for high school principalships because the demands are too great. She referenced her own situation in which she was never at home because she was working seven days a week at the school.

All I know is that it is a sacrifice that women make that impacts family and women are the ones nurturing those kids and raising those families because if there is a spouse he is working as well. That has just been our role since the beginning...then it is a sacrifice and as much as the first year I was never at home. Now my son was in high school; my daughter was in college. He was a junior in high school and I was literally never at home. I would work 13 to 14 hours a day and I would work EVERY weekend both days because I only had one AP. So I gave up everything to do this in a way that some women aren't willing to. If the job is going to be done well then a lot of hours are still spent here as I do.

She stressed that being a female high school principal is a total commitment because they cannot half do things in ways that men can. Informant C asserted that women have to always be better, and to succeed at that sometimes means "you are not quite popular". She remembered some female principals and aspirants that she has encountered in her 23 year career who were "too mild-mannered to distinguish themselves." Others she said were "too temperamental...too hot and cold". She maintains that being a female principal requires a "steadiness" because it brings into play the notion that because you are a woman, you are just having a bad day.

So temperamentally women have to be able to provide steadiness and stability in a way that men by their very nature are like that. First of all they don't see as much in terms of the details. They don't see the details in the way that women do. For women who have been prepared to be principals and are not, I would like to be able to have that conversation with them. The ones who have not...part of it beyond the politics because that is always a factor...part of it is their failure to

convey a sense of steadiness and stability.

She attributes her own longevity has a principal to her ability to always be steady and calm in situations.

I think that that is why I am still here because I am somewhere in between. As strong as people think I am and I keep hearing that “she doesn’t play.” That is what I keep hearing and “that that lady is mean” but the reality is that they know that I don’t play, but I am never going to be just down right rude because when I have done that then that becomes the issue. I can’t address the very reason why we came together.

Informant C recommended that women must be willing to take on a variety of leadership roles to make them more “marketable” when they are seeking administrative positions. She added that women cannot get “caught up in one role” but rather find ways to engage in a variety of experiences. Women must have instructional experience as well as discipline experience. She recommended aspiring principals begin as teachers assisting with testing, and volunteering to keep detentions because this shows leadership capacity. She added that regardless of the politics in any system, when you have many experiences, it is difficult for people “to say that you are not ready.”

She asserted also that women must be willing to take their time and not rush into a position that they are not ready for.

I was also willing to take my time and do it. I was not rushing to be a principal. So twenty-three years in, but only five of those years as a principal, a full eight before I got it because I was not rushing to do what I wasn’t prepared to do.

She said that she knew when she was ready because “God communicated that to her.” Informant C insisted that women must have a “breadth of experiences” so that when the appropriate time arose no one could say that you are not ready. She added that women should not be just applying for jobs just to get their names “out there.” She said that when you have not done the job long enough, you don’t have a vantage point from which to draw valid experience. She credited her ten years of teaching experience as an invaluable asset because it gave her a perspective on the instructional, curricular, and disciplinary issues that she deals with on a daily basis as well as set a standard for what she wanted her leadership to be.

I was in a county where I had been in a situation where I learned everything not to do. There is no excuse for me ever because I had worked with the worst possible principal. When you have lived through that you don’t duplicate that. You know what is right and if you don’t know what is right that is kind of frightening for me because you are going to have somebody’s children that you are responsible for...lots of people’s children that you are responsible for.

### *Summary*

Informant C is a strict, no-nonsense leader in a suburban high school in north Georgia. The school is the most diverse in the county as 74 countries are represented in the student body. School demographics are currently being reshaped by continuing “white flight” from the school. Informant C views her leadership as an obligation to serve the students and provide them with the best possible education. She comes from a family of black educators and longs for the sense of community and connectedness found in schools before integration. She spoke candidly regarding the challenges that race and

gender play in her leadership and the negative perceptions people have about her, but is unwilling to relent in her drive to educate students. Despite barriers, she believes women must be steady in their temperament, and market themselves more effectively by having a diverse range of leadership experiences. She credits her effective communication skills and established relationships with central office personnel as critical to her success. She feels that all women must be patient in their pursuit of principalships, and dedicate total commitment to the job when one is obtained.

#### Cross-Case Analysis: Emerging Themes

This section examines the common themes that emerged in each of the three individual stories. Four themes were salient: (a) increased visibility in professional circles, (b) facilitative leadership, (c) desire to nurture students, and (d) legacy of struggle. Each is considered in turn.

##### *Theme One: Increased Visibility in Professional Circles*

Common in the narratives of each of the three African American women involved in the study, was the desire to position herself to access the resources that would facilitate the attainment of the principalship. Informant A credited her work in the community as paramount in her obtaining a principalship. She recognized that the high school principalship is “more politically driven” and asserts that African American women must be seen in “coordinating roles” so that when their name “comes across the table” it will be familiar to those in power positions.

Informants A and C shared that a part of this increased visibility came through their mentoring relationships. Informant A said her leadership experience had been shaped “by white male and black male mentors” which was beneficial because they were

in top leadership positions. Informant A recalled that mentoring had “brought her name in the discussion.” Informant C credited her relationships with central office personnel and the superintendent as critical in her leadership experience. Informant C shared that her “various roles and responsibilities” in the school district had made it easy for her to “package herself” and made it difficult for people to say that she was not ready for the job as principal.

Informant B asserted that much of her preparation had come from her “having worked in different areas in education”. She added that African American women must “expose themselves in the church and community” as serving in leadership positions. She added that “she welcomed opportunities” to show that she was not afraid of responsibility. Since she had no mentoring relationships in her district, she attributed these factors to her attainment of the principalship after only a few years in education. The examination of the informants’ resumes revealed each woman had a multiplicity of experiences relating to leadership roles. All of the women worked in the community with various organizations that focused on the betterment of at-risk youth. The literature supported this work in the community as an important forum for leadership development (Gostell, 1996).

### *Theme Two: Legacy of Struggle*

Each of the three African American high school principals acknowledged the legacy of struggle in their leadership experience. Two of the principals referenced slavery as having taught lessons that were pertinent to their survival in a white male dominated profession. Informant A shared of her struggles with limited resources in a small rural school district that she had to learn to “take a little and make a lot out of it” much like the

slaves did when they would try to make ends meet. Informant B indicated she derived her strength to endure difficult situations or “storms” in her leadership experience from what she imagined her ancestors experienced.

