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This dissertation examines the lived experiences of Black men credentialed to be assistant principals and principals within a southeastern, urban public school district based upon the philosophies of equity and social justice. Through a qualitative constructivist approach, this research explores their experiences in and with education and how it has impacted their professional ascension. Timeline mapping interviews and one-on-one interviews were used to gain a more nuanced understanding of how they have traversed the requirements for securing an assistant principal or principal position within the district. As a philosophy, equity and social justice can be utilized to impact representation for students, teachers, and leadership.

Central to this research is the proposal for a principal preparation and pipeline program within the district and for subsequent hiring practices that intentionally incorporate social justice to create representation in leadership that more closely mirrors the demographics of the student population and does not primarily relegate Black men to high-needs, majority-minority schools. The creation of a framework that encourages district-level leadership to identify bias in principal preparation, assigned duties, equitable representation and diverse placement will serve as an attempt to place the issues of preparation and representation into conversation by intertwining these elements to examine gaps in some settings and over-representation in others. The value of this work is the ability to create a more nuanced understanding and implementation of a framework of principal preparation that is intentionally grounded in aspects of history, personal and imposed identity, and justice in order to recognize and encourage future action towards the diminishment of oppression and othering through education in all forms and at all levels.

REFRAMING THE STORY: COUNTER-NARRATIVE STORYTELLING AND

BLACK MEN IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN A

SOUTHEASTERN, URBAN DISTRICT

by

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Approved by

_____
Dr. Leila Villaverde
Committee Chair

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work to my mother and my aunt, my husband, and my sons. Clementine Sherrod and Barbara Jean Horton were foundational in teaching me the value of strength and resiliency as a Black woman.

I also dedicate this dissertation to the love of my life, my strength and my stay, Carlos R. Pledger. Your words of encouragement and unending support never wavered. My dream became your dream. My goal became your goal. You took this Black girl's ambitions and nurtured them until they became a realization. Every girl should be as lucky as I.

I further dedicate this dissertation to my sons, Caleb E. Pledger and Jackson E. Pledger. You make my every moment a joy. I am honored and blessed to hear each of you call me "Mom". It adds life to my years and years to my life.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my loving family, especially my brother, Carlos Sherrod. Thank you for loving me unconditionally.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Latarsha Sherrod Pledger has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH INTEREST

Amplifying, engaging, and co-producing knowledge through the stories generated from the lived experiences of the marginalized holds the potential to re-interpret and re-imagine educational processes that support equity. Research done through a critical lens to promote social justice in district hiring practices can examine espoused and enacted practices from the macro- and micro- levels. Equitable educational systems and processes that focus on all aspects of schooling, from pedagogy to human resources, necessitate an appreciation for difference and representation. This work of creating equity at all levels within education to support cultural and racial representation in all spaces allows more students to see someone with whom they can identify. Progress has been made in varying degrees, in varying geographic locations, and at varying times; however, there is much work to be done as educators and agents of change to support diversity that trends and reflects the democratic ideals of equity and representation.

**Research Interest**

As a high school assistant principal, I have long ruminated upon the root causes for the student behaviors that present themselves on any given school campus and the disparities in inclusionary and exclusionary discipline that are used to remedy those behaviors. When tasked with tallying and coding the discipline referrals of all teachers monthly, and over the years, a pattern quickly emerged. There was a drastic discrepancy in the interactions of young Black men with Black men teachers and administrators versus the interactions with White men and White women teachers and administrators. The same young Black men seemed to progress throughout the day without incident until their interaction with White educators. In counseling the students, the themes of not being heard, being targeted, being misunderstood, not being seen or being disrespected were commonly articulated in one form or another. This germinated the

seeds of my interest in not only creating responsible representation through the hiring of Black men teachers, but also what the absence or presence of responsible representation means in the life of the most widely suspended demographic: Black adolescent men. Unfortunately, in a pool of applicants on my district's webpage, that demographic is hard to find. The difficult and complex conversations surrounding how to create an educational space that honors Plato and Dewey's vision of an environment that prepares students to affect change authentically and effectively within their lived society became a daily preoccupation in light of the disparity in exclusionary discipline. To that end, the task of hiring more Black men in hopes of creating responsible representation to foster connection and identity became my personal odyssey. And considering the journey I found myself on, I also came to wonder the following: What are the lived experiences of Black men principals and to what extent do those experiences influence their professional interests in pursuing a role in education that could possibly lead to roles in educational leadership?

Considering the positionality of educational leaders as raced, gendered, and classed beings and how each of those positionalities impacts their value orientations and their professional decisions allows for a more nuanced understanding of how these factors can manifest in a Black man's decision to pursue a principalship. When explored through a critical lens, these factors can trouble the widely accepted assumption that, whether codified or through convention, Black men serving as a principal in economically disadvantaged and low-performing schools is based primarily upon exclusionary hiring practices.

There is space for supplementary counter-storytelling narratives that may serve to explore additional critical perspectives on the presence or absence of Black men as educational leaders in any type of school. As Leffler (2014) asserts:

The black leaders in this study participate in a rich oral autobiographical tradition. In narrating their personal stories, they too serve as witnesses to history. We learn about their neighborhoods, communities, and regions. They speak for themselves; they speak for their communities of origin; they speak about racial realities in America today; and they speak about future possibilities. Narratives become linked to future goals as part of a wider human discourse about culture and values. They operate both as arsenals and as battlegrounds for building authentic and vibrant communities. Hearing their voices incorporating at times passion, anger, reflection, sadness, and hope—not only connects these individuals to the oratorical traditions of black America, but also deepens our understanding of their individual and shared experiences (p. 19).

The stories of the participants also reveal value systems embedded over time that may come to bear on self-perceptions and professional decision-making. Critical perspectives that question normative interpretations allow scholars to interrogate historical assumptions regarding Black men's educational leadership presence, or lack thereof.

## Statement of Problem

This research sought to address questions about the lived experiences of Black men in educational leadership and how those experiences impact their career trajectory. More specifically, this research examined how the participants viewed their opportunities within a southeastern school district. The research was underpinned by the recognition that "all structures and processes in schools need to be critically self-reflective" and that, "we (educators) must ask how we are personally responsible for reproducing oppressive practices" (Khalifa, 2018, p.60). The study also sought to investigate the processes in place and how those enacted processes

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support or undermine the advancement of Black men as they aspire towards the assistant principalship or principalship.

Horace Mann, considered the founder of the common school curriculum, believed common schools would bind us and give us the tools for a more equitable and democratic way of life (Mann, 1865). Public schools were seen as the vessel that would be the great equalizer for the rich and poor. Mann believed a common education would obliterate factious distinctions within society. Post-*Brown* there is still much to be done to establish equity and promote social justice through the educational system on all levels for minoritized students, teachers, and educational leaders. Foundational level evidence of this can be found as most districts across the United States grapple with the issue of over-representation of the minoritized man in the school-to-prison pipeline while pondering what to do about the underperformance of that same demographic on local and national achievement assessments. And while schools have become more racially and ethnically diverse, the diversity among school leaders does not reflect the changing demographics (Tillman, 2004a). Scholars like Tillman have produced research arguing the merits of culturally responsive representation to reduce the disenfranchisement of minoritized students while increasing achievement. However, it is important to note that race and gender are not sufficient in and of themselves to change the status quo. Culturally responsive and responsible leadership is what is needed to allow students to see themselves as members of K-12 schools, and it is still rare to see Black men as principals or superintendents. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Black male teachers represent less than 2% of the total teacher population and less than 3% of the nation's nearly 15,000 superintendents are Black (NCES,2023). This represents the basis for the problem of this project.

A constructivist approach was used to inform the research (Charmaz, 2016). The project began with the initial idea that all demographics have experience with the "epistemologies and interpretations that have been normalized in schools" and how they impact equity, achievement, and representation in all areas of education (Khalifa, 2018, p. 40). The project concluded by attempting to use voices of Black men to explain how these epistemologies and interpretations influence the absence or presence of Black men in diverse leadership spaces and at all levels. The initial idea was explored and challenged through the data collection process that utilized a historical timeline mapping interview and a subsequent semi-structured one-on-one interview. The data collection required a return to the preliminary idea to explain the experiences of Black men educational leaders who participated in the study.

The initial and foundational question of this research project examined the views of the participants and what they saw as the impetus for the presence and/or absence of responsible representation in roles of educational leadership. There was an emphasis on minimizing the single-story narrative by including the voices of the participants as primary historical sources to ascertain how or if historical tropes about Black men, their intellect, and their ability to lead are manifested in their personal beliefs, attitudes, and professional decisions. This allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the root cause(s) of the representation of Black men in education and the lack of minoritized men in educational leadership.

Although equity can be achieved in many ways, I was interested in the impactful power of responsible representation at all levels of education for marginalized populations who do not typically experience the researched benefits associated with parity in education. Throughout my more than 25 years of experience in the field of education, I have examined the gaps and challenges that seem to beset how Black adolescent men are perceived and how those

perceptions influence his experiences within education. I used qualitative data collection methods (timeline maps and one-on-one interviews) to assess how the participants see themselves in educational spaces and how they believe they are perceived as academic leaders. I have experienced how culturally responsible and responsive leadership impacts relationships, identity, pedagogy, and outcomes. It can have a transformative impact on students and their future perceptions of education. I am interested in exploring the use of responsible representation to create a connection between social justice education and critical pedagogy within a school environment that intentionally centers this work. This research focused on Black men credentialed to be assistant principals and principals. I recognize that not all educational environments have the same human resource structure and dynamic as the urban, southeastern district where the research was conducted. I was galvanized to observe and articulate how this research might provide examples and resources for district senior-level leadership and human resource stakeholders to incorporate equity in hiring and diversity in placement into their leadership succession planning.

The subset of questions of my research explored their early experiences with education and how they transitioned into and through leadership positions. Following a constructivist approach, data gathered in the historical timeline continually and iteratively informed the development of the subsequent one-on-one semi-structured interview. An initial review of the literature and personal interactions with the educational leaders demonstrated how their experiences within leadership and ascension fail to fully incorporate a focus on equity, identity, or access. While the district has made strides toward preparing assistant principals to become effective principals, there is a lapse in a succession model that fully includes critical

examinations of identity, access, equity, power, and history based on the data yielded from this research.

I believe that there is a disconnect between the espoused and enacted principles that may come from the limited abilities of existing preparation models to adapt to changing cultural, social, and educational landscapes. As student populations continue to evolve, I want to be part of a bigger conversation about how this field can dismantle systems of power, histories of violence, and the culture of whiteness that permeates so many places. I hope that by centering each participant's voice as a data collection tool, talent acquisition planning for the assistant principal and principal pipeline will evolve in a manner that considers responsible representation and the impact it has on social justice within education. The analysis of the data in a constructivist way informed the development of an extension of the current talent acquisition process that incorporates a strong focus on justice, equity, access, and identity in the hiring and placement of Black men in educational leadership.

### Purpose of Study

By the fall of 2028, the percentage of White students enrolled in public schools is projected to decrease to less than 30% while the percentage of Latino students is projected to increase to 29%, and the percentage of Black students is expected to remain the same at 15% (NCES, 2023). As of 2015, 41% of students enrolled from Pre-K through 12th grade in the U.S. were Latino and Black while only 17% of school principals were Latino or Black, and only 14.6% of teachers identified as Latino or Black (NCES, 2023). This research seeks to explore how lived experiences inform our understanding of who we are and what roles we can play in the future.

Research conducted in a post-*Brown* landscape, which will be discussed in more detail later, outlines factors such as slavery and a systemic lack of civil rights as contributions to the current lack of equitable representation within school leadership in all types of schools, as well as decreased minoritized student achievement and increased exclusionary discipline. Historically, the vision of harmonious integration and equity has largely veered from reality because Black and White students educated pre- and post-integration did not enter school on equal ground; thus, they did not traverse at the same level possibly making it far more difficult for Black people to ascend to positions of educational leadership at the same pace as Whites.

Minoritized representation in roles of leadership in all public schools offers the opportunity to promote a varied lens through which to view people of color while also promoting a culture of relevancy and connection for underserved populations. Evidence of the disproportionate over-representation of Black men in roles of leadership in mostly minoritized, Title I, and low-performing schools may have particular relevance when connected to research that indicates students of color in White, non-Title I, and academically achieving schools have decreased exclusionary discipline and increased achievement when they are exposed to qualified same-race educators (Lindsay & Hart, 2017).

As an educator, I spend a great deal of time disaggregating and triangulating achievement, discipline, school climate, and community outreach data attempting to construct a narrative by looking beyond the superficial cause and effect to ascertain the root cause analysis to bridge gaps in achievement. Young Black men are a consistent demographic that has seen little gain in achievement over the last decade within the district (NCDPI, 2023). In all relevant literature, the unifying theme is the conclusion that K-12 Black men achieve at a greater level

when presented with a culturally responsive educational experience wherein they see themselves in leadership and within the curriculum (Lindsay & Hart, 2017).

However, America's long-standing preoccupation with power, privilege, and education for White people has created an implicitly biased educational system centered around a White curriculum wherein White students are able to see themselves and their success through the hiring of White teachers that become White principals all the while making it difficult for Black and Latino students to see themselves in the schemata. Scholars such as Ballantine and Hammack (2012) explore how postmodern issues can be approached with an emphasis on "inequality in educational access and experiences, where class, race and ethnicity, and gender are presented as separate (though intersecting) vectors of educational inequality" by combining "qualitative and quantitative approaches and relevant theory, classics and emerging research, and micro-and macro-level perspectives" (p. 12). This relevant theory encourages the exploration of why, all credentials and experience being equal, Black men advance in educational leadership at a slower pace and are seemingly relegated to schools with exponential challenges (Bales & Guthrey, 2020).