The women in this study represented a variety of backgrounds and school settings, yet each told stories of struggles and barriers that seemed racially constructed. Informant A recounted how she was told that district officials needed an administrator who “fit” the needs of the school. Similarly, Informant B acknowledged being isolated in her building by the assistant principal and principal, both of whom were white males. She recalled being “kept out of the loop” and was not initially considered for the principalship although her colleague was being groomed for the position. She accepted all of the “dirty jobs” that were given to her and made every effort to perform extremely well because she knew she would be “under a microscope.”

Informant B’s experience further highlighted the need of African American women to be better than their counterparts in the professional setting. Informant B is situated in an urban school district with a history of academic problems and limited resources. She recounted continuously in her narrative having “to fight” for her students and teachers to get the resources she needed to combat academic failure in the school. Informant C also recalled a number of challenges to her leadership. She struggled with the perceptions that she is a “black bitch” although she indicated that she never conducts herself in a rude or disrespectful manner.

Despite daily challenges to their leadership, each of the three informants exercised strength and resilience in order to survive. Each woman revealed an awareness of racism in her leadership experiences, but was unwilling to allow it to undermine their success.



*Theme Three: Facilitative Leadership*

In each informant's narrative, stories emerged regarding her belief in facilitative or collaborative leadership to build capacity through effective communication. Each of the women was devoted to a commitment to creating a setting that encouraged gratitude, cooperation and respect as a means to achieve school improvement goals and combat negative stereotypes regarding African American women. One of the goals of Informant A was to maintain teacher stability.

She added that she accomplished that goal by "putting teachers in leadership positions". She established "learning communities" and meets weekly with teachers to solicit input relating to curriculum and instruction. She said she came to the school with an understanding that each stakeholder had to become a part of the process or "get their slice of the pie" to benefit the kids. Informant A shared that she wanted to put facilitative systems in place so that in her absence other school personnel could "still nurture and take care of the needs of the kids."

Informant B asserted that the improvements at her school are the result of "collaboration among a lot of folk". She readily "solicits help" and acknowledged that "there are people in her building that know more than she does on certain subjects". She asserted that "she constantly thinks about how to take care of her people" and views her leadership as "influence". She cited a school collaboration to write a grant to help provide a mentoring program for her black male students.

She viewed leadership as both leading and following. Informant B acknowledged the ideas of the nutrition worker, the classroom teacher, the custodian, or even a student as valuable. Collaboration is achieved by clearly articulating her goals and demonstrating

that she is working towards the achievement of them as well. Informant C said it “is her mission to build leadership capacity”. She utilizes a “Better Seeking Team” comprised of teachers and administrators to make the crucial decisions that impacts the school. She advocates exposing teachers to as many roles as possible. She uses all teachers to help build the master schedule rather than just department heads. Informant C added the “prerequisite for this is effective communication on all levels” including written, oral, and interpersonal skills.

Each informant underscored the importance of facilitative leadership. It is viewed as critical to the “buy-in” of their school visions and essential in preventing “sabotage” of each principal’s leadership.

#### *Theme Four: Desire to Nurture Students*

Emerging in the collective dialogue of each principal in this study is the need to nurture students and build a sense of community. Informant A shared how she had spent a number of years working with at-risk youth to improve their conditions and put them on a path to success. In her principalship, she provided strong discipline tempered with a caring attitude which she believes instills “hope” and “pride” in them. Informant A attributed her nurturing spirit to the African American culture and her gender. Informant A said she drew from her own experience as a mother to help her “build bridges” with her students.

Informant B recalled her “most rewarding experiences” in education occurred early in her career at the alternative school where she treated students with respect that they reciprocated to her. She desired to “relate” to students, but give them the discipline they need to be successful. Informant B cited her upbringing and the discipline she

received as a child as influencing the way she handles her students. She believes in making connections with students and seeks opportunities to do so such as serving lunches in the cafeteria.

Intertwined in the story of Informant C is the obligation to nurture her students by building a sense of community. She conceded it is difficult given the transient nature of her school but she still strives to obtain the ideal “when there was no separation between home, community, church, and school”. Her commitment emanated from her family who were all educators many who served before integration. She shared her desire to “connect” with students and uses her “black mother tone” when needed. Students along the way have called her “mama” and “tee-tee”. Informant C noted that she “puts a lot of emphasis on the caring piece” which allows African American women to be successful. Informant C shared she feels a “sense of urgency” as it relates her African American students because of the negative impacts against them. Each of the informants seemed to be influenced by their personal experiences as mothers which translated into feelings of obligation to African American students who comprised the majority of each student body. This ideal of care and responsibility is well documented in both mainstream literature on female leadership and as well as literature regarding African American women (Kropiewnick, 2001; Beck, 1994).

### Summary

The preceding section expounded on the four themes that were a common thread in the narratives of the three African American female principals involved in this study. The themes highlighted the ways each conceived the impact of race and gender on her leadership experience and included the following:

1. Increased visibility in professional circle.
2. Legacy of struggle.
3. Need for facilitative leadership.
4. Desire to nurture students.

These themes and their relation to the research questions and the conceptual framework for the study are considered in the next chapter, which summarizes and concludes this study.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Introduction

Historically, the research has documented the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership (Grogan, 1999; Gupton & Slick, 2004; Hamilton, 2000). African American women are often less visible. It is important to address the obstacles encountered and strategies utilized by African American women who have obtained the principalship. The purpose of this multiple case study was to describe how three female African American high school principals understand the influence of race and gender on their educational leadership experiences.

The research consisted of three semi-structured in-depth interviews that focused on each woman's professional background, leadership conceptualization, barriers encountered, and strategies utilized to gain a principalship. The informant in each case was purposefully selected with consideration given to years in the principalship, geographical location, and school setting. A pseudonym was given to each of the informants to maintain confidentiality. The multiple case study gave "voice" to each woman as she unfolded her leadership experiences and the ways that race and gender intersected her professional life.

The overarching research question that guided the study was: How do African American high school principals understand the influence of race and gender on their leadership experiences. Three sub-questions were as follows:

1. What strategies do three female African American high school principals in Georgia believe facilitated their attainment of the high school principalship?
2. What barriers do three female African American high school principals in Georgia believe they encountered in their progression to the principalship?
3. How do three female African American high school principals conceptualize leadership?

This chapter presents summaries of the findings, an overview of the cases, as well as the implications of black feminist theory (BFT) and the relevant review of literature.

### Summary of the Three Cases

Each case represented a unique set of leadership experiences for the three informants involved in this study. However, intersecting in their voices are common elements relating to their path to leadership, leadership conceptualization, barriers encountered, and strategies utilized to obtain a principalship. A brief summary of each case is provided prior to the discussion of the cross-case findings pertaining to each research questions.