This delay can be of particular importance when additional research has explored the benefits of diverse leadership and its potential to serve as representation for both the marginalized and the dominant societal class. As Judson (1999) noted, "Our success and our presence will encourage others and will help create an environment which may be more inviting and comfortable for African Americans and other minorities and more supportive as well" (pp. 109-110). This current study will add to the ongoing educational conversation on the lack of Black man assistant principals and principals by examining the lived experiences that influence their decisions in applying for leadership positions. While there is substantial research that

focuses on the experiences of the demographic in educational leadership positions, there is a gap in the literature that explores how Black men principals weigh access to positions and opportunities for success.

## Research Questions

This study seeks to explore the lived experiences of Black male educational leaders, their employment desires, and their experiences throughout their career. In particular, this research project is examining the following research questions:

What are the career experiences of Black men educators who are credentialed to be principals in an urban, southeastern school district?

    a.   What is the nature of their early career experiences?

    b.   How did they experience their various transitions into and through leadership positions?

## Positionality

While my positionality as a researcher and minoritized female in educational leadership for more than 27 years may allow me to explore what people are doing, what people think they are doing, and the meanings behind those experiences, as a learner, it requires that I remain open to interpretations of those experiences that may be contrary to my lived experiences (Kraus, 2005). My personal interpretations regarding the act of disproportionate exclusionary discipline of Black men students contribute to the subsequent questions that prompted my research interest.

As an administrator, I am required to examine and account for the suspension rates and the over-representation of any sub-group. The district has invested a great deal of time and resources in training leadership to understand the stories of the students being suspended, and, when possible, enact restorative practices that take the lived experiences of the student into

account.  We are tasked with getting to know them and taking copious notes that attempt to connect the behaviors being exhibited with a root cause analysis.  In reviewing the suspension rates on a weekly basis and speaking with the students daily, I found similar narratives among Black youths who were being suspended. There was an overwhelming rate of absenteeism of fathers or any male Black role model.  They tend to be raised by mothers, grandmothers, or an extended female relative.  Most of their behaviors result in conflict with White male and female authority figures and arise from feeling unheard, misunderstood or disrespected. This pattern has prompted me to actively pursue the hiring of Black men in core subject areas with the hopes of allowing these Black young men to see themselves in academic spaces and perhaps find connection.  It also serves to defy the standard trope that the most common options for Black man success is to become an athlete or a rapper.  It is difficult to envision or relate to that which you do not see; and sadly, athletes and rappers are where they tend to see examples of success for people who look like them.

So, herein lies the redundant pattern of conversations that present daily in my line of work:  Black young men are disproportionately suspended. Within their homes, they may lack role models that look like them and with whom they can culturally or racially identify. Within the school, where they spend a majority of their day, they may also lack role models that look like them and with whom they can culturally or racially identify.  If one is a part of the dominant culture, it may be difficult to understand the mental and emotional trauma that can come with the absence of connection from relatable identity, but as a Black woman, I relate to feeling awkward and searching for someone with whom I can relate and connect.  Additionally, in my conversations with this demographic there is a common theme: they do not routinely see anyone that looks like them for whom education has worked. I am essentially trying to sell the product of

education in the absence of relatable testimonials. Removing young Black men from the educational space through suspension only further serves to reinforce disenfranchisement while possibly feeding the school to prison pipeline and contributing to the inconsistent flow within the educational leadership pipeline.

It is this daily positionality that created my desire to understand the lived experiences of Black men who do make their way into education and aspire to, or actually, become leaders within education.  The students' shared themes of absenteeism within the home and education and how it impacts their daily lives are what have made me particularly interested in listening for counter-narrative stories that may explain how some Black men leaders see themselves or do not see themselves within educational spaces.

To that end, my research took place within a southeastern urban school district, a district within which I have been employed for 27 years.  My positionality as a scholar with intersecting identities as a minoritized female who has served as a student-teacher, teacher, instructional facilitator, and assistant principal of instruction creates a vast, yet limited assemblage given these roles have all been within the same district.  This backyard research requires me to outline the process and challenges associated with conducting a qualitative study in the district in which I currently serve in a leadership role.  Bettez (2014) specifically defines positionality:

> As involving the combination of social status groups to which one belongs (such as race, class, gender, and sexuality) and one's personal experience (understanding that experience is always individually interpreted, and it is the interpretation that gives an experience meaning). Our positionalities – how we see ourselves, how we are perceived by others, and our experiences – influence how we approach knowledge, what we know,

and what we believe we know. Thus, positionality is paramount to the production and understanding of knowledge (p.934).

The belonging I have to each of these aforementioned social status groups and my personal experiences as I have traversed from one level of professionalism in education to the next will play a role in how I proceed with my research, what I have constructed as knowledge over the past 27 years and, consequently, how I interpret the experiences of my research participants. Bettez's definition also provides a note of caution. Therefore, it is important that I acknowledge the assemblages of who I am and the role they will play in my research.

I am a researcher and a witness who has worked with many of the prospective participants in various capacities as they aspired to roles of leadership. My professional relationship with the participants will require that I be aware of my biases and how I interpret their experiences. Lyotard (1979) contends that our reality is strung through events held together loosely by some ever-present yet unseen thread. At the moment, the thread of events may make very little sense and may seem to be of little consequence, but in its totality, they all begin to form the tapestry or collage of our lived experiences and how we perceive them, as well as our meaning-making.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

**Overview**

This chapter provides a review of the literature pertinent to the study of the minoritized

men in educational leadership.  The review of literature is organized chronologically and

thematically to explore each major topic.  The first part of the review begins with an examination

of the Southern historical arc and societal norms that created racially segregated patterns for the

placement of Black principals in the years prior to *Brown v The Board of Education of Topeka*

(1954). The second section probes the (un)foreseen results of the court's decision on the

(dis)placement of the African American man principal post-*Brown* during the post-civil rights

era.  This is followed by an assessment of the current re-segregation of schools and the possible

implications for Black principals. Immediately after, a comprehensive examination is provided

for the socio-historic placement of Black principals in an effort to create representation and the

benefits of Black principal placement at White schools.  The literature review concludes with an

outline of the cultural and systemic themes that have been researched yet does not address self-

selecting as a factor in a candidate's decision to apply for certain positions.

This literature review is underpinned by empirical research that has observed a cyclical

connection between exclusionary discipline for minoritized men and negative educational

outcomes as a factor in the lack of Black men teachers.  Many scholars use empirical research to

argue that exclusionary discipline and its statistical connection to the school-to-prison pipeline

for Black men is a result of the cultural discontinuity between White female teachers and Black

men students (Allen and White-Smith 2014; Bryan 2017).  However, there is a need to further

explore why when Black men educators do ascend to the principalship, they continue to be

relegated to predominantly Black schools with higher socio-economic challenges as opposed to

their White counterparts. These Black schools operate with additional social, emotional, economic, and learning challenges while tasked with reducing the achievement gap, thus making it far more difficult for principals to experience professional success and making job security far more difficult in the age of the neo-liberal accountability model for education. In the United States, public school principals are paid a base salary and a per-pupil supplement. Black and socio-economically challenged schools tend to have smaller populations while contending with supplemental concerns which means the principal makes far less than principals at large White schools that have more resources and fewer barriers to overcome.

For this chapter, I reviewed historical and current research on Black men principals and their placement at Black schools. I found little research that specifically addressed the aspect of self-selecting when deciding whether to apply for a White school versus a Black school in the post-segregation era. There were few explorations regarding the possibility that perhaps Black men principals, intentionally and for a multitude of reasons, could be relegating themselves to Black schools, thus replicating pre-*Brown* racialized placement patterns where a Black principal was only seen as fit to serve in Black schools. This lack of scholarly literature regarding self-selection leaves the question of whether Black principals, indeed, perceive a greater potential to secure a leadership position in schools that have greater economic and social challenges and why. Moreover, the gap in literature challenged me to explore the thought processes and personal ideologies that factor into a Black man principal's decision to apply for a position at a wealthy White school when given the opportunity.

**The Pre-*Brown* History of Black Principals**

The consistent narrative perpetuated through books, newspapers, films, and community lore about the pre-*Brown* Black public school is one of segregation and deprivation. The single-story narrative generally highlights the inferior facilities and resources, as compared to White schools, and the struggle surrounding their procurement. Additionally, particular attention is given to examining the discriminatory systems and policies that limited funding and accessibility in an effort to maintain the system of oppression. "However, the same portraits are also replete with descriptions of the schools as having a cadre of committed and increasingly well-trained teachers and principals" (Walker & Byas, 2009, p.1). Historically, the African American principal was a revered figure within the community that was dedicated to supporting the educational, cultural, and local needs of their students. Black principals worked with other community leaders to establish schools in the face of hostility and resistance while fighting to end segregation. Together with parents and teachers, they formed the most influential factors in the education of Black children.

As far back as the 1860s Black educators were instrumental in building and operating common schools that became cultural symbols for the Black community. They raised funds and provided other resources as needed. Enslaved Black people were freed around the same time that education for Whites "was transformed into a highly formal and critical social institution" (Anderson, 1988, p.2). But in the years post-slavery, education for Whites was a sign of privilege and entitlement while representing an opportunity for advancement and access to a more democratic way of life for post-slavery Black people. Thus, the Black educator's role became inextricably linked to activism for the development of Black children and their chance for a better quality of life. In fact, the cultural capital afforded the Black teacher and principals

by their community members would eventually position them as solidly middle-class. But before that could happen, Black people had to overcome the ideas Whites held about what type of education they should receive. Black people had a desire to be educated, but well-meaning White Southern philanthropists believed they should be trained in a vocation and taught the Christian morals that would support and align with Southern White hegemony. However, Black people viewed education as a means for creating agency defined as "self-reliance, proactive actions, and self-determining philosophies that result from a centeredness within one's community" (Savage, 2001, p. 172).

> Black principals operationalized agency in three ways: (a) developing resources (acquiring money, materials, and other resources to ensure the success of the school), (b) performing extraordinary services (maneuvering district policies, introducing new curricula and activities, and instilling in Black children resiliency, self-reliance, self-respect, and racial pride), and (c) focusing on the school as the center of the community (transforming schools into the cultural symbol of the Black community) (Savage, 2001, p. 171)

To that end, Black principals circumvented resistance in diverse ways. They served as the spokesperson for the needs of the Black community by addressing the White superintendent and the White school board with the purpose of securing resources for their students. Supplementally, Black principals rallied Black community members for goods and services when the White educational system did not adequately meet the educational needs of the students. They made the curriculum culturally relevant and rigorous to create as much alignment as possible with the curriculum being taught to White students (Tillman, 2004a). Whenever possible, principals created allies within the White community to garner support for the cause of

Black education and excellence. And finally, they recruited qualified teachers to create an educational pipeline within their communities. This foundational principle for teacher recruitment is reiterated by Khalifa's (2018) assertion that, "when schools are able to identify (and help develop) teaching talent within minoritized and Indigenous communities, they get the minoritized teachers they always claim to seek" (p. 176). This creates a pipeline that could increase minoritized leadership. It also gives presence and voice to those that inhabit the neighborhoods we serve in and "gives communities a chance to influence how schooling happens, which again can lead to job growth for minoritized students and communities" (p. 176). While the Pre-*Brown* Black school was intentionally ignored through the lens of the White community, Black principals often worked tirelessly within and beyond the parameters of hegemony to create learning for those that were a part of a separate system.

And while the Black school system may have been closed off from the dominant body of education, "by the second half of the twentieth century, black teachers and principals were important role models and respected leaders in their communities" (Henig, Hula, Orr, and Pedescleaux, 1999, p. 44). "The Black principal represented the Black community; was regarded as the authority on educational, social, and economic issues; and was responsible for establishing the all-Black school as the cultural symbol of the Black community" (Tillman, 2004, p.172). The Black school as a system was largely isolated from mainstream education and society except in matters of political and financial influence from the White school board and/or superintendent.

The pre-*Brown* Black principal was quintessential to the interpretation, representation, and authentication of school culture and relationships. They acted as nurturers and protectors guided "specifically by explicit, ethical, social, and cultural rules and expectations" (Dillard, 1995, p. 551). Within the segregated and isolated world of education, Black men principals were

elevated to icon status within the Black community while serving as a connection to the White

community.  The Black principal was the instructional authority that oftentimes held advanced

degrees and attended professional development conferences.  They were typically understaffed,

so they alone tended to be responsible for the educational objectives of the school and the

communication of those objectives to the hegemonic system and structure beyond the Black

campus. The Black principal was the acceptable mouthpiece for the needs of the Black school.

The White community's blatant disregard for Black schools and Black students allowed the pre-

*Brown* Black principal a certain level of sovereignty in matters of HR, program planning and

implementation, and the allocation of funding within the school.  A by-product of the insular

nature of the segregated school system was that the principal became responsible for the social,

emotional, academic, and success of a race and a community.

## The (Un)anticipated Results of the *Brown* Decision

In theory, the *Brown* decision was intended to be a way to remedy the inequities that

were produced by the inherently flawed ideology of *Plessy's* separate but equal.  Hopes of

equitable funding and access for the education of Black students loomed on the horizon.

However, in 1951 the *Journal of Negro Education* published three commentaries that forewarned

of the possible ramifications of desegregation.  The first brief highlighted the 1950 vote by the

Board of Trustees of the University of Louisville to close the segregated and all-black Louisville

Municipal College. The all-Black faculty received two months of severance and were dismissed

in spite of contracts and/or tenure.  This could be seen as a preamble of things to come.

According to Orfield & Lee (2004), prior to the 1954 decision, approximately 82,000 Black

teachers taught the approximately 2 million Black students who attended mostly segregated

schools.  However, just as was forewarned by the *Journal of Negro Education* in 1951, between

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1954 and 1965, more than 38,000 Black educators in 17 southern and border states were dismissed from their positions. The modern-day impact was still being felt in 2001 when Black teachers only represented 6% of the teaching force while Black students comprised slightly more than 17% of the student population (Orfield & Lee, 2004).  Again, this lack of a minoritized teaching population can be seen as a contributing factor to the lack of minoritized leadership.

The closing and subsequent dismissals were not based on legal precedent or logic. Instead, they were steeped in historically implicit biases that posited Black people and the education of Black people as optional and disposable.  Additionally, the unceremonious end to Louisville Municipal College could be viewed as a bellwether for continued disparities in funding, physical structures, physical equipment, salaries, and overall resources that would be allocated to the education of Black people post-*Brown*.

The second, and more optimistic commentary, was written by Charles H. Thompson.  He pointed out that many regions of the United States held the perspective that African American educators have been, and will always be, regarded as the most appropriate human resource to educate Black children. However, he also illuminated the fact that many in the Black community were willing to accept the trade-off and sacrifice of Black positions within education in an effort to secure access to and equity of facilities and resources.  Thompson was confident that Black teachers would always be a mainstay in the education of the Black child; however, he did add that "the situation relative to the future status of Negro principals and supervisors is not so clear, nor so certain" (Thompson, 1951, p.135).

There were other attempts to reassure the Black community that all was not lost as a result of desegregation.  Later publications in the *Journal of Negro Education*, *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines offered a more optimistic view by declaring that, for example, "even though some

Black teachers in states such as Oklahoma had lost their jobs, teachers should not be fearful because among other reasons, there were not enough White teachers to replace them in desegregated schools" (Tillman, 2004, p.286). A 1951 editorial in the *Journal of Negro Education* even went so far as to declare that even, "if they were faced by such a dilemma, the elimination of legally enforced segregated schools should outweigh in importance the loss of teaching positions even by a majority of the of the 75,000 Negro teachers who might conceivably be affected" (Chas, 1951, p.138).

Currently, more than 79% of all educators are White (NCES, 2020). In the years that have followed *Brown*, formalized education has continued to reinforce and reproduce the positionality of minoritized groups as outsiders to the dominant culture. More specifically, "within the school there are "insiders," whose status culture is reinforced through the school experience, and "outsiders," who face barriers to success in school" (Ballantine, 2012, p. 22). The assumption that an "assimilationist" methodology would bridge the gap between races inherently failed, "to recognize and address fears and misconceptions of teachers about black children's academic ability and behavior problems, the adequacy of their home backgrounds, and their moral aptitude" (Bell, 2005, p. 180).

The third commentary and warning came from Jack Greenberg. Greenberg (1951) stated that, "Intimidation, intentional or otherwise, is in the air" and that there was "substance to the threat" that was overtly and covertly communicated by segregationists that wished to maintain the tenets of *Plessy* (p.585). He believed there was a real threat to the role Black educators would play in education; however, of all the commentaries, Thompson's speculation about the future role of principals was the most accurate. For two decades post-*Brown*, Black school staff were displaced, demoted, or dismissed. What had once been a dual system of learning that

afforded the Black principal a prominent space of influence to educate the Black student, quickly became a single system that viewed the role of Black principals as a threat to Southern hegemony. The former system of separate and unequal championed Black principals and their leadership role in both the school and the community.  In the post-*Brown* era, very few White superintendents and White school boards were willing to place a Black principal in authority over a White staff regardless of credentials.

> Since racial patterns in most communities, especially those in the South [,] did not
>
> countenance Black people supervising whites in any capacity, much less teaching,
>
> principals of formerly black schools usually were reassigned as assistants to white
>
> principals or as central office supervisors. (Yeakey et al, 1986, p.122)

Additionally, and according to Bell (2008) the purpose of these policies was simply not to exclude or segregate but to subordinate those who, based on their color and without regard to their accomplishments, were presumed to be inferior to any White person no matter how low or ignorant (p.27).  This purpose of policy as outlined serves to additionally amplify the *Critical Race Theory* tenet of interest convergence argued by Bell in *The Harvard Law Review* wherein, he asserts that civil rights for Black people seems to coincide with economic change and the promotion of the self-interest of elite Whites.

Very little research or data exists on the displacement, dismissal, or demotion of Black principals following the *Brown* decision.  The earliest and most comprehensive data on the ramifications of post-*Brown* did not begin to emerge until the early 1970s.  The most notable is research done by Hooker in 1971 where it was noted that North Carolina was one of the states to experience swift backlash as a result of *Brown*.  "During the 3-years from 1967 to 1970, the number of Black principals in North Carolina declined from 670 to 170" (Lyons & Chesley,

2004, p. 302). Implicit biases held by Whites regarding Black intellect and the Black educator's

ability to effectively lead an educational community provided additional ire to decisions to close

all-Black schools.  The students were unceremoniously placed in White schools leaving the

former patriarchs of the Black community without an educational home.  As southern states such

as North Carolina, Maryland, and Kentucky closed almost all of their all-Black schools, more

than 50% of their principals were demoted (Etheridge, 1979).

> The unconscious psychological attitudes of the lawyers, the judges, and the expert
>
> witnesses did not take into account either the rights of students to an integrated staff or
>
> their right to non-racist texts and curriculum.  The language of the Decision, as well as
>
> the sociological evidence put before the Court, set the stage for twenty-five years of
>
> sacrifice on the part of the Black educators in the South (Etheridge, p. 217).

Black educators were assaulted on every front with the sole intention of removing them

from the iconic status of community pillar.  In fact, even after most Black principals were

demoted, White school boards of the South instituted additional measures to reinforce the

tenuous nature of the role of Black educators.  Southern legislative authorities enacted measures

to remove state and local tenure laws. "Most common in the South were the continuing contract

or spring notification laws...However, under these contracts, localities maintained no obligation

to renew any individual contract, regardless of reason" (Fultz, 2004, p.19).  Less than two years

post-*Brown,* states such as North and South Carolina had completely nullified their continuing

contract laws.  North Carolina took it a step further and "formally terminated all teacher

contracts and placed all future contracts on a one-year basis" (Fultz. p.19).  According to Lyons

and Chesley (2004):

While it is difficult to find empirical studies explaining how and why these Black

educators were displaced or dismissed, it might be hypothesized that there were likely

multiple reasons…. Given that few tenure laws and reduction in force (RIF) policies were

in place in the states most affected by the mandate to desegregate, Black principals and

teachers had little recourse to contest displacements and dismissals.  Moreover, since the

majority of school board members and superintendents in the states most affected were

White, preferences were likely given to retaining and employing White principals and

teachers (p. 302).

The consistent theme was to use loopholes within the system to reinforce gatekeeping

measures that would maintain marginalization and disenfranchisement.  While integration had

been legally mandated, there would never be a way to completely mandate social and cultural

integration within education.  Measures were taken by federal courts and the Civil Rights

division of the Justice Department to force reluctant districts to implement desegregation plans,

the courts had used "every tool available to free men" to remove segregation, "but in the secret

court of men's hearts" there was no way to impose the truest form of integration to a recalcitrant

population steeped in historical racist ideologies (Lee, 1999, p.179).  Post-*Brown* many Whites

entrenched within the educational system saw little to no value in the role of the Black principal

and their ability to effectively lead the White teacher and the White student.

### Disenfranchisement for Pre-and Post-*Brown*

The lack of confidence in the intellect of Black men is supported by the major forms of

knowledge that have been curated around Black principals while being underpinned by a focus

on the pre-*Brown* socio-historical factors that primarily relegated Black principals to Black

schools while illuminating their role as community icon and spokesperson as foundational.  The

accepted narrative of the Black segregated school and the role of Black principals focuses on the

theme of perceived deficiency.  The segregated school and Black principals are absorbed and

reproduced in and around the themes of inferior facilities, inadequate funding, and

marginalization as compared to the White educational community (Ashmore, 1954; Johnson,

1941; Pierce, Kincheloe, Moore, Drewry, & Carmichael, 1955).  However to move forward,

there must also be a focus on how the newer bodies of work have challenged the historical theme

of lack and inadequacy in shaping the role of the pre-*Brown* Black principal and have begun to

explore new methodological approaches that combine ethnography, survey, document analysis,

and interviews as a means of inquiry to counteract the single-story narrative of inequality and

disenfranchisement to create a more balanced historical perspective on the segregated role.  In

Horsford's (2011) *Learning in a burning house: educational inequality, ideology, and*

*(dis)integration* the researcher notes:

> Another important feature of CRT is the voice-of-color thesis, which suggests that based
>
> on historical experiences of oppression and encounters with discrimination, people of
>
> color bear a presumed competence to discuss matters of race and racism.  It also
>
> recognizes the possibilities of adding richness to a discourse that has failed to hearken
>
> student and educator voices of color on matters concerning race in education (p. 5).

These shared stories affirmed and continue to affirm the value of cultural relevance

within the curriculum and the sense of belonging and solidarity within the pre- and post-

segregated school.  These ethnographic and qualitative studies seek to go beyond the stock tales

and images of the role of Black principals to provide a multi-dimensional profile of their role as

an archetype within the Black community in an effort to combat disenfranchisement.  Horsford

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noted her own adolescent and limited understanding of the pre-*Brown* educational setting for

Black people when she shared:

> ...before engaging in such research, I believed segregated schools to be nothing more than
>
> the unjust products of racism and discrimination. Poorly constructed facilities housing
>
> impoverished Black children sitting in inadequately equipped classrooms taught by
>
> underprepared Black teachers.  And why wouldn't I have imagined this to be so?  My
>
> understanding was limited to the one-dimensional portrayal of the all-Black school (p.
>
> 32).

As a counter-narrative, recent research on the pre-*Brown* Black principal incorporates the

themes of caring and high expectations as character traits as opposed to focusing on the

disenfranchisement and difficulties of Black men as educational leaders in an underfunded

environment while addressing the how and why Black principals were relegated to Black schools

and the significance of their role (Siddle Walker, 1993a, 1993b, 1996a, 1996b).

Additionally, the research typically goes beyond by exploring the (un)anticipated effects

of desegregation and the demotion, dismissal, or displacement of Black principals and the

consequences for the current educational pipeline and the minoritized student during the post-

*Brown* era. This research considers the themes surrounding the ideology that Black principals

were perceived to be intellectually inferior and unable to lead non-minoritized staff and students;

a theme that was expounded upon in my research findings.

### The Re-Segregation and Black Principal Over Time in North Carolina

The disenfranchisement that accompanied Jim Crow and *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) has

left an indelible stain on the trajectory of education.  In theory, post-*Brown* education was

intended to be a way to provide equity and access and to improve outcomes for the marginalized.

Instead, research has indicated a gradual reversion to segregated schools accompanied by stalled or limited professional opportunities for Black principals. The legal mandate of integration did not account for the school segregation that occurs as a result of residential choices. This poses a particular problem since the Supreme Court has consistently decreed that neither the state nor the public school can be held accountable for segregation that results from the choices of private citizens. In 2007 Chief Justice John Roberts authored the controlling opinion that where segregation is *de facto* (not created by government policy), it would violate the Constitution to take racially explicit steps to reverse it. However, private residency choices have the added by-product of creating racial and socio-economic residential patterns that then create increased segregation patterns between schools within the same district.

Additionally, many districts have implemented school choice policies that have eliminated much of the decades-long planning to promote racial balance only to result in an accelerated rate of re-segregation. It is at these re-segregated schools that Black principals are most often hired, thus recreating pre-*Brown* racialized patterns of placement. According to the statistical profile for North Carolina Public Schools, in 2005 the number of total principals was 2,152 with 1,650 White principals and 507 Black principals. Sixteen years later, the state of North Carolina reported 2, 410 total principals. Out of that total, 1,744 were White and 619 were Black (State_personnel_table16, 2021). Many scholars such as Bell (2004) believe that the expectations and understandings of *Brown* have gotten derailed, and as a result:

> Disenchantment with desegregation as a means of solving educational inequalities led to alternative means of achieving effective schooling for those not able to escape to the suburbs or enroll in expensive private schools. (Bell, p. 234).

According to Bell (2004) there began a Black revolt wherein, "the value of integrated schooling proved elusive" and as a result Black parents "began looking for a more viable vehicle for their educational goals" since there were a growing number of "civil rights leaders who maintained that *Brown* could only be read to require an end to intentional discrimination against black children through their assignment to integrated schools" (p. 169). All of these measures served in recreating pre-*Brown* racial patterns for Black students and Black principals.

## Black Principals for All Students

Black principals and their absence or presence in White schools is an additional theme of relevance to be considered from a socio-historical perspective. As previously reviewed, *Brown* had an (un)intentional impact on Black principals and their place within the Black community as educational and cultural icons. They served in predominantly Black schools and represented a large portion of the Black middle class (Brown, 2005). As Black schools closed post-*Brown,* the former leaders found themselves displaced, demoted, or discharged. According to research conducted by Brown (2005), between 1967 and 1970, 75% of the principals in the state of North Carolina were no longer employed in their pre-*Brown* role as educational leaders. Scholars continue to provide research that addresses the theme of representation within schools; however, according to Tillman (2003), "Educational administration continues to confront the issues of effectively engaging in efforts to racially and ethnically diversify... K-12 leadership. [And] despite our commitment to diversify, our field remains predominantly White" (p.1). To that end, much empirical research has been dedicated to exploring the benefits of representation for minoritized and non-minoritized students as scholars have found that within education and all facets of society:

Whiteness is largely constructed as the raceless norm, that whiteness is a form of

structural privilege…White racial identity is socially constructed from a pantheon of

European ethnic identities and that whiteness-akin to private property-has been granted

the legal right to exclude.  American institutions, from educational to criminal justice,

from the labor market to the law, privilege and protect whiteness, and American culture,

from discourse to ideology, and from styles of dress to standards of beauty, reflects and

reifies the preferences of white people (Bell, 2021, p 4.)