#### *Informant A*

Informant A is a 47 year old principal. She entered educational administration through the atypical path of community educator. She is the first African American female principal at a rural high school situated in an impoverished, racially divided community. She shared numerous stories of her unsuccessful attempts to obtain a principalship in her former predominately white school district where she had worked for thirteen years in various roles.

She situated this experience within the contexts of racism and gender bias because she was not the right “fit.” She espoused distributive leadership as a means to have a greater impact on her students. Informant A utilized human relations skills, community involvement, and mentorships to facilitate her path to the high school principalship.

*Informant B*

Informant B is the 42 year old principal of a predominately black urban high school in southwest Georgia. The school is currently in Needs Improvement 3 status for not having met the standards of Adequate Yearly Progress. She was named principal at the age of 38 and was then the youngest principal in her district. She entered into administration after only a few years teaching and credits her ascent to others seeing her leadership skills. While she acknowledged difficulties in her leadership experience, she was careful not to refer to them as barriers because of her resilient spirit. She viewed these challenges as preparation for her own principalship. Informant B conceded that racism and sexism exists, but that she is a fighter who will not allow such challenges to impede her progress.

*Informant C*

Informant C is the 48 year old principal of a large suburban high school in north Georgia. The school has been open for only five years, and is one of the most diverse in the district. Despite consistently meeting the standards of Adequate Yearly Progress, the school is experiencing “white flight” that Informant C attributed to school demographics. She spoke candidly and honestly regarding the many challenges she has experienced in leadership that are a result of racial and gendered perceptions or stereotypes. Informant C shared that she has daily challenges to her leadership, but is unrelenting in what she must

do in order to move the school forward. Her leadership was strongly influenced by her mother, a former teacher and principal during integration, as well as other members other family who were educators. She asserted she understands “how the game is played”, and credits her strength and positive relationships with district personnel with her success.

### Summary of the Findings

#### *Research Question 1*

*What strategies do three female African American high school principals in Georgia believe facilitated their attainment of the high school principalship?*

The theme, *increased visibility in professional circles*, emerged as the most salient one in the stories of these individuals. The literature acknowledges that in order for women to become successful in educational leadership, they must increase their visibility in professional circles (Beason, 1992; Holtkamp, 2002; Wyatt, 1992). This is especially critical for African American women who experience “double jeopardy” (Dardaine-Ragguet, 1994; Doughty, 1980).

The narratives revealed that none of the women had initially pursued leadership positions. The three African American principals in the present study indicated that certain activities had facilitated their attainment of the principalship. All of the women engaged in activities that increased their visibility in professional circles, such as forming relationships with persons who became their mentors and advocates. Mentors recognized leadership qualities in them and put them on a path toward administration because of the leadership qualities they displayed.

Mentoring and sponsoring are often cited as important strategies utilized by women for career advancement (Allen et al., 1995; Young & McLeod, 2001).



Mentorships or sponsorships provide access to the power structure that women usually lack. The literature mentions that the best mentors for women are other women (Allen et al., 1995), yet the women in this study cited their mentorships with white males as a critical part of their success. Two of the three informants asserted they had benefited from these mentoring relationships while one reported she had no mentor in her district.

A second path to the position of principal was work in the community. Each of the women in this study had increased their visibility by such engagement, especially by service in various leadership roles. This is typical of African American women as their work is historically embedded in the community (Banks, 1995) and considered part of a larger mission to improve the lives of others. The literature supports community work as an important forum for leadership development (Gostnell, 1996) for African American women.

### *Research Question 2*

*What barriers do three female African American high school principals in Georgia believe they encountered in their leadership experience?*

The theme most pertinent to this research question is *legacy of struggle*. According to Collins (2000), there is a constant struggle for African American women to survive in the workplace. The findings in the three narratives indicated that female African American high school principals encountered significant challenges in their leadership experiences that hindered, but did not prevent the attainment of a principalship. Each of the informants encountered inequitable selection processes that favored their male colleagues. These women were either not considered for leadership positions while their male counterparts were being groomed for the role of principal, or

were unsuccessful with interview committees. These filtering methods are often viewed as a means to reinforce the myths that women and minorities are unsuitable for the high school principalship (Simmons, 2007; Pecora, 2006). Shea (1983) maintained “fit” is nothing more than a process to eliminate candidates based upon race, gender, or background. After they received their appointments, the informants contended with negative stereotypes relating to African American women as well as women in general. The literature relating to female leadership suggests that it is common for women to encounter resistance from teachers and parents who view them as easy to manipulate or intimidate (Harris et al., 2002).

The idea of “double jeopardy” is applicable since each informant reported that she encountered barriers or challenges that were both racial and sexist. Each woman in the study readily embraced facilitative leadership and relationship building, although certain staff and parents attempted to define them through negative lens. Black feminist theory (BFT) acknowledges the fact that other people often shape the identity of African American women.

However, each woman sought to deflect these negative images by projecting themselves as caring, confident, capable leaders which is viewed in BFT as a key to empowerment. While all of the women cited challenges in their leadership experience, two were hesitant to refer to the challenges as barriers. Rather they viewed these instances as temporary impediments to their success. This resilient spirit allowed them to “bounce back” from these negative experiences (Gostnell, 1996, p. 72). Collins (2000) acknowledged that resiliency is often a quality associated with the leadership of African American women as a survival mechanism for difficult situations.

### *Research Question 3*

*How do three female African American high school principals conceptualize leadership?*

Two themes were pertinent to this research question. The first theme was *facilitative leadership*. The narratives revealed that each of the women valued facilitative leadership as a means to “build relationships” and foster school improvement. Each woman had an awareness of negative stereotypical images relating to African American women, and was conscious to dispel them in their leadership practice through facilitative leadership. None of the women wanted to be viewed as aggressive, difficult to work for, unwilling to share power, or an angry black woman.

Common in the narratives was the desire to put teachers in leadership positions, and include them in decision making processes at each school. All of the women cited effective communication as essential in facilitative leadership. Facilitative leadership was viewed as a means to move others toward “buy-in” of their visions and goals for each school.

The existent literature characterizes women as relational leaders who focus on collaboration and team building (Grogan, 1999). Studies that focus on the leadership of women cite effective communication skills, establishing rapport, empowering others through delegation of responsibility, and relationship building as attributes of female leadership (Wyatt, 1992; Harris et al., 2002; Growe & Montgomery, 2003).

The present findings reveal that for African American women, these traits are critical in their leadership since they typically encounter negative perceptions others have about African American women in general. As a result, African American women must prove their abilities and legitimize themselves to their counterparts (Brunner & Peyton-

Claire, 2000). This idea is connected to each of the narratives, since the informants acknowledged the idea that as African American women they must always be better and do more.