This reification, over time, has cultivated a lack of representation in the curriculum and in

the human resource pool denying all students the opportunity to see diversity.

Pre-*Brown,* Black principals and teachers created a pipeline to Black student success.

Representation within the Black educational community was synonymous with increased

expectations. The current lack of teachers and educational leaders of color has been linked to

increased discipline rates for Black students as they find themselves being primarily educated by

White women, thus leading to what is commonly known as the school-to-prison pipeline (Hart,

2017). In urban areas, statistics indicate that the population of students has become exponentially

Black and Brown; however, the teachers and administrators that lead those schools are

overwhelmingly White.  In one study conducted by Landsman & Lewis to research the impact of

the White teacher on the academic achievement of Black students, it was found that Black

students typically experience a unique set of pressures when educated by those who do not share

their racial and cultural background.  The inverse of this is that White students experience an

added advantage of sharing the same racial and cultural background of educators.  Their research

was underpinned by the following:

The discussion about the lack of academic success of Black students often leads to

consideration of factors external to schools, such as: (a) Black students' academic

performance;(b) inadequate academic preparation; and (c)lack of family support for

Black students. Given that a significant number of Black students in America's public

schools are largely educated by White teachers, there is a pressing need to know more

about the impact that White teachers have on Black students' school outcomes (e.g.,

academic achievement) (Landsman & Lewis, 2006, p. 48).

The primary finding reflected a perceived lack of respect from the White educators to Black

students.  A secondary finding was that the students felt stereotyped and judged by the White

administration because of the color of their skin.  A third theme was the belief that the White

administrators were completely out of touch with their lived experiences and unable to relate.

The final finding was that the students were happy to be in a diverse school with access to

resources.  However, the themes 1-3 were perceived by Black students as the top impediments to

their success.

This connects to Lindsay and Hart's (2017) research where they found "Black and White

children alike experience significantly higher achievement when assigned to a same-race teacher;

as White students are far more likely to have same-race teachers, they have disproportionate

access to this benefit" (p. 486). Research has shown that students have decreased exclusionary

discipline and increased achievement when they are exposed to same-race educators. However,

that is not to discount the research of scholars such as Haberman (1988) that argued that the best

predictors of "success for teachers in urban schools were life experiences, attitudes, and

dispositions toward inequality and difference" as opposed to mere racial or cultural synchronicity

and training (Cherry-McDaniel, 2019, p. 242).

On the contrary, many researchers consistently find that representation in roles of leadership is needed to promote connectivity and a culture of relevancy for underserved populations. America's long-standing preoccupation with power, privilege, and the education of the White student has created an implicitly biased educational system centered around a White curriculum that hires White teachers that become White principals all the while making it difficult for Black students to see themselves in the schemata.  The need to hire diverse leadership that represents the population served was noted by Judson (1999) assertion that the presence of Black people in educational spaces benefits all demographics by making these hegemonic structures more inviting, supportive, and comfortable serves to emphasizes the need for all students to see Black leadership.  For the White student, it serves to counteract the single-story narrative of what it means to be Black and the positionalities a Black person can occupy. Unfortunately, in a quest to create representation, "... the majority of African American leaders are employed in large, urban school districts that are underfunded, have scarce resources, significant numbers of uncertified teachers, and student underachievement" (Brown, 2005, p. 587). This has a direct correlation to an earlier reference within this literature review that explored the implicit biases associated with Black educational leaders as intellectually inferior and/or not appropriate leaders for White teachers and students. When many Black principals are charged with leading in White educational spaces they are seen as "incompetent and simply a diversity hire" even when they possess the same academic credentials and leadership experience as their White counterparts (Clarida, 2023, p. 35).

The implications of this theoretical underpinning posit Black principals as only suitable for Black schools while White principals are seen as having the capacity to lead in both White and non-White educational settings.  This ideology reinforces the hegemonic structure that

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implicitly favors Whiteness by providing greater access and opportunity for perceived

superiority in intellect and ability. According to research done by Lopez (2003):

> We [educational leaders and scholars] have a duty to know and raise questions about race
>
> and racism in society, as well as an ethical responsibility to interrogate systems,
>
> organizational frameworks, and leadership theories that privilege certain groups and/or
>
> perspectives over others, (p. 70).

The examination of Whiteness as cultural capital allows scholars to critically examine to

what extent and in what manners Whiteness is operationalized in order to yield unfair

advantages. In this case, it is the advantages afforded to White educators when being assigned to

certain school principalships as opposed to a Black educator.  "It also includes expectations (e.g.,

being treated a certain way, knowing your race will not work against you in opportunities for

jobs and other special events) and privileges (e.g., the entitlement and advantages granted to an

individual or group" (Grant, 1995, p.711). Again, as previously discussed in this review, pre-

*Brown* Black schools operated in a segregated and dual educational system.  Black principals

were primarily relegated to leading and influencing Black teachers and students.  They were

tasked with having to accomplish so much with so little while being disenfranchised and being

perceived as intellectually inferior to their White counterparts.  This became overtly evident

post- *Brown* when they were unceremoniously displaced or demoted and policies to ensure their

professional subjugation were swiftly enacted to strip them of all legal rights to employment and

advancement.  According to research conducted by McCray and Beachum (2007):

> There seem to be trends where there is an underlying notion to place White administrators
>
> in schools that are predominately White, predominantly minority, as well as diverse and to
>
> only place minority principals and administrators in charge of schools that reflect the

principal's ethnic and racial heritage. In order to correct this quandary with African American and minority principal placement, many within the field of educational leadership (theorists and practitioners) cite the problem as a shortage of minority principal candidates (p.253).

My research served to build upon Horsford's (2011) research that emphasized the importance of including the voice-of-color as a credible resource when exploring matters of race and racism as they pertain to lived experiences of Black men and their ascension through educational leadership.  Without further exploration, "... there will continue to be an underlying supposition within the field of education that minority principals should only be placed and can only lead in schools with a heavy concentration of minority students" (McCray & Beachum, p. 253).

## Black Teacher Shortage

The shortage of Black principals requires an exploration of the research surrounding the shortage of Black man as teachers.  At the turn of the twentieth century, public schooling represented a phenomenon for White and Black students. As examined in the pre-*Brown* history of Black principals, historically Black colleges and universities were pivotal in cultivating teachers who would later inundate Black communities and sometimes eventually become educational leaders in what were almost exclusively inequitably funded facilities within Black neighborhoods. Within the halls of these HBCUs was the ingrained belief that one of the primary purposes of teaching was to depart to serve and play an integral role in the upliftment of the race (Morris, 2004). Scholars such as Du Bois (1935) indicated that Black teachers possessed a "sympathetic touch" that was inherent because of their knowledge of Black culture, Black history, and Black circumstances (p. 328).  DuBois would later go on to make the following

statement about the plight of Black teachers "If and when they (Blacks) are admitted to these (public) schools certain things will inevitably follow. Negro teachers will become rare and, in many cases, disappear" (DuBois, 1973, p. 511). The *Brown* decision held great potential; however, decades later it has become clear that the theory has not been enacted in a way that has yielded the desired results for Black people. The espoused versus the enacted was argued by scholars such as Hudson & Holmes (1994) and as Mercer and Mercer (1986) who claim that "[operating] a public school system without Black teachers is [like teaching] White supremacy without saying a word" (p. 105).

To that prophetic word, many believe the trajectory led to an educational system that was not created with Black students in mind and thus, by extension, led to the omission of Black teachers (Milner, 2016). The structural racism prevalent within education "allows people to tacitly hold racist or biased views while espousing a color-blind ethos" that serves to perpetuate racist and exclusionary practices that further marginalize (Bonilla-Silva, 2017, p. 101). For Black young men, the implications of Bonilla-Silva's research mean that Black men are often excluded from authentic and engaging participation in the educational process. These exclusionary practices that preclude Black men from fully engaging in the educational process are the same practices that, by extension, are believed to manifest in the absence of Black men in teaching (Sandles, 2020).

The aforementioned lack of Black educators as researched by Toldson (2013) found that Black males are less likely to graduate from a college or university and are less likely to major in education. During the 2012-2013 academic year, Black women earned 65% of those earned by Black students while Black men earned only 35% of degrees earned by Black students. The data specifically related to education revealed that in 2009, 25, 725 Black women graduated from a

college with a degree in education, while only 7, 603 Black men graduated from a college with a

degree in education. Toldson also found that less than 24% of Black men with a degree in

education actually choose a career in teaching in the United States.  According to (NCES, 2016),

the degree disaggregation for Black people in 2012-2014 is outlined as follows: psychology,

business, health professions and related fields, and history (9%).

Additional research, such as that conducted by (D'amico et al., 2017) has sought to move

beyond the mere discussion of individual motivations with the intention of exploring institutional

patterns that impact the adolescent Black man and his experiences with and in education to bring

to bear how it impacts the pipeline from student to teacher and restricts racial diversity. Their

research represents an exploration into causation to establish a link between the student's school

experience, the possibility of racialized undertones in preparation programs and the impact of

standardized tests. The findings serve to underscore the significance of Black adolescent men in

public schools, marginalizing gatekeeping measures and the lack of representation as factors to

explain the lack within the pipeline. As Vanessa-Siddle Walker (2000) has consistently asserted,

pre- and post- *Brown,* Black teachers provided deep and abiding value-added to the education of

Black students.  This makes the action research and its findings regarding the lack of diversity all

the more important.

## Principal Preparation at a District Level

There is a lack of Black men within the talent pool of principal applicants (Lomotey,

1993; Young & Brooks, 2008).  The Black population of schools across the country has trended

upward since the 20th century; however, the demographic of Black men as principals has not

trended at the same rate and continues to remain majority White (Hozien, 2016).  A key factor in

creating representation should be the examination of principal preparation programs.  Various

forms of performance-based evaluation and accountability benchmarks have been implemented as tools to improve principal preparation programs around the United States.

In a study conducted by Jean-Marie, Normore & Brooks (2009) they examined principal preparation programs through a historical lens wherein they noted that, "the early history of educational administration as a profession and mode of inquiry drew heavily from  hierarchical and simplistic business models that obscured the rich diversity of public schools in the early twentieth century" while later preparation programs were based on preparing leaders for "scientific management" that developed as a result of standardized testing and a controlled way of viewing curricula and teaching methods.  The current principal preparation model develops "administrators for the role of a top-down manager and are overloaded with courses on management and administration (i.e. planning, organizing, financing, supervising, budgeting, scheduling, etc.) rather than on the development of relationships and caring environments within schools to promote student learning" (p.6).  None of the iterations emphasize or are underscored by equity in leadership for learning and as noted by (Tillman, 2004b), this is historically emblematic of Black issues with education that continue to leave Black principals on the margins of educational leadership.  This is expected to continue as long as principal preparation programs do not evolve to include a purposeful focus on equity in hiring as a form of social justice.  To meet the needs of changing demographic of students more fully, Smith (2019) states:

> There is a real and urgent need to authentically document the leadership experiences, philosophies, and understandings of Black male school leaders. Understanding the (changing) demographic characteristics of the school leadership workforce aids in the creation of race critical, supportive, culturally aligned leadership development

opportunities, and ultimately will lead to more culturally relevant and responsive leadership (p. 5).

His research is underpinned and supports the findings of the research of Echols, 2006; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Horsford et al., 2011; Howard, 2003; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; and Khalifa, 2018 which continuously points to the benefit of Black principals for Black students, thus creating a need to cultivate and enhance principal preparation programs designed to recruit and retain the minoritized educator and thereby meet the needs of the minoritized student.

According to research conducted by Sanchez, Thornton, and Usinger (2008), there are additional researched reasons for the absence of Black men in educational leadership:

1. Decreased career aspirations can result if minoritized people believe that the educational system is ignoring or is acting in direct opposition with their lived experiences within their communities.

2. While there may be a significant percentage of Black people who major in education, their aspirations are not encouraged by their current educational environment.

3. Black people receive less support; however, they require more.

4. Black people face conscious and unconscious resistance from the educational system when they seek to advance in educational leadership.

5. There are fewer role models and mentors with whom they can culturally identify and connect with.

6. Negative stereotypes regarding Black people and education persist to support the grand narrative.

7. There is a need for additional research that focuses on the lived experiences of Black principals and their career aspirations.

In urban areas, various iterations of a succession model are beginning to be implemented. In a qualitative study conducted by (Peters-Hawkins et al., 2017) they researched this overlapping and cyclical process of creating a diverse and consistent talent pool. Through this process, the principals identified and mentored teachers located within the building to create a steady stream of talent for school leadership succession. During forecasting, the principal completes an ongoing assessment of upcoming vacancies within the school and the district and then identifies those within the building who demonstrate the potential for leadership. Sustaining current leadership is impacted by district policies and practices. However, consistent induction practices; salient evaluation feedback with monitored action steps embedded; and mentoring and leadership academies were key components in creating a sustainable talent pipeline. The planning element included clear and consistent benchmarks for each candidate to provide clear guidance on how to progress from the classroom to the assistant principalship to the principalship with embedded support to provide exposure to all facets of the job.

**Figure 1. Succession Model Based on Mentoring for Equity**
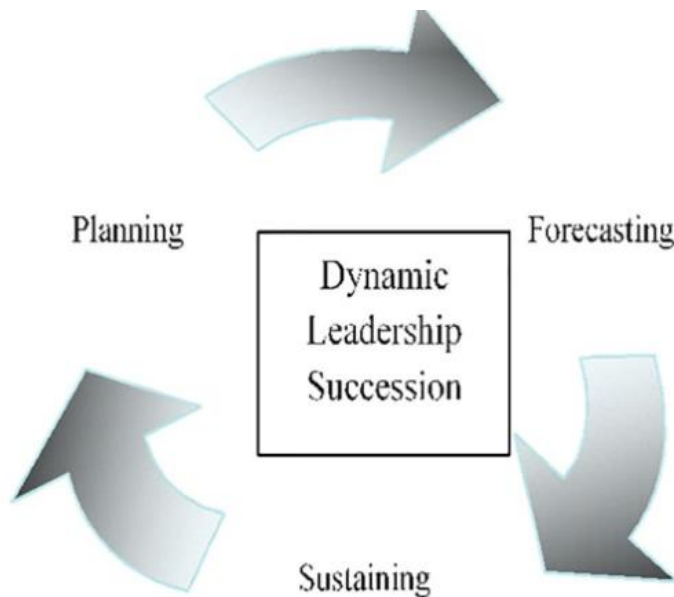
This model in Figure 1 (Peters-Hawkins et.al, 2017, p.39) goes beyond principal preparation and extends to an emphasis on equity as the minoritized principals were likely to promote minoritized talent. This principal preparation model does not exist under the assumption that principal preparation within the district will ensure equity in the hiring of prospective principals.  It is a succession model that relies upon tapping and mentoring leaders with the added steps of placement and retention.  According to Fuller et. al (2016), the New Leaders and the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) have collaborated to develop a framework that includes:

> ...four broad areas: Program Inputs, Program Processes, Program Outputs, and Program Graduate Outcomes. Program Outputs include four indicators: (1) graduation rate, (2) licensure rate, (3) placement rate, and (4) retention rate. Program Graduate Outcomes includes five indicators: leadership effectiveness rate, school climate, teacher team effectiveness, noncognitive student outcomes, and student achievement outcomes (p.645).

As a result of the framework recommendations, studies about the efficacy of current programs around the United States have begun to bring to bear the placement rates of individuals once they have completed school leadership preparation programs.  However, there are no current empirical studies that examine the connection between SLPPs and placement rates for various demographics. As additional research has emerged, the findings have a direct correlation to my research topic.  In a 2015 study conducted by Crawford and Fuller, they found that;

> Black teachers were more likely to obtain principal certification and were also more
> likely to become school leaders. However, one important caveat to these findings is

that...Black educators were more likely to become assistant principals and less likely to become principals (p.646).

Research conducted by DeAngelis & O'Connor (2012) and Joy (1998) asserts that candidates conduct personal and informal calculations associated with applying for and accepting a job. According to Fuller et. al (2016) and their study on the impact of personal and program characteristics on the placement of school leadership candidates after program completion:

In making such calculations, individuals consider their own personal characteristics and circumstances as well as the characteristics of the school in which the job is located. Research in this area suggests that individuals focus on salary (salary relative to workload and salary relative to current salary), working conditions, and the impact the position might have on the applicant's personal life (p.646).

However, none of the empirical research specifically addresses questions surrounding the lived experiences of Black men and their impact on his career decision-making and ascension with regard to educational leadership positions.

Another principal preparation tool at the district level is the use of in-basket assessments. In-basket assessments are designed to determine the administrative abilities of candidate's and their competency to perform the managerial and supervisory aspects of educational leadership. The use of in-basket assessments focuses on candidates' problem-solving skills, administrative capabilities, ability to delegate, reason, judgment and justification, organizational skills, and their ability to prioritize.  The exercise is defined and designed in the following manner:

The in-basket exercise consists of a stack of letters, memos, reports, and related materials that are presumed to have accumulated in the in-basket of a manager.  The participant is

directed to deal with the materials as if he or she were actually on the job as the manager. Performance on the exercise can be scored on various dimensions that are important to the successful performance of the work.  Although usually group-administered, the in-basket  exercise allows the participant to act independently by reading and responding in writing to the memos, letters, and other documents.  Typically, a job analysis is conducted to ensure that the problems and situations presented in the in-basket exercise are representative and accurate samples of work and so will be valid measures of on-the-job performance (Harlos, 1982, p. 2).

The tasks are underpinned by the belief that educational leaders should take initiative; set well-defined and realistic personal goals; track progress and be driven to succeed while effectively managing time and coping with stress. To make a determination of the aforementioned, the candidate interacts with discipline, memos, e-mails, voice messages, urgent district requests and mandates.  According to a leading human resource organization the in-basket addresses the following competencies:

**Table 1. In-Basket Competencies and Goals**

| In-Basket Competency | Objective |
|---|---|
| Ability to plan, evaluate, and execute | Organizes work, defines priorities, and determines resource requirements; establishes goals and strategies for achieving them; monitors and assesses progress toward the goals. |
| Ability to identify problems and areas of improvement | Gathering, interpreting, and evaluating information to determine its accuracy and relevance; generating alternatives; making well-informed decisions; and committing to achieve organizational goals are all part of problem solving and decision making. |
| Ability to manage and organize information | Recognizes the need for information; analyses and interprets data in complicated settings including competing demands, requirements, and priorities; assesses its value and correctness; and communicates it using a variety of techniques. |
| Ability to be independent and accountable | Takes initiative; sets well-defined and realistic personal goals; tracks progress and is driven to succeed; effectively manages time and copes with stress. |
| People Hum, 2023. | |

Examples of In-Basket exercises would be completing purchase requisitions, editing letters to stakeholders, completing travel expenditure documentation, or completing budget approvals. Another type of method may be drafting a press release as a result of a campus incident that has been made public, or interviewing candidates.

There is empirical research that questions the subjective nature of the scoring strategies and the reliability of the assessments. In referencing the use of in-basket, it was noted that there are three methods for scoring. The objective method is scored based upon the candidate's free form written response and quantitively score the molecular units for style and content. This presents lengthy and costly factors that have been addressed through the subjective method.

Using the subjective method, the primary source of eligibility comes from an interview completed after the in-basket assessments. The inherent issue is the subjective and interpretive nature of the scorer. A mixed method approach of objective and subjective scoring has been adopted by many principal preparation programs with the added requirement of an objective examination.

As many principal preparation programs have been outlined, the commonality is that the emphasis has been on the tasks associated with the role of assistant principal or principal. However, there is an overwhelming absence of programs that incorporate components that use data to assure equity in the types of candidates and a preparation model that supports the various issues of bias within the roles performed by aspiring leaders and how that impacts their respective career experiences and their ability to successfully complete all facets of the tasks associated with leadership.

## Ascension in Educational Leadership Post-*Brown*

In conjunction with principal preparation programs, attention must be given to the probability of professional ascension after program completion. Much research is evolving to explore the pace at which Black principals ascend to roles of leadership as compared to their White and similarly credentialed counterparts. Research indicates that only 7% of teachers are Black and non-Hispanic, only 2% are Black men (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Additionally, according to NCES (2022) Black principals represent only 9.5% of all US principals which further connects to data that reports Black assistant principals experience longer wait times for advancement and are, overall, less likely to receive promotions than other White principals (Bailes & Guthery, 2020).

Research that poses questions regarding the likelihood of securing a principalship and systematic delays do not explore the extent of self-selecting, but they do offer insight into possible hindrances that can derail the promotion and placement of Black principals.  Sufficient human resource data exists within corporate and educational settings to support findings that race and gender matching play a significant role in the hiring process.  "Non-Black managers hire more White people and fewer Black people than do Black managers" (Giuliano et al., 2009; Pager et al., 2009). "Similar patterns hold in schools: Black principals are more likely to hire and retain Black teachers" (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019). The lack of Black representation at the principal, superintendent, and school board level could directly impact a Black candidate's potential of securing a principal position, particularly at a White school, thus leading to the disproportionate promotion of White educators, as outlined previously, all while actively delaying the Black teacher to assistant principal or principal pipeline.  According to Horsford,

> This is particularly troubling given what we already know about the significance of culture in organizations and how it informs the values, behaviors, and work of educational leaders, who in turn influence the organization, its members, and those it serves (2011, p. 583).

The projected trends in student demographics to a more majority-minority percentage have prompted an increased interest in creating culturally responsive and responsible representation in hiring decisions.

**Table 2.  Adolescent Racial and Ethnic Composition**

*Racial and Ethnic Composition of Children Under Age 18:  2016, 2020, 2030, 2060*

|  | **2016** | **2020** | **2030** | **2060** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| White, non-Hispanic | 51.1% | 49.8% | 46.9% | 36.4% |
| Hispanic | 24.9% | 25.5% | 26.5% | 31.9% |
| Black, non-Hispanic | 15.1% | 15.2% | 15.5% | 16.0% |
| Asian | 5.2% | 5.5% | 6.3% | 8.1% |
| American Indian/ Alaska Native | 1.6% | 1.6% | 1.5% | 1.4% |
| Two or More Races | 5.3% | 5.8% | 7.0% | 11.3% |
| Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2020) | | | | |

Research has consistently evidenced that creating representation for minoritized student populations through responsible racial parity has proven to increase academic achievement for students with similar backgrounds (Bireda & Chait, 2011).  However, while the body of research is expanding, there is still less attention given to the need for diversity in educational leadership. As evidenced in Table 2, there is a need to recruit, train, and retain educators and educational leads to align with the trends found within the race projections for students over time.

**Table 3.  Principal Racial and Ethnic Composition**

*Racial and Ethnic Composition of Principals: 2017-2018 and 2020-2021*

|  | **2017-2018** | **2020-2021** |
|---|---|---|
| White | 77.7% | 78.4% |
| Black, non-Hispanic | 10.5% | 9.5% |
| Hispanic | 8.9% | 8.7% |
| Other | 2.9% | 3.6% |
| Source: NCES (2022) | | |

Bartanen & Grisson (2019) added to the conversation through their findings that culturally responsive leadership contributes to fewer discipline issues, greater minoritized student representation in upper-level courses, greater student achievement, and the added benefit of identifying with a cultural role model.  There was also a reduction in turnover and the probability of principals of color recruiting and retaining teachers of color.  While the body of expanding research touts the connection between parity in hiring decisions and positive student outcomes, there is a need to greater understand the factors that contribute to the absence of minoritized people in educational leadership jobs and the factors that hinder the ascension rates for Black men in educational leadership.  Among the more researched reasons for the decline in the racial and ethnic composition of principals are the inherent demands of the job.  An Education Week (1995) article entitled "Getting real about leadership", Evans satirically created an ad for the job of principal that read:

Wanted: A miracle worker who can do more with less, pacify rival groups, endure

chronic second-guessing, tolerate low levels of support, process large volumes of paper

and work double shifts (75 nights a year). He or she will have carte blanche to innovate,

but cannot spend much money, replace any personnel, or upset any constituency (p.3)

While the ad was meant to make light of the increased demands of compliance and the political

landmines in which leaders find themselves entrenched, it is an accurate assessment of the

modern-day role. In research conducted by Marsh et. al (2023) they concluded that increasingly

high demands, attrition, and burn-out played a significant role in the increased dissatisfaction

with the role of principal.

In *How educators get top jobs: Understanding race and sex differences in the "Old Boy*

*Network"* Hudson (1991) noted that minority access to positions presents many obstacles. She

further observed that the title of her book is based upon a flawed hypothesis.  Hudson states,

"one of the major flaws with the hypothesis is that they [aspiring school administrators] cannot

offer a definitive answer as to how [current] school administrators arrived at their jobs" (p.4).

The lack of a clear process could offer answers to the issue of ascension rates.  Bales & Guthrey

(2020) used their research to explore promotional delays as it relates to race and gender, and they

found that "Black assistant principals are 18% less likely to be promoted across all time periods

relative to White candidates holding education, gender, experience, urbanicity, and school-level

constant" (p.7).  Additionally, their research pointed to another issue, "... This study indicates

that Black assistant principals are both less likely to be promoted to principal positions and more

likely to wait longer for promotions, should they ever be awarded" (p. 9). This is particularly

alarming considering the participants in the study all held equivalent qualifications and similar

years of experience in similar school settings.  Much of the research surrounding promotion

predictors for the minoritized man principal indicates that "race is a significant predictor of both promotion and time to promotion from assistant principal to principal" (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). Furthermore, the results of these bodies of research show that:

School leadership continues to experience equity gaps attributable to gender and race with lasting, detrimental effects throughout school systems. Closing those gaps is essential. In absence of equitable pathways to leadership, many educators experience careers that are curtailed or truncated...increasing the diversity of school leadership is likely to result in addressing the academic needs of an increasingly diverse student body (p.13).

These results have implications for earning potential, retirement, and the researched benefits for students and teachers of color with regard to culturally and pedagogically sensitive representation. However, this review of the literature also found that ascension rates may also be impacted by limited placement opportunities.

## Pigeonholing

While ascension rates may be a deterrent in professional trajectory for Black men within educational leadership, pigeonholing has also been a central topic that has been explored as a possible hindrance for ascension to leadership positions within education. Since pre-*Brown* Black principals and their intellect have been opined as subpar by the dominant culture. This created the perception that they were only fit to lead same-race settings with insufficient resources. This ultimately served to create a dual system that operated in a vacuum. Well into the Civil Rights movement White educators held the perception that Black principals were insignificant in roles of leadership and inadequate in roles of leadership as compared to their White counterparts (Delpit, 1995).