The informants in this study validated their own standpoint instead of succumbing to the usual stereotypes that they would be difficult to work with, aggressive or angry. This exemplifies a premise of BFT which asserts that African American women are always cognizant of their marginalized status because of race and gender, and that they must be able to access the setting and locate themselves within it (Collins, 2000).

Collins (2000) further asserts that, even though African American women operate in white power structure, they use their power to transform structures toward their agendas or goals. In recognizing her “outsider-within” status, African American women are then able to develop methods that enable them to survive and resist.

*Desire to nurture students* emerged as the second theme. All of the informants demonstrated an ethic of care toward students in order to build relationships. Two of the informants expressed their own impoverished backgrounds had influenced how they related to students. A common thread in all of the narratives was a sense of urgency towards African American students in particular.

All of the informants had experienced working with at-risk youth. Two of the informants are principals in predominately African American schools with a history of academic failure. The narratives revealed each woman had a “commitment” to the students that was akin to the type of commitment and obligation they had for their own children. The informants attributed their desire to nurture students to culture and gender. All viewed students as part of their extended family and frequently acted as surrogate

mothers to them.

According to Lomotey (1989), the leadership of African American female leaders is often characterized by a commitment to the education of all students, confidence in the ability of all students, and compassion for all students. African American female leaders who embody these ideals set high standards for both teachers and students (Dilliard, as cited in Tillman, 2004) to achieve goals.

The literature reveals these caring and empowering practices are tied to the cultural heritage of African American women (Dilliard, as cited in Tillman, 2004) and is a prevalent theme in mainstream literature regarding female leadership as well (Beck, 1994; Kropiewnick, 2001). Despite some challenging conditions in their schools, each informant expressed commitment to helping students transcend their circumstances. They viewed themselves as mothers and students as part of their extended families.

BFT views this practice as “othermothering” (Collins, 2000) and links it to historical experiences where African American women made such commitments because of a personal, social, and moral obligation to uplift the race. This cultural consciousness is influenced by the way African American women define both family and community and how they determine what approaches are best suited to meet the needs of the community (Tillman, 2004; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Loder, 2005).

Collins asserts “othermothering” is an ethic of care where African American women feel accountable to all the African American community’s children and treat them as they are their own kids. Each of the informants in this study viewed this practice as a means to influence the academic achievement of the students (Brown & Beckett, 2007) as they would with their biological children. According to Collins (2000), such relationships

are intended to extend kinship bonds and networks as a means of empowerment.

### Conclusions

The voices of the three principals in this study revealed three resilient leaders with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Yet, woven among their stories are common themes which reveal the impact of race and gender on their leadership experiences. Based on the findings in this study, female African American principals encountered barriers or challenges that were considered racist and sexist.

Each told stories of various leadership experiences that were a direct result of them being African American women. The experiences related to hiring practices, stereotypical images, and leadership conceptualization. Despite such challenges, each woman utilized various strategies that enabled them to overcome the intersections of race and gender in their leadership. Paramount among those was a need to increase visibility in professional circles by seeking opportunities and undertaking various roles that demonstrated leadership capacity.

The principals in the study conceptualized their leadership as an obligation and a commitment to nurture students, particularly African American students, in a manner akin to the ways in which they nurtured their own children. The African American principals in this study utilized facilitative leadership to build relationships with all key stakeholders. This practice was considered an invaluable asset in moving everyone towards school improvement goals and dispelling negative stereotypes typically associated with African American women.

The narratives of each woman reveal strong, confident leaders who are undeterred by negative racial and sexist practices. The articulation of their knowledge and

experiences defines them as emerging agents of power. Their distinct voices and collective stories will encourage other African American women toward educational leadership.

### *Implications*

Based on the findings in this study, the following implications are made for practitioners in educational leadership:

1. The perspective of the women of diverse cultural backgrounds is essential to increase the knowledge base on women in educational leadership. Since the leadership experiences of African American women are often excluded in mainstream literature, the findings of this study offer authentic insight into their practice.
2. The findings in this study may be used in school districts to assess hiring practices and policies and alleviate those that may hinder well-qualified minorities from obtaining positions.
3. The findings in this study may be used in university preparation programs to not only address the condition of African American women in the secondary principalship but to offer realistic programs of study that prepare them for the role of principal.

### *Recommendations*

Based upon the findings in this study, the following recommendations for further research are made:

1. Conduct research that examines the way female African American principals conceptualize leadership and its impact on student achievement.

2. Conduct comparison research of female African American principals to their white counterparts to examine the impact of race and gender in their leadership experiences.
3. Conduct research with female African American principals that focus solely on strategies utilized for career advancement.
4. Conduct research with various stakeholders to examine their perspective of the female African American principal.
5. Conduct research that examines the hiring practices and policies of school districts and their impacts on the selection of African American women to the principalship.

### Concluding Thoughts

As an aspiring African American high school principal, I was compelled to examine the leadership experiences of current principals as a means to understand the impact of race and gender in their professional lives. Because there are few African American women serving in the high school principalship, their experiences are not well documented. I wanted to gain an authentic awareness regarding their struggles and triumphs as they progressed toward and obtained a principalship.

I sought to understand how they progressed to the principalship, how they conceptualized leadership, what barriers they had experienced, and what strategies had they utilized to obtain a principalship. The methodology utilized in this multiple-case study was extremely valuable in eliciting rich narratives that articulated the lived experiences of the three principals as they related to those areas. As is the premise of BFT, they emerged as agents of knowledge that will assist and empower all aspiring



female African American principals as they journey toward a high school principalship.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
IRB APPROVAL

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

To: Angela M. Smith  
P.O. Box 135  
Toombsboro, GA 31090

CC: Charles E. Patterson  
Associate Vice President for Research

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

Date: September 4, 2008,

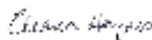
Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: H09024 and titled "The Impact of Race and Gender on the Leadership Experience of Female African-American High School Principals", 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.

*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.*

This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol, you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. 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 Hayner  
Compliance Officer

APPENDIX B

IRB COVER

RESEARCH COMPLIANCE CONSOLIDATED COVER PAGE  
**Georgia Southern University**

For electronic submission: Your proposal narrative should already be completed and saved. Next complete cover page and “Save As” a word document to your computer or disk named “Coverpage\_Year\_Month\_Date\_lastname, First initial.doc.” Then open and complete Informed Consent Checklist. Email the entire package to [ovrsight@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:ovrsight@georgiasouthern.edu). Original signature pages may follow by mail.