Achievement gaps between White and Black students have created more questions than answers about how to adequately address the needs of minoritized learners. Positively, the educational and cultural gap has brought to bear research that posits Black principals as the answer. In an attempt to profile the leadership styles of Black principals and their impact on student learning, Lomotey (1989) found that they tend to have an ingrained commitment to Black students and higher academic and behavioral expectations than White school principals. Lomotey also noted that there was a greater connection to the community and a willingness to embrace the Black community as an integral component in the education of Black students. Lomotey noted that Black principals welcomed the Black community into the school in far more non-traditional roles as a means to create buy-in and connection between the school, home, and community. Additionally, other scholars such as Valverde (1987) found that just as in the pre-*Brown,* the post-*Brown* Black principal served as a role model in and outside the school setting. The Black principal's ethnic identity served as a constant that shaped their mission as an educator and their leadership decisions.

However, there is also a connection to the aforementioned pre-*Brown* deficit theme of disenfranchisement that should serve as a cautionary tale. Attempts to create profiles of Black principals often co-illuminate the societal constructs and the barriers Black principals face. As such, the relegation of Black men leading a majority-minority school is a part of a "dominant or traditional narrative...of the "Black principal solution" that must do the impossible with so little" (Gooden, 2012, p.78). In the theme of pigeonholing, the ideology is that Black men principals are serving marginalized students in low socioeconomic settings because he has the innate ability to culturally connect far better than the White principal; however, the former dominant narrative of the "Black principal solution" may still be present. Post-Civil Rights, many researchers began

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to take a different approach to principal placement.  Much of their research yielded the same findings.  For example, Jones' (2002) research yielded the following:

> A person's socialization has an impact on the perception of and interaction with people who are ethnically, culturally, and socially different. Therefore, as people are socialized about others dissimilar to themselves, they make value judgments, character assessments, and stereotypical comments.  This socialization about others leads them to make cultural assumptions, especially about people of color. These global labels manifest themselves in how people treat and respond to each other in the organization (p.9).

In this case, the assumptions are oftentimes those of White community members, White superintendents, and White school board members that are making decisions about principal placement.  Leaders of color play an important role in creating and maintaining diversity at all levels; however, stereotypes about Black principals' intellectual and professional capacity based upon "ethnically socialized constructs of African American leaders" and perceptions of their leadership ultimately relegate them to schools that serve predominantly Black communities (Jones, 2002, p.9).  This qualitative thematic strategy of research provides a valuable perspective about how cultural matching may serve to provide an opportunity for Black men to experience the principalship and the benefits to Black communities, but it also places limitations on placement based upon perceptions of the intellect of Black men and their ability to be accepted in non-majority-minority spaces while.  Within the varying views there is need to address the possibility of self-selecting as Black men decide to apply for jobs beyond Black and socio-economically challenged communities and their perspectives on relegation and perceptions of their ability to lead in all educational spaces.

**Self-Selection Bias in Research**

While the phenomenon of pigeon-holing examines available research on the lack of equitable placement through the lens of the dominant culture and perceptions of the ability of Black men to adequately lead in non-Black educational spaces, the phenomenon of self-selection bias can offer a lens that explores how Black men see themselves and their ability to lead in predominantly non-Black spaces.

The self-selection phenomenon occurs when participants decide to either opt out or participate in a research project (Keeble et al., 2015). Many studies have been conducted in the areas of reputation systems, sociology, and medical studies to examine the impact of self-selection bias and its impact on research results. The premise of the research centers on the importance of the recognition of self-selection bias and the acknowledgement that it can never be fully eliminated. In support of this recognition, a preponderance of the medical and psychological research gathered explores methods to reduce self-selection bias thereby reducing its impact on research results. To create a more nuanced understanding of the impetus and result of the lived experiences of Black men, (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012) advance the idea that conversations regarding career trajectory:

> should include both objective (e.g. social, economic, and political) and subjective (e.g. individually influenced) aspects...needed to understand the factors impacting issues of recruitment and retention of school leaders...further suggests that the distinction in these aspects highlights an important tension between the influence of structural factors on career trajectories and the potential for individual agency in the shaping of career paths. Studies should focus attention on the challenges principals face as they move through their career and the forces which impact their decision to continue,

move, or exit their positions (p. 790).

However, I posit that the phenomenon of self-selection combined with research on career trajectories can offer additional consideration for equity and access to educational leadership opportunities for Black men. Additionally, it can create a lens through which researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the underpinnings of a candidate's decision to apply for certain positions within educational leadership and how that may or may not contribute to the lack of equitable representation throughout a given large urban school district.

## Delayed Advancement

In 2020, there were approximately 48.1 million students enrolled in grades K-12. White students comprised 45.83 % of the population. The other 54.17% was from minoritized groups. Statistical data such as this tends to create a sense of urgency for many progressive educators and the call for diversity among educational leaders is renewed. According to Brown (2005), "schools in a racially diverse society will require leaders and models of leadership that will address the racial, cultural, and ethnic makeup of the school community" (p. 585). Some researchers such as Bush & Moloi (2008) argue that delayed advancement and underrepresentation of Black principals could be the result of a system that is localized as opposed to centralized at the state level, thus producing a variety of subjective routes to the principalship that can be riddled with independent district biases that are based upon the propensities of the superintendent and board members involved in the hiring process.

Another factor was outlined by Dancy and colleagues (2018) as "anti-blackness". Anti-blackness was denoted as the actions that take place in "institutions" when Black people are used as property and stereotypical narratives are used to "police, control, imprison, and kill" (p. 180). The concept of anti-Blackness can be increasingly evident as Black people aspire to matriculate

into positions of educational leadership. "For example, Black leaders experience disrespect when people consider their leadership position as illegitimate (i.e., affirmative action or a diversity hire) or when Black principals have had to work harder and make fewer mistakes to prove they are competent" (Clarida, 2023, p. 37).

Scholars argue that this will infallibly breed discriminatory practices that manifest in the delayed advancement or strategic placement for Black principals. The theme of delayed advancement is often underpinned by research such as Hooker's (2000) paper that concluded that "racism within the realms of education leadership development does advantage Whites and subordinate Black people and those from other racial minority groups" (p.79). The delayed advancement for Black principals could be attributed to social and professional structures designed to sift, sort, and select to reinforce and reproduce the culture of power. Additionally, racial microaggressions and biased and arbitrary hiring processes ultimately serve as gatekeeping measures against Black principals. However, while research has been done to explore the stagnant and oftentimes confined placement of Black principals, the issue of how their lived experiences influence their decision to seek a principalship at a White high school presents a gap in the literature.

**Conclusion**

The historical frame for reviewing the literature traces the advancement of Black men principals through a socio-historical lens yet allows room for my research which seeks to examine psychological considerations using counter-storytelling that explores majoritarian narratives. The theories presented in the explanation of why Black principals are typically assigned to schools that are predominantly Black, have higher poverty rates, higher crime rates, and lower standardized test scores present a unique opportunity for me to explore the lived

experiences of Black men principals who participated in the study and to what extent these experiences influence their decision to apply, or not, for predominantly White schools in more affluent areas within a district, even in cases where school systems have made changes to their human resource policies and may state that they encourage applicants of color. Much has been written about the marginalization of Black men principals as a result of pre-*Brown* segregation. Post-*Brown* research produced a lens that concentrated on the implicit biases that lead to the demotion, displacement, or dismissal of Black principals that were viewed as unfit to lead the education of Whites in a leadership capacity.  Additional research focused on the barriers that could lead to delayed advancement for Black principals or create pigeonholes that offer limited opportunities that are deemed acceptable by White power structures.  However, there is an enduring need to understand if these socio-historical factors impact Black men's decisions to apply for the position of principal in certain schools.  According to Gooden, 2012, p. 68:

> Certainly the discourse of the history of African Americans and their struggle to achieve equity in education has been enhanced by the work of noted scholars.  However, this story is not complete without a discussion of the lives of African-American leaders, especially principals.  It is also important that these histories are reported from perspectives of African-American scholars who do not present them from a deficit perspective.

By using the previous research as an underpinning, it will center the educational leader voice of Black men and uncover their nuanced interpretations of their leadership experiences and how those experiences inform(ed) their professional career advancement decisions and aligns with Toldson's (2018, 2019) rejection of the validity of research that seeks to humanize the lived experiences of Black people without the voices and perspectives of Black people.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGICAL FRAMING AND METHODS

The primary purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of Black men principals or Black men credentialed to be principals with a particular emphasis on their motivation and any challenges that could impact their decision to pursue or not to pursue certain principal opportunities. Black men represent a subset of a dominant group and for this reason there is a need to add their historic and internalized experiences of education and leadership to the critical conversations about their absence and/or presence and how that comes to bear on their professional decision-making process. A secondary purpose is to complicate the traditional view and amplify the nuances of their stories to promote change where needed.

## Research Questions

What are the career experiences of Black men educators who are credentialed to be principals in a southeastern School District?

a. What is the nature of their early career experiences?

b. How did they experience their various transitions into and through leadership positions?

## Methodology

This study assumes that researchers are the primary data collection instrument, allowing for the construction of meaning from research participants through inductive fieldwork (Creswell, 2004). This study sought to construct meaning from the narratives of Black men educational leaders by exploring their experiences, feelings, and views of the principalship, as well as their aspirations and professional navigation. According to Glesne (2016), a qualitative researcher seeks to make sense of actions and narratives and how they intersect. Assessing the qualitative discoveries allowed for more critical insights to the decisions made by Black men

educational leaders. Of interest was the impetus for the participants' decisions to apply for

certain positions/assignments.  As a bricoleur, studying the choices of minoritized men in

educational leadership, I sought to add to "reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis, and intertextual

representation" in a manner that went beyond the collection of data to construct concepts and

code the categories into a provisional theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 38).  The social impact

of my data findings means that I, and others that look like me, have the potential to relearn and

reflect on the constitution that guides our thinking. Thus, there is the opportunity to add to the

conversation about "what is knowledge, what makes it valid, and whether and how it can be

objective if shaped by historical, social and cultural contexts" (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p.2).

Representation in educational leadership and knowledge creation means creating knowledge that

demonstrates "how personal troubles connect with social issues" (Mills, 1959, p. 8).  This

qualitative research study also allowed me to focus on data and data collection that created "a

pieced-together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation"

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4).

## Paradigmatic and Theoretical Research Frameworks

Saldaña and Omasta (2018) submit that "a methodology is why you are going about it in

a particular way" (p.30) whereas the theoretical framework is what the research considers to be

necessary.  According to Lincoln (2010), paradigms are concepts that "tell us something

important about researcher standpoint. […] They tell us something about what the researcher

counts as knowledge and who can deliver the most valuable slice of this knowledge" (p. 7.)

The use of Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework that amplifies the tenet of

counter storytelling and majoritarian narratives to examine systems of power within education

provided the data necessary to obtain a more nuanced understanding about how and why Black

men make professional decisions regarding career advancement in educational leadership. This qualitative study, underpinned by CRT, focused on what I consider to be of importance: understanding what, if any, factors impact decision-making about belonging and leading in certain educational spaces. The goal of this research was to explore how Black men educators' understanding of their lived experiences have informed their pursuit of educational leadership roles.

This research was "based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 23). This study of a large, southeastern, urban district also answered possible questions about how social and professional identity is constructed at the intersections of race and education as it focused upon: "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences with the overall purpose being to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). However, in the end, my goal was to have an intersectionality of theory and method to provide "clarity of conception and economy of procedure" and to aid in the "release rather than the restriction of the sociological imagination" to provide a different viewpoint on how to instrumentalize the two in order to become a "self-conscious thinker" as I imaginatively interpreted the data (Mills, 1959, p.120). The postmodern constructivist framework was reinforced by the recognition that there are no objective human perceptions because each perception is shaped by respective cultures, interactions, and societies. As Black men, educational leaders are a part of a relatively small group that has been conditioned by a historical context that has created a localized representation of a societal pattern and structure. This social institution impacts perception, opportunity, thinking, and decision-

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making. My intent was to "conceptualize the studied phenomenon to understand it in abstract terms, articulate theoretical claims, acknowledge subjectivity in theorizing, and offer an imaginative interpretation" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 127). Like Gordon (2008), I was

> motivated by my desire to find a method of knowledge production and a way of writing that could represent the damage and the haunting of the historical alternatives and thus richly conjure, describe, narrate, and explain the liens, the costs, the forfeits, and the losses of modern systems of abusive power in their immediacy and worldly significance (p. xvii).

Operating under a constructivist paradigm and according to Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba the belief is that "we construct knowledge through our lived experiences and through our interactions with other members of society" (2011, p. 103). By allowing space for multiple factors and perspectives of Black men educators to be amplified, provided additional knowledge production to further the body of research.