***Application for Research Approval***

<b><i>Investigator Information:</i></b>		
Name of Principal Investigator: Angela M. Smith	Email: amosley3@georgiasouthern.edu	<b>For Office Use Only:</b>  Protocol ID: _____  Date Received:
Phone: 478.933.5279	Address: P.O. Box 135 Toombsboro, GA 31090	
Department: Educational Administration		
Name(s) of Co-Investigators: None	Title of Co-Investigator(s): None	
Personnel and/or Institutions Outside of Georgia Southern University involved in this research: No investigators outside of Georgia Southern will be involved in this research.		
<b><i>Project Information:</i></b>		
Title: The Impact of Race and Gender on the Leadership Experience of Female African American High School Principals		
Brief (less than 50 words) Project Summary: This qualitative multiple-case study will examine the leadership experience of three African American women currently serving as high school principals in public schools in Georgia. In-depth interviews will be used to give “voice” to each informant and unfold her story regarding the impact of race and gender in her professional life.		
<b><i>Compliance Information:</i></b>		
Please indicate which of the following will be used in your research:		

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Human Subjects (Complete <i>Section A: Human Subjects</i> below) <input type="checkbox"/> Care and Use of Vertebrate Animals (Complete <i>Section B: Care and Use of Vertebrate Animals</i> below) <input type="checkbox"/> Biohazards (Complete <i>Section C: Biohazards</i> below)	
<b>Section A: Human Subjects</b>	
Number of Subjects: 3	Project Start Date: Sep. 2008    Project End Date: Dec. 2008 (no more than 1 year)
*Date of IRB education completion: 12/11/06    ( <b>attach copy of completion certificate</b> )	
<i>Purpose of Research:</i>  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> For use in thesis/dissertation <input type="checkbox"/> Completion of a class project <input type="checkbox"/> Publication (journal, book, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Poster/presentation to a scientific audience <input type="checkbox"/> Results will <b>not</b> be published <input type="checkbox"/> Other	<i>Please indicate if the following are included in the study:</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Informed Consent Document <input type="checkbox"/> Greater than minimal risk <input type="checkbox"/> Research Involving Minors <input type="checkbox"/> Deception <input type="checkbox"/> Generalizable knowledge (results are intended to be published) <input type="checkbox"/> Survey Research <input type="checkbox"/> At Risk Populations (prisoners, children, pregnant women, etc) <input type="checkbox"/> Video or Audio Tapes <input type="checkbox"/> Medical Procedures, including exercise, administering drugs/dietary supplements, and other procedures
Check one: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Student <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty/Staff <b><i>If student project please complete advisor's information below:</i></b>	
Advisor's Name: Dr. Sandra M. Nettles	Advisor's E-mail: snettles@GeorgiaSouthern.edu
Advisor's Phone: 478-0538	Advisor's Department: Cont. Ed & Public Service Admin P.O. Box: 08124
<i>Signature of Applicant:</i>  X	Date:
<i>Signature of Advisor (if student):</i>  X	Date:
<b>Section B: Care and Use of Vertebrate Animals</b>	
Project Start Date:	Project End Date: (no more than 1 year)
<i>Purpose of use/care of animals:</i>	<i>Please indicate if the following are included in the study:</i>

<input type="checkbox"/> Research <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching <input type="checkbox"/> Exhibition <input type="checkbox"/> Display	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical intervention with vertebrate animals <input type="checkbox"/> Housing of vertebrate animals <input type="checkbox"/> Euthanasia of vertebrate animals <input type="checkbox"/> Use of sedation, analgesia, or anesthesia <input type="checkbox"/> Surgery <input type="checkbox"/> Farm animals for biomedical research (e.g., diseases, organs, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Farm animals for agricultural research (e.g., food/fiber production, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Observation of vertebrate animals in their natural setting
Check one: <input type="checkbox"/> Student <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty/Staff <b><i>If student project please complete advisor's information below:</i></b>	
Advisor's Name:	Advisor's E-mail:
Advisor's Phone:	Advisor's Department: P.O. Box:
<i>Signature of Applicant:</i> _____ <i>Date:</i> _____ X	
<i>Signature of Advisor(if student)/Dept. Chair(if faculty):</i> _____ <i>Date:</i> _____ X	
<b>Section C: Biohazards</b>	
Project Start Date:	Project End Date: (no more than 3 years)
<i>Biosafety Level:</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Exempt <input type="checkbox"/> BSL 1 <input type="checkbox"/> BSL 2	<i>Please indicate if the following are included in the study:</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Use of rDNA
<i>Signature of Applicant (Faculty ONLY):</i> _____ <i>Date:</i> _____ X	

Please submit this protocol to the Georgia Southern University Compliance Office, c/o The Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs, P.O. Box 8005. The application should contain all required documents specific to the committee to which you are applying. Questions or comments can be directed to (912)681-5465 or [ovrsight@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:ovrsight@georgiasouthern.edu)



APPENDIX C  
PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

**For electronic submission: First complete the proposal narrative in entirety and “Save As” a word document to your computer or disk named “propnarr\_Year\_Month\_Date\_lastname, First initial.doc.” Open and complete Cover page. Email both to [oversight@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:oversight@georgiasouthern.edu) . Documents that require signature may be faxed to 912-681-0719 or uploaded in PDF. (Electronic submission is not required.)**

*Please respond to the following as briefly as possible, but keep in mind that your responses will affect the actions of the Board. Clearly label your responses in sections that correspond to the specific information requested. Make sure the narrative clearly explains aspects of the methodology that provide protections for your human subjects. You may insert your responses in each section on this page, leaving a space between the question and your answers. Narrative should not exceed 4 pages.*

The application should be submitted electronically or 2 duplicate copies sent to the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs, at P. O. Box 8005, Statesboro, GA 30460, and should contain, in this order: a signed cover page, the informed consent checklist page, the project proposal narrative, and the informed consent that you will use in your project. Additional information, such as copies of survey instruments, advertisements, or any instruments used to interact with participants should be attached at the end of the proposal clearly designated as an Appendix.

**Personnel.** Please list any individuals who will be participating in the research beyond the PI and advisor. Also please detail the experience, level of involvement in the process and the access to information that each may have.

**Three African American women who are currently serving as principals of public high schools in Georgia will be involved in this study. Each potential informant will be interviewed at her school at a time that is convenient for each woman. The interviews will last approximately two hours. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed, and each participant will have complete access to her transcript to review the accuracy of the information. Confidentiality will be established by using pseudonyms for each informant, school, and school district. Only the researcher, informant, and committee chair will have access to the tapes and transcriptions. Follow-up interviews will be scheduled as needed to clarify information in the transcripts. Interview data will be triangulated through use of observations of each informant in her school setting to provide insight into her daily leadership role as principal. Observations will be scheduled at a time that is convenient to each informant. The researcher’s role will be that of participant-observer. Observational data will be recorded in a field notebook for immediate data analysis.**

**Purpose.** 1. Briefly describe in one or two sentences the purpose of your research. 2. What questions are you trying to answer in this experiment? Please include your hypothesis in this section. The jurisdiction of the IRB requires that we ensure the appropriateness of research. It is unethical to put participants at risk without the possibility of sound scientific result. For this reason, you should be very clear on how participants and others will benefit from knowledge gained in this project. 3. What current literature have you reviewed regarding this topic of research? How does it help you to frame the hypothesis and research you will be doing?

**The purpose of this multiple-case study is to describe the influence of race and gender on the leadership experience of three female African American high school principals. Additional sub-questions are:**

- 1. How do three female African American high school principals in Georgia describe their progression to the principalship?**
- 2. What strategies do three female African American high school principals in Georgia believe facilitated their attainment of the high school principalship?**
- 3. What barriers do three female African American high school principals in Georgia believe they encountered in their leadership experience?**
- 4. How do three female African American high school principals conceptualize leadership?**

**Current literature reveals that there is an under-representation of women in the secondary principalship. A preponderance of literature identifies various barriers that women face as well as strategies to achieving the principalship. While many studies have focused on these issues, few have been conducted that focus specifically on the struggle of African American women who must overcome the dual challenge of race and gender to achieve the principalship. Understanding the obstacles they confronted as they pursued their goals, and the strategies utilized in advancing their careers will not only give voice to the experiences of African American women, but also give aspiring female principals valuable insight that may facilitate the achievement of the high school principalship.**

**Outcome.** Please state what results you expect to achieve? Who will benefit from this study? How will the participants benefit (if at all). Remember that the participants do not necessarily have to benefit directly. The results of your study may have broadly stated outcomes for a large number of people or society in general.

**The principal investigator hopes the study will provide the three women who have achieved the secondary principalship an opportunity to illuminate their experiences and provide a knowledge base for African American women who aspire to the high principalship. Although the results cannot be generalized to specific population, the perspectives of the three women in the study may raise new questions, challenge**

**traditional leadership theory, and dispel negative perceptions regarding the leadership of African American women.**

**Describe your subjects.** Give number of participants, approximate ages, gender requirements (if any).

Describe how they will be recruited, how data will be collected (i.e., will names or social security numbers be collected, or will there be any other identification process used that might jeopardize confidentiality?), and/or describe any inducement (payment, etc.) that will be used to recruit subjects. Please use this section to justify how limits and inclusions to the population are going to be used and how they might affect the result (in general).

**Data will be collected from three African American women who are currently serving as principals of Georgia high schools. In-depth interviews (approximately two hours each) will represent one of two data collection methods to be utilized in this study. The questions in the interview protocol (Appendix A) are designed to elicit information regarding each informant's leadership experience in the context of her race and gender. To maintain the confidentiality and ensure anonymity, names of informants, schools, and school districts, will be replaced with pseudonyms. Each interview will be tape recorded and transcribed for review by each informant. Follow-up interviews will be scheduled as needed to either clarify or expand upon information in the transcripts. The second data collection method will involve observations of each informant in her school setting. Following each interview, observations will be scheduled with each informant at a time convenient to her. Observations will be conducted to elicit data relating to the daily leadership role of each informant.**

**Only three African American women will be selected because the study examines the multiplicative influence of both race and gender. Current research in educational leadership often excludes the work of African American women. Qualitative research relies on a small sample size since findings are not generalized to a particular population. Considering the influence of both race and gender in our society, it is critical to get the perspective of only those women who might be marginalized by both of those factors. No inducements will be used to recruit potential informants. The informants in this case will be selected from a list of female African American high school principals provided to the researcher by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission. The pool includes 39 women who are currently serving as high school principals in public high schools in Georgia. From this list, the researcher will select three cases to include in the study. The overall criteria for sample consideration includes: 1) those administrators who have been in their high school principalship for at least one year. 2) those available administrators whose districts are within a two hour drive of the researcher 3) those available administrators who represent diverse school settings including suburban, urban, and rural. Initial phone calls will be made to each principal to explain the project and obtain her consent to participate in the study. Letters of informed consent will also be mailed to the potential informant and appropriate district personnel to obtain written consent. Upon receipt of written consent forms, data collection will ensue.**

**Methodology (Procedures).** Enumerate specifically what will you be doing in this study, what kind of experimental manipulations you will use, what kinds of questions or recording of behavior you will use. If appropriate, attach a questionnaire to each submitted copy of this proposal. Describe in detail any physical procedures you may be performing.

**During the course of this case study, the following procedures will be utilized to describe the impact of race and gender on the leadership experience of three African American high school principals. In-depth interviews will be scheduled at a time and location that is convenient for each informant. Prior to each interview, the interview protocol (Appendix A) will be provided to each informant. All interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed by the researcher. Each informant will be provided a copy of the transcription to check for accuracy of data and make any necessary revisions. Observational data will be collected by the researcher of each informant in her school setting following the interviews. Field notes will be used to record information relating to each informant's daily routine and interactions with others in the building. Data will be organized for analysis, reduced into themes through coding and represented in figures, tables, and narrative format. Cross-case analysis of the data will be used to identify similarities or differences among the cases. The results of the emergent themes will be used to describe the ways that race and gender impacts the leadership of African American female principals.**

**Special Conditions:**

**Risk.** Is there greater than minimal risk from physical, mental or social discomfort? Describe the risks and the steps taken to minimize them. Justify the risk undertaken by outlining any benefits that might result from the study, both on a participant and societal level. Even minor discomfort in answering questions on a survey may pose some risk to subjects. Carefully consider how the subjects will react and address ANY potential risks. Do not simply state that no risk exists, until you have carefully examined possible subject reactions.

**There are no known risks for participation in this study.**

**Research involving minors.** Describe how the details of your study will be communicated to parents/guardians. If part of an in-school study (elementary, middle, or high school), describe how permission will be obtained from school officials/teachers, and indicate whether the study will be a part of the normal curriculum/school process. Please provide both parental consent letters and child assent letters (or processes for children too young to read).