Critical Race Theory informed the research at various phases, from research design to analysis. This particular framework provided a critical lens to promote a call for action (Creswell, 2009). *The Tenets of CRT* are as follows (adapted from Horsford, 2010a):

**Table 4.  The Tenets of Critical Race Theory**

| Critical Race Theory Tenet | Definition | Source |
|---|---|---|
| Permanence of Racism | Racism, both conscious and unconscious is a permanent component of American life | Bell (1992); Ladson-Billings &; Tate (1995); Tate (1997); Ladson-Billings (1998) |
| Whiteness as Property | Because of the history of race and racism in the U.S. and the role U.S. jurisprudence has played in reifying conceptions of race, the notion of whiteness can be considered a property interest | Harris (1995), Ladson-Billings (1998), Ladson-Billings &; Tate (1995) |
| Counter storytelling and majoritarian narratives | A method of telling a story that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths especially ones held by the majority; majoritarian narratives are also recognized as stories, and not assumed to be facts or the truth | Matsuda (1995); Ladson-Billings &; Tate (1995); Tate (1997); Delgado (1995); Ladson-Billings (1998); Solórzano &; Yosso (2001) |
| Interest Convergence | Significant progress for Black people is achieved only when the goals of Black people are consistent with the needs of Whites | Bell (1980a, 2004); Ladson-Billings (1998) |
| Critique of Liberalism | Critique of basic notions embraced by liberal ideology to include colorblindness, meritocracy, and neutrality of the law | Crenshaw (1988), Ladson-Billings &; Tate (1995); Tate (1997); Ladson-Billings (1998) |
| Intersectionality | Considers race across races and the intersection of race with other identities and differences | Crenshaw (1991) |

I selected Critical Race Theory for this study to account for the historical perspectives of race and racism in education in the southeastern United States and as a theory to assist in understanding and coding the data. Ladson-Billings and Tate stated, "Racism is endemic and deeply ingrained in American life and the impetus of Black underachievement is institutional and structural racism" (as reported by Cole, 2009, p.15). This is predicated upon the tenet of the "Permanence of Racism". In educational settings and for this research, Critical Race Theory constituted a scrutiny of school and learning as a racial state apparatus (Leonardo, 2012). I utilized the tenet of "Counter Storytelling and Majoritarian Narratives", as a means of allowing participants to share their lived experiences and counteracting the single-story narrative that is often constructed about a minoritized group. This process-oriented way of listening and coding counter-narrative stories through life history interviews allowed their stories to be linked to a wider environmental, social and/or political context. The use of storytelling and narrative analysis served to demonstrate the coexistence of dual or divergent realities when it comes to education or educational leadership.

The tenet of interest convergence also played a role in some lived experiences given that education has long since been used to reinforce racial hierarchies and those racial hierarchies can sometimes also be used to determine who receives the explicit and hidden benefits. The tenet of intersectionality explores and honors multiple positionalities. Sexual orientation, gender, sex, religion, class, race, and national origin are perceived in varying ways during various times and could impact how the tenets of interest convergence and counter storytelling present in any given lived experience as each can represent a different form of representation and/or oppression for each subgroup.

**Methods**

This research utilized various methods to allow for a "thick description" (Ryle, 1948) to illuminate the historical and sociological lived experiences of Black men and their career experiences in educational leadership. Using qualitative data to create codes from observations and interviews, making marginal notes, and then repeatedly revisiting the data to identify patterns, themes, or differences is a way of making meaning (Lester et. al. 2020). The timeline maps and the semi-structured interviews of each participant provided a unique insight into the complex path associated with the journey to the principalship. The themes created from the repetitive degree of generality underscored the interconnectedness of the participants' lived experiences and unified ideas. The research methods are outlined below.

**Research Site and Social and Organizational Context**

The research site was a large, urban public school district in the Southeast that has one of the most diverse student populations within the state. According to Public School Review (2023), the district is ranked in the Top 1% of North Carolina school districts with regard to diversity. Additionally, it is noted that the minority enrollment is 65% of the student body (majority Black and Hispanic). The general demographics closely mirror those of the United States at large. On average, White students comprise 35% of the total population, 29% are Black, 28% are Hispanic, 5% identify with two or more races, and 3% are Asian. There are more than 80 schools in its system, and it serves more than 51,843 students each year. The school system has 42 elementary schools, 15 middle schools, and 16 high schools. Eight specialty schools bring the system-wide total to 81. The Board of Education is composed of nine members who serve four-year terms. The board selects a superintendent to oversee the day-to-

day operations of the school system. The current Superintendent began her tenure in 2021, after serving as Interim Superintendent since November 2020.

On the district's website, it states that the district's Human Resource mission is to, "Recruit and retain a highly effective and diverse workforce that supports district goals to ensure excellence for all." It further states that for Climate and Safety, the district seeks to, "Foster an inclusive climate that values the safety and well-being of all students, faculty and staff and fosters an environment that creates a sense of belonging."

While the district has over 7,400 employees, the district's human resource department claims to not collect demographic information about the employees. The student demographics are published on the district's website; however, only the number of employees are provided on the site. This research will seek to connect the macro of the political, historical, social, and cultural experiences to the micro of the participants to address the research question and sub-questions.

**Timeline Mapping Interviews**

This research used life history interviews to capture the personal life perceptions of 12 Black men and their professional career choices in educational leadership. This projective technique included minimal structure to allow the participants "to impose their own forms of organization, bringing into expression their needs, motives, emotions and the like" (Bagnoli, 2009, p. 548).

This served as a topic-oriented method that focused on what the participants perceived as the life moments that informed their educational leadership trajectory. The life history interview and subsequent conversation laid the foundation to intentionally explore the past, for the political, historical, cultural, and social lived experiences that led them to a career in the field of

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education.  This research method focused on the use of oral history to explore the intersectionality of culture and history as a tool for recognizing context-specific events and the possible professional impact (Adriansen, 2012).  The aim of using this method in my research was to create connections between the stories being told, what has transpired in the interviewees' lives over their career, and how they have reacted in their professional decision-making by highlighting the significant dimensions of their professional experience from their perspective. There is a "growing interest in the use of visual methods in qualitative research as a way to engage with issues of power relations, representation, and meaning" (Kolar et al., 2015, p.15).

Each participant interaction began with a projected one-hour in-person timeline mapping interview using a large sheet of white paper and thin markers.  This portion of the interview was taped and transcribed, and their visual timelines were later analyzed as additional points. Their timeline served as a visual representation of major and most important life events that the participants connected to their experiences with education and educational leadership. Facilitating the creation of this timeline was intentionally open-ended. Participants could begin wherever the memories took them with the allowance for addition and editing.  A horizontal line, or any other visual method the participant chose to represent their life trajectory was encouraged. Through a discussion of the timeline, I sought to consider when and how these events unfolded and how they may have affected one another.  During the conversation, participants would sometimes add additional lines to delineate various perspectives or edit their previous work. After the timeline began to take shape, participants were asked to add any relevant outside historical events that had an impact with extended lines that intersect their main horizontal line. As memories crystallized, allowances were made to reconstruct or deconstruct their story. The combination of their life history with these external events began to provide context and meaning

making. As noted by Goodson and Sikes (2001), the process of life history research is iterative, and the analysis of the interview begins as soon as the interview begins.

It is important to note that the participant was encouraged to participate in the writing and drawing process as a way of co-constructing knowledge in an explorative manner. The analysis of the life history timeline came through a social, historical, and political lens for context. The visual, in part or whole, served as a published portion of the data analysis because it provided visual context; however, decipherable personal information was redacted. (see Appendix A for timeline mapping questions)

**Interviews**

For clarification and follow-up questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants in a second session after the completion of their timeline map. This provided an additional means of data collection to explore salient points from the timeline and connect the story with an emphasis on the present, future, early life, early career, and current career for the participant. Thus, the goal was to delve into the nuances of early career experiences and their various transitions into and through leadership in hopes of understanding the impetus and result for their career choices and how they view their role in education. The individual interview questions were informed by CRT and the importance of asking open-ended questions that allow for participants to share the meaning-making of their lived experiences, which may or may not line up with the status quo narratives; in other words, these interviews were open-ended in order to allow participants to share counter-narratives (see Appendix B for interview questions).

The same 12 Black men participants took part in a one-on-one, face-to-face, interview with open-ended questions that lasted approximately 2 hours with questions that were curated

based upon the findings from their timeline map and individual experiences. I sought permission from the participants using a written informed consent letter that explained the purpose of the research and an inquiry about their interest in participating. I reiterated the participant's right to discontinue their involvement in the research study at any time without negative consequences. I used an interview protocol wherein I asked the participant to address the interview questions. I provided the participant with an advance copy of the questions to establish comfort and elicit detailed responses. I asked follow-up questions as the interview progressed to gain a greater understanding of their lived experiences as an educational leader within the district. In-person interviews were audiotaped with a digital recorder and transcribed. I offered the participant the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy. A pseudonym was used to protect the identity of the participants. All interviews were transcribed and coded using an iterative process.

**Journal**

I took notes before, during, and after the timeline mapping interview and the semi-structured interview. The bulk of my notes were taken during the audiotaped portion of the process. I wanted to be certain not to interrupt the participants as they were sharing; however, I wanted to revisit during a natural pause or break. I described the participants, their gestures, where they applied emphasis, changes in voice, my wonderings, points lacking clarity and my personal reactions, interpretations, or perceptions. I also included anything I felt was salient to my research as I went about my day.

While my research was motivated by the lack of representation of Black men in the role of assistant principal or principal at all levels and at all types of schools, the noted research problem of underrepresentation made locating participants difficult although there are 81 schools in the district.

**Data Collection and Coding Process**

The purpose of the data analysis as it pertains to this study is to lay bare any external or internalized factors that impact how Black men educational leaders navigate leadership opportunities and to what extent self-selecting plays a part.  Through the "organizing and interrogating" of data I had the opportunity to "see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories" (Hatch, 2002, p. 148). Data collection began with initial timeline mapping interviews that allowed me to decide upon the direction of all subsequent questions asked in the one-on-one interviews.  The data set for each participant generated initial codes.  Patterns were identified and categories were derived from the data and themes were derived.  This led to future decisions about additional questions needed for follow-up or the need to ask probing questions to better understand the lived experiences of the participants.  This cyclical approach allowed me to re(consider) the methods and types of data collected in the future based upon what was revealed or not revealed.

This qualitative study used the inductive analysis framework as outlined by Hatch (2002). It allowed me to "proceed from the specific to the general" by beginning specifically with minoritized men that have applied for positions of leadership within education and then develop questions that exposed possible connections among them to create an entire phenomenon (Hatch, 2002, p. 161). The examination of patterns began with analyzable parts that Hatch describes as "frames of analysis" that evolve from words or the participants' descriptions of events (Hatch, 2002, p.163).  This information was then organized into domains and then salient domains were identified and coded while others were relegated to another facet of the study for another time. "Domains can be categories that are understood by large numbers of people with common

cultural understandings" thus, "discovering domains gives researchers a way of getting at how participants organize their understanding and participate in their worlds" to reveal relationships and themes across the data (Hatch, 2002, p. 165). These domains also held the possibility of revealing counterevidence that did not support, disconfirmed, or contradicted the initial hypothesis. Using a cyclical process allowed me to use my research questions as a reference tool during the coding process to reflect the data and to provide direction for future research questions.

The data analysis process followed Saldaña's (2016) use of codes, categories, and themes. Saldaña (2016) explains that a "code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). Based upon the patterns or features noted from the codes created through an analytic lens, categories can then be derived from groups of like codes that share a panoptic representation. The themes that result are not coded. Rather, they represent something derived from the categories and reflect process and data (Saldaña, 2016). The data collection process began with the initial codes such as fairness, equity, validation, self-perception, racism, personal growth, identity, representation, stereotypes and family. The intermediate coding was grouped together, where appropriate, to yield categories. These categories evolved into themes. An example of the categories that resulted from the grouping of the codes were familial and education, impact of bias and stereotypes, representation in education. It is important to note that the process was undertaken and refined after each of the 12 participants completed both interviews. As a result of an increased data set, it was important to reflect and make adjustments such as adding additional codes, adjusting the

grouping of codes and reconsidering the categories and how the information was being

interpreted based upon each participant's experience.

**Table 5.  Data Collection Timetable**

| Data Collection Plan | Original Data Collection | Actual Data Collection |
|---|---|---|
| Timeline Map Interviews | Interview 12 Participants | Interviewed 12 Participants |
| *Initial coding:  Analyze data from each participant. Curate questions for subsequent one-on-one interview based on their timeline and their individual experiences. Code data.* | | |
| One-on-One Interviews with Same 12 Participants | Interview Same 12 Participants | Interviewed Same 12 Participants |
| *Intermediate Coding:  Analyze data from one-on-one interviews. Rearrange and/or reassign codes and categories based on data from each interview.  Note initial themes.  Revisit data and journal notes. Search for commonalties and variances in the data.* | | |
| Clarity for Interpretations | Contact as Needed | Text 4 Participants and Called 2 Participants |
| *Advanced Coding:  Continued analysis of data. Identifying and verifying themes.  Revisiting data for additional interpretations. Use data to inform recommendations.* | | |

## Data Analysis

Data was collected through timeline mapping, one-on-one semi-structured interview

questions, recordings, and a reflexive journal.  Both interviews were conducted using the

qualitative interview protocol to allow the participants to tell their individual stories from the

perspective of their lived experiences.  The first interview (the timeline mapping) was used as a

research tool to gather information and insights on the memories of the participants that could

then be used to curate the questions for the second interview.  As participants answered the

timeline mapping interview questions and constructed a visual representation of their path to the

principalship, I noted body language, pauses, excitement, shifts in tone, timeline segments on

which they labored, and emotional shifts.  The reflexive notes coupled with the timeline served

as a backbone for the curated and semi-structured questions for the second interview. All

interviews occurred after the participants had signed and submitted the consent form.  The

interviews took place between September 11, 2023 and November 27, 2023.  Each participant

went well beyond the allotted time for each interview and demonstrated enthusiasm at the

opportunity to share their experiences and to have their story preserved.

## Ethics

As a minoritized woman in educational leadership, it was important that I acknowledge

my implicit biases and how they impacted my research and my views of social justice.  My

positionalities and the frames created come to bear on my work as a researcher and the ethics

that must underpin my research.  There are no safe spaces, and the pursuit of absolute objectivity

may do more harm than good in the research process. As such, researchers, "concerned with

voice, power, interpretation, and representation have struggled with the ethics of research"

(Lincoln & Canella, 2009, p. 277).  Instead, it is my responsibility to understand my biases and

identities to recognize how it will impact my interpretation of the data. To that end, I continued

to keep a reflexivity journal of ideas, threads, and ruminations while I conducted and

documented interviews and conversations to explore my historic way of thinking.  Qualitative

research is never neutral, but it can still be emancipatory while counteracting the single-story

narrative as I endeavor to employ 'reflexive, critical ethics' that "include a concern for

transformative egalitarianism, attention to problems of representation, and [a] continued

examination of power orientations" (Lincoln & Canella, 2009, p. 279). However, the design of

my qualitative research, the manner in which I collect data, and the analysis process must all be

underpinned by trustworthiness and a pursuit of social justice that disrupts the dominant structure of education that reproduces itself.