**No minors will be involved in the study.**

**Deception.** Describe the deception and how the subject will be debriefed. Briefly address the rationale for using deception. Be sure to review the deception disclaimer language required in the informed consent. **Note:** All research in which deception will be used is required to be reviewed by the full Board.

**No deception will be involved in this study.**

**Medical procedures.** Describe your procedures, including safeguards. If appropriate, briefly describe the necessity for employing a medical procedure in this study. Be sure to review the *medical disclaimer* language required in the informed consent.

**No medical procedures will be employed in this study.**

**Cover page checklist.** Please provide additional information concerning these risk elements. If none, please state "none of the items listed on the cover page checklist apply." The [cover page](#) can be accessed from the IRB forms page.

**None of the items listed in the cover page checklist apply.**

**Reminder:** No research can be undertaken until your proposal has been approved by the IRB.

APPENDIX D  
INFORMED CONSENT

---

COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY & HUMAN  
DEVELOPMENT

---

INFORMED CONSENT  
District

My name is Angela Mosley Smith and I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia. I am completing this study to fulfill partial requirements for the degree *Doctor of Education*. I am conducting a study entitled *The Impact of Race and Gender on the Leadership Experience of Three Female African American High School Principals* and I would greatly appreciate your permission to include the principal of (school name) as a potential informant in this research as her story may assist aspiring African American high school principals in their quest to become an educational leader. The researcher hopes to give “voice” to African American women in educational leadership by presenting a detailed portrait of their leadership experience how they were able to achieve the high school principalship.

Participation in this research will include completion of an in-depth interview that will last approximately two hours at a time and location that is convenient to each informant. All interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each informant will receive a copy of the transcript from her interview. A copy of the interview questions will be provided to each informant prior to the interview. Follow-up interviews will be scheduled only as needed. Following each interview, observations of each informant in her school setting will be scheduled to provide additional insight into her leadership experience. There will be a total of three informants in this study. There are minimal discomforts and risks involved in this study and every effort will be made to make each informant as comfortable as possible.

Potential benefits for participation in this study are as follows. This study provides each informant with an opportunity to give an accurate, information-rich accounting of her leadership



experiences. This valuable insight is critical to increase the knowledge base about African American women in educational leadership. In addition, her participation helps to dispel erroneous perceptions and stereotypes regarding the leadership of African American women. The benefits to society are that these stories are essential to accurately reflecting change in the profession and gaining understanding regarding the factors that impact leadership opportunities for African American women.

The duration of this study is approximately three months. Data collection will begin in September 2008 and will be completed by December 2008. The information gathered will be kept strictly confidential. The names of each informant, school, and school district will be assigned a pseudonym on the transcripts and in the research report. Only the researcher, informant, and faculty advisor will have access to the data.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me or my faculty advisor, whose contact information is located at the end of this informed consent. For additional questions, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912.478.0843.

Participation in this study is voluntary and no compensation will be provided. If you consent to the participation of your high school principal in this research study and to the terms above, please forward an email to [ovrsight@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:ovrsight@georgiasouthern.edu) indicating this. Please include the information below on the email.\* Upon approval by the IRB and prior to the study, you will receive another copy of this informed consent for official signature.

**\*Title of Project:** The Influence of Race and Gender on the Leadership of Three Female African American High School Principals

**\*Principal Investigator:** (Angela M. Smith; P.O. Box 135, Toombsboro, GA 31090; 478.933.5279 (home) 478.456.4505 (cell); email address: [amosley3@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:amosley3@georgiasouthern.edu))

**Faculty Advisor:** (Dr. Saundra M. Nettles; P.O. Box 08124, Statesboro, GA 30460; 912.478.0538; email address: [snettlles@GeorgiaSouthern.edu](mailto:snettlles@GeorgiaSouthern.edu))

\_\_\_\_\_  
District Representative Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

---

COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

---

DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY & HUMAN  
DEVELOPMENT

---

INFORMED CONSENT  
Informant

My name is Angela Mosley Smith and I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia. I am completing this study to fulfill partial requirements for the degree *Doctor of Education*. I am conducting a study entitled *The Impact of Race and Gender on the Leadership Experience of Three Female African American High School Principals* and I would greatly appreciate your participation in this research as your story may assist aspiring African American high school principals in their quest to become an educational leader. The research hopes to give “voice” to African American women in educational leadership by presenting a detailed portrait of their leadership experience how they were able to achieve the high school principalship.

Participation in this research will include completion of an in-depth interview that will last approximately two hours at a time and location that is convenient to you. All interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each informant will receive a copy of the transcript from her interview. A copy of the interview questions will be provided to each informant prior to the interview. Follow-up interviews will be scheduled only as needed. Following each interview, observations of each informant in her school setting will be scheduled to provide additional insight into her leadership experience. There will be a total of three informants in this study. There are minimal discomforts and risks involved in this study and every effort will be made to make each informant as comfortable as possible.

Potential benefits for participation in this study are as follows. This study provides each informant with an opportunity to give an accurate, information-rich accounting of her leadership

experiences. This valuable insight is critical to increase the knowledge base about African American women in education leadership. In addition, your participation helps to dispel erroneous perceptions and stereotypes regarding the leadership of African American women. The benefits to society are that your stories are essential to accurately reflecting change in the profession and gaining understanding regarding the factors that impact leadership opportunities for African American women.

The duration of this study is approximately four months. Data collection will begin in September 2008 and will be completed by December 2008. The information gathered will be kept strictly confidential. The names of each informant, school, and school district will be assigned a pseudonym on the transcriptions and in the research report. Only the researcher, informant, and faculty advisor will have access to the data.

You have a right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me or my faculty advisor, whose contact information is located at the end of this informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912.478.0843.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and no compensation will be provided. You may end participation at any time by notifying me via email or telephone of your decision without penalty or retribution. During the interview, you also do not have to answer any questions on the instrument that you do not wish to. 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 below.

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

**Title of Project:** The Impact of Race and Gender on the Leadership of Three Female African American High School Principals

**Principal Investigator:** (Angela M. Smith; P.O. Box 135, Toombsboro, GA 31090; 478.933.5279 (home) 478.456.4505 (cell); email address: amosley3@georgiasouthern.edu)

**Faculty Advisor:** (Dr. Sandra M. Nettles; P.O. Box 08124, Statesboro, GA 30460; 912.478.0538; email address: snettles@GeorgiaSouthern.edu)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX E  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Informant:**

**Place:**

**Date:**

**Time of Interview:**

**Introductory Comments:** I would like to thank you for taking time to meet with me today. The purpose of this interview is to unfold the story of your leadership as a female African American high school principal as impacted by race and gender. This interview will last approximately two hours and will be taped recorded to insure the accuracy of your story. Your participation is voluntary and you may stop the interview at any time. All of your responses will remain confidential as will your identity and school district. Please elaborate on specific details during the course of the interview. Please be honest, candid, and accurate as you respond to the questions. Are there any questions regarding the conditions of this interview?

### 1. Professional Background

- 1.1 How many years did you teach prior to your first administrative appointment?
- 1.2 How many years have you served in your current position?
- 1.3 What other administrative positions have you held?
- 1.4 What is the highest degree you have completed?

### 2. Leadership

- 2.1 Tell me the story of how you became a principal. When did you decide that you wanted to become a high school principal? Why did you want to become a principal? What do you think you bring to being a high school principal that you are most proud of?
- 2.2 What specific characteristics, skills, and abilities enabled you to achieve the principalship? How were you able to develop these characteristics?
- 2.3 How would you define your leadership style? How do you think that your African American culture shaped your leadership style? Can you give me a specific example of ways your culture has influenced your leadership style? Elaborate please.

- 2.4 How do you feel others view your leadership because you are an African-American woman? Was there a specific experience when these views became evident to you? What did you do? If views are negative, how effective do you think your actions were in dispelling those notions?
- 2.5 How do you view yourself as an African American woman? In what ways do these views impact your leadership?

### 3. Barriers/Strategies

- 3.1 What are the most significant problems or barriers you have personally experienced as an African American female principal? Tell me about a specific incident in which these barriers became evident to you. When did this incident occur? How did you react? How did these barriers impact your leadership? What did you learn about how to negotiate or overcome these barriers?
- 3.2 Are there any other issues, circumstances or events that you feel hindered your leadership experience?
- 3.3 What are the most significant factors or strategies that you feel enabled you to obtain the high school principalship as an African American woman? Tell me about a specific incident in which you applied a strategy. How was the strategy beneficial to you?

### 4. Conclusion

- 4.1 Why do you think there are so few minority women serving as high school principals? What do you suggest should be done to encourage more African American women to pursue the high school principalship?
- 4.2.1 What recommendations or advice, regarding professional preparation, would you give other African American females aspiring to the high school principalship?

**Concluding Comments:** Once again I would like to thank you for sharing your experiences with me today. I will be transcribing the interview and providing you with a copy for your review. I will also contact you via telephone should we need to schedule follow-up interviews. Thank you.



APPENDIX F

QUESTION MATRIX

### QUESTION MATRIX

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Research Question 1</u></p> <p>What strategies do three female African American high school principals in Georgia believe facilitated their attainment of the high school principalship?</p>	2.2, 2.3, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Research Question 2</u></p> <p>What barriers do three female African American high school principals in Georgia believe they encountered in their progression to the principalship ?</p>	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 2.1, 2.5, 2.4, 3.1, 3.2,
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Research Question 3</u></p> <p>How do three female African American High school principals conceptualize leadership?</p>	2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 3.3

APPENDIX G

DATA COLLECTION MATRIX

## DATA COLLECTION MATRIX

INFORMANTS	INTERVIEWS	OBSERVATIONS	DOCUMENT REVIEW
INFORMANT A	X	X	X
INFORMANT B	X	X	X
INFORMANT C	X	X	X

X – Denotes data collection method used with informant

APPENDIX H  
CODING CATEGORIES

## IN VIVO CODES

<b>Professional Background</b>		
<b>Informant A</b>	<b>Informant B</b>	<b>Informant C</b>
community educator	multiple roles	family of educators
other leadership opportunities	alternative school teacher	English teacher remedial students
military officer	education second career	hearing officer
non-profits	at-risk impoverished kids	old school principal
alternative school	Volunteering my time	decent teacher
atypical background		
not having been a K-12 teacher		
child advocacy		

<b>Leadership</b>		
<b>Informant A</b>	<b>Informant B</b>	<b>Informant C</b>
Individuals putting me in that path	Modeling for them	Old school principal
impact on greater number of kids	Build a relationship and rapport with kids	Not let them put me in a box
Divine intervention prepares you for right opportunity	Thrown into administration	Known for being strict with kids
everyone feels they have a portion of responsibility	Leadership is something people see as innate	Have to do this together
Everyone gets slice of pie	Aura about you	Mission is to build leadership capacity
Strict disciplinarian	Excellent follower	Inspired to become an administrator
Distributive leadership	Excellent listener	Maintain a sense of community
culture shaped my leadership	Collaboration of a lot of folks	Parent whoever needs parenting

Nurturing	Everything is preparation	Emphasis on caring piece
Training as African American mom impacted my leadership	Driving force in their lives	Warm demander
Lead by example	Great expectations	Sense of urgency can't articulate
Relationship building/forging bonds	Family environment	Not relenting on what we have to do
Transcend the role	Solicit help from others	All of us are servants
Have my ducks in a row	Influencing folks	
Lead with spirit of service	Not a dictator	

<b>Barriers</b>		
<b>Informant A</b>	<b>Informant B</b>	<b>Informant C</b>
Had to be right fit	Rocky relationship with male faculty	Parents crushed school is not majority white
Politically motivated high school principalship	Given the difficult jobs	Part of issue is I am black female principal
Needed someone with more leadership experience	Under a microscope	We always have to be better
Racism still exists	You've got to be better	People did not want to work for a woman
Not be able to relate to white students	Men and women doubted me	notion of the "Black B"
Things on resume not possibly valid	Kept out of the loop	Same old double standard
Background better suited for predominately African American community	Aware of the "good ole boy" system	See this black woman and do a double take
Paid but no full title as administrator	It is a battle	I was incompetent
They needed a male	Stereotypes exist	White flight
Validate credentially I was qualified	Disrespect for me	Outwardly shown disdain for black female principal
Community perceptions	Racism exists	They come at me

		View strength as negative
		That old mentality

<b>Strategies</b>		
<b>Informant A</b>	<b>Informant B</b>	<b>Informant C</b>
Human relations skills	View storms as preparation	Developing really good relationships
Divine intervention	Willing to follow	Having the appropriate temperament
Establishing good relationships	Being able to articulate	Multiplicity of roles/breadth of experiences
Pursue advanced degrees	Doing jobs without compensation	Not rushing to be a principal
Different mentors for different reasons	Cannot be cliquish	Package yourself
Develop communication skills	Filled with integrity	Requisite communication skills
Involvement on community/coordinating role	Can't be afraid when things are difficult	Communication is critical
	Prepare yourself professionally	
	networking	
	exposing yourself	
	Make things happen for ourselves	
	Build relationships	