Trustworthiness is quintessential to the research design process, data collection and analysis. Creating knowledge that added to the existing body of work was done by focusing on meaning making that is useful, an examination of power, while being trustworthy and credible. As I examined structures of sociological and historical power and how the structures influenced the daily lived experiences of Black man educators as they move toward and through educational leadership positions, it was important that the narratives of their lived experiences were protected and honored. Ethical decisions were made about material that was included and excluded to protect the participants while remaining true to the agenda of collecting the stories of the underrepresented. Every effort was made to represent the stories of Black men educators fairly and accurately while also recognizing my biases as a member of the district and as a minoritized female in a position within educational leadership within the district. This recognition was particularly important as I tried to avoid unintentionally mis-representing any data collected.

**Member Checking**

As a form of validation and to affirm the validity of the data collected, member checking was used wherein participants were offered access to their consent forms, timeline maps, and transcripts. The timeline mapping interview represented approximately 1 and a half hours per participant and the recorded transcripts represented approximately 2 hours per participant. The participants were contacted within 7 days of their final interview. They were asked to check for accuracy of the transcripts and were encouraged to add to their timelines. They were also made aware that what was transcribed, and my notes were my interpretations of their timeline mapping interview and the one-on-one interview that followed. I noted places of pause, deep breaths,

requests to repeat questions, tapping, emphasis, and any other body language that I noticed. Through the analysis of the transcript my notes helped create a visual to aid in my nascent interpretation of what the participants said.  It was helpful to provide my notes of audible and visual reactions to the words transcribed on the paper.  They were also asked about their continued consent to have their interviews included in my final research.  None of the participants suggested any additions, subtractions, or changes to their maps or interviews.  None of the participants withdrew their consent.  This was all done to support the credibility of the data collected.  I had several subsequent interactions with the participants when necessary to ask clarifying questions about my interpretations and the coding of the transcripts.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of Black

men principals or Black men assistant principals with aspirations to serve in the role of principal

in a large, urban, Southeastern school district with an emphasis on the motivating factors that

influenced their professional career choices.  I conducted one-on-one timeline mapping

interviews with 12 participants that then produced curated semi-structured interview questions

for the second interview with the same 12 participants.  The goal was to intentionally seek out

the perspectives of the participants and respect their lived experiences by encouraging them to

share the unique stories of their journey to the principalship.  Data from my journal provides

points for reflection and illuminated tone, body language, points of emphasis and connections

found.

Critical Race Theory was used as a methodological and interpretive framework to

examine their perceptions of the influence of race and racism on their ascension through

educational leadership through Black voice through the lens of counter-narrative storytelling

(Ladson-Billings, 2009a, 2009c; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).  Leffler notes in Defining self: Oral

history, storytelling, and leadership (2014) that there is significance in the emancipatory act of

defining who we are in the face of the grand narratives that are constructed for us, about us and

often without us:

> The stories people choose to tell about themselves are constructed on multiple levels.
>
> They are first and foremost stories of individual memories and meanings. We are
>
> products of intergenerational cultures that have geographic, ethnic, racial, linguistic, and
>
> ancestral roots. We also live in specific moments in time, regularly forging connections
>
> between the present, past, and future. And we inhabit particular spaces, either voluntarily

or involuntarily, which form our reality of possibilities. The stories we remember and the stories we choose to tell shape our personal consciousness. They also influence how others see us. Our stories impact our leadership potential (p.19).

This chapter explores the codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the data analysis, the interpretations gleaned, and the insights gained from my research approaches with a purpose of creating space for Black men who have been marginalized in educational spaces where the grand narrative serves as the lens through which they are viewed. Leffler (2014) emphasizes the healing that can result from sharing personal stories:

For those who have been left out of the historical record, they can put more voices in play, illustrating the complex mosaic of how societies function. Telling one's personal story can also be therapeutic for those who feel marginalized and overlooked. Autobiographical reflections are historiographical acts and help to create a collective consciousness and purpose (p. 19).

I begin with a comprehensive overview to provide context to each participants' lived experience. According to Paris (2011) and Blackburn (2014) researchers have the potential to alter the dominant narrative that dehumanizes and marginalizes while also adding validity to their research particularly in instances where they are "made less human by having their individuality, creativity, and humanity taken away. . . .This is especially true for those marginalized by systems of inequality based on race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, or language, among other identity markers" (p. 43). What follows are biographical profiles that include tenure in education, and current roles. My findings are divided into sections organized according to the themes that emerged to answer my research questions. Tables and figures are included to present a concise version and illustration of salient information.

# Participant Overview

## Principal Pipeline Participants

Mr. X is a Black man who had recently entered the pool to become an assistant principal. He has served as a PE teacher, head basketball coach, Dean of Students and a graduation coach. He also has extensive experience as an in-school-suspension and long-term suspension support. He has more than 20 years of experience in education. He identifies as a Black man over the age of 40. He possesses a Master of Education and has earned many awards and notes of recognition for his outstanding service in the community and as an educational leader. Although he has been credentialed to be an assistant principal for more than 5 years, local requirements for the pool process delayed his ascension. He has worked in a large, urban school district for his entire career.

Mr. Shonuff and Mr. Q had not decided whether to complete the pool process. Both of them identified as Black men and are over the age of 50 and have more than 20 years of experience in the district. Mr. Shonuff has almost a decade of experience as an assistant principal and Mr. Q has close to 20 years of experience as an assistant principal. Both have spent most of their careers at large White high schools. They have received awards and they serve on leadership committees as representatives in educational leadership for the district. They are active and well-known within the community for their philanthropic work. Both men hold graduate degrees in Educational Leadership and are active members of their fraternities. They use their respective organizations to create mentoring opportunities for youth, particularly the adolescent Black man.

Mr. Atticus recently gained access to the pool after several attempts. He has been in education for a little more than 15 years and has 6 years of experience as an assistant principal.

Most of his experience has been at large, urban, low-performing schools. He identifies as a Black man and is under the age 40. He earned a Masters in Educational Leadership and is active in his fraternity and within the community.

Mr. Phil and Mr. King currently serve as principals within the district. They both identify as Black men and both are over the age of 50. Mr. King has a Masters in Educational Leadership. Both men have assistant principal experience K-12. Mr. King has 11 years of assistant principal experience and 7 years as a principal. Mr. King has more than 27 years of experience in education. Mr. Phil has 8 years of experience as an assistant principal and 14 years of principal experience. He has earned a terminal degree in education.

Mr. Paul identifies as a multi-racial man close to the age of 50. He has a graduate degree in Educational Leadership with 23 years of experience in education. He was an assistant principal for 12 years and served as a principal for 5 years. He is no longer a principal. He has applied for several assistant principal positions, but he is currently providing instructional support at the Central Office.

Mr. Lonnon was tapped to join the district from a neighboring county. He identifies as a Black man close to the age of 50. He has a graduate degree in Educational Leadership. He has approximately 10 years of leadership experience, most of which was gained in another district. He was assigned to a large, urban school within the district that had been historically White and had an almost 90% White staff when he arrived. Within the last 6 years, the student population had adjusted to reflect more than 57% Black and Brown and was now Title One. He abruptly departed the district after less than 2 years primarily because of the unaddressed racial climate at the school at which he was asked to lead. He felt it could negatively impact his career in the long-run and accepted a promotion at a large, White school outside of the district. He served in

the classroom for approximately 8 years before being tapped to enter educational leadership in another district.

**Pre-Principal Pipeline Participants**

Mr. Method identifies as a 40-year-old Black man. He spent 2 years within the district as an assistant principal before leaving to advance his career in a neighboring district. He identified the racial climate and delayed advancement as the reason for his departure from the district in which the research was conducted. He became a principal within another district after 2 years as an assistant principal with them. He holds a counseling degree and a degree in Educational Leadership. He is currently pursuing a terminal degree in education. He has won several awards for his leadership and uses his fraternity to provide mentoring and counseling opportunities for adolescent Black men.

Mr. Wilson and Mr. Alpha are retired principals who are still active at the senior level. Both had more than 10 years of K-12 experience in educational leadership when they retired. They are between the ages of 55 and 65. Upon their recent retirements, they chose to continue to work within the educational community to influence policy and procedure for recruiting and retaining Black men. Both men serve as mentors in the Black Caucus and hold regular gatherings to fully understand the advancement or delayed advancement for the men within the group.

Mr. Omaha also identifies as a Black man close to the age of 50 served as a principal and as a part of senior staff. He holds a terminal degree in leadership and has approximately 24 years of experience. While with the district, he was known for conversations surrounding equity and the absence of equity within the schools to which he was assigned. He was very vocal about curriculum and the quality of education received by marginalized populations. He was a daily presence within the school buildings and within the community. He was known as an activist

who was not afraid to speak truth to power.  He was demoted and found blameless.  He was

assigned to a department of two tasked with creating equity for students in the district.  He

decided to leave to take a promotion in another state.

The following table provides a snapshot of the demographics of the 12 participants.

**Table 6.  Demographics of the Participants**

| Participants | Years in the Field of Education | Years as an Assistant Principal | Years as a Principal | Additional Factors |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mr. X | 27 | 0 | 0 | Recently Granted Access to AP Pool |
| Mr. Atticus | 22 | 6 | 0 | Recently Granted Access to Principal Pool |
| Mr. King | 26 | 11 | 7 | Principal at Non-Traditional School |
| Mr. Lonnon | 21 | 3.5 | 9.5 | Principal – Left District |
| Mr. Omaha | 24 | 5 | 7.5 | Involuntarily Reassigned – Left District |
| Mr. Shonuff | 28 | 9 | 0 | No Pool Access |
| Mr. Alpha | 32 | 3 | 19 | Retired Principal |
| Mr. Q | 27 | 18 | 0 | No Pool Access Career AP |
| Mr. Paul | 12 | 5 | 5 | Demoted Principal |
| Mr. Wilson | 28 | 9 | 15 | Retired Principal |
| Mr. Phil | 28 | 6.5 | 14 | Principal |
| Mr. Method | 5 | 4 | 4 | Principal – Left District |

**Theme Analysis: The Data Speaks and Themes Emerge**

I began with the use of participant generated timeline mapping as a method of facilitating the collection of data while also allowing the participants to gradually become comfortable with expressing themselves, cultivating their voice and crafting their narrative. Additionally, "through timeline mapping, participants also get an opportunity to reflect on their own trajectories and describe the experiences in detail" (Day et al., 2016; Worth, 2011). I used a recording device to record the interviews. The length of each transcript averaged 18 pages in length and most one-on-one interviews approximately two hours as opposed to the projected one-and-half hours. The audio was played, and the transcripts were edited for accuracy. Once each transcription was edited for clarity to match the words and expressions of each participant, the transcripts were cut and glued on color-coded note cards and organized and reorganized to allow for data analysis. The themes are (a) faith as a pillar (b) family as a foundational impetus to educational goals (c) gatekeeping measures as problematic (d) delayed advancement as a demotivating (e) racialized placement (f) bias in assigned duties and a lack of preparedness (g) personal and imposed perceptions.

The data set provided evidence that many Black men in educational leadership within the district had formed a brotherhood of sorts. It was sometimes mentioned as an "educational frat", the Black Caucus, my boys, or my brothers. They meet for dinner, engage beyond the work hours, communicate via group chat, provide encouragement and mentor one another. They act as a community to provide support and guidance many of them feel is missing within the district.

**Theme 1: Faith as a Pillar**

The findings begin with the role of faith in the lives of the participants. Five of the 12 participants referenced their belief system as a method or vessel for channeling their frustration

or disappointment with their career advancement or trajectories (see Figure 2). Many of their stories were underpinned by faith, not as a factor in their professional decision-making to pursue certain positions, but as a coping mechanism to face bias or adversity within the district.

Each of the five participants viewed faith as an inseparable part of their being and they found it important to operationalize their faith throughout the day as educational leaders. They cited that their faith or spirituality was particularly useful as they navigated relationships, stressors and setbacks within the role of educational leader. This was true for those serving as assistant principals and principals.

As researched by Newcomb and Niemever (2015) for the Black principal participants in their study, faith in various forms served to reinforce the resiliency of Black principals under the most strenuous of circumstances. In support of these findings, the responses of some of the participants indicated that their belief system helped them make meaning in difficult situations and served as a sanctuary of sorts during trying times. Faith and spirituality were identified as the underpinning for many who identify with the African American culture and five of the research participants indicated that Christian faith and/or individual spirituality played an important role among Black principals (Bass & Alston, 2018; Lomotey, 2019; Newcomb & Niemever, 2015). At its most fundamental level, it was found that faith helps some Black educational leaders with the daily activities associated with being an educational leader, particularly in high-needs educational settings.

What follows in Table 6 are the codes, categories, and themes and the explanation of the data set.

**Figure 2. Mr. Paul Illustrates Faith's Role in Battling Biased Systems**



Mr. Paul explains that faith has been a foundational piece in coping with adversity and attempting to make sense of his professional experiences.

> When the rubber hits the road, eventually I find myself at faith, but what I get bombarded with every day and have to deal with in the environment constantly is the perceived reality or the perceived bias that may or may not exist that I have to fight internally... But when it gets down to it, whether I lean this way, at one point, I eventually found myself back here because I have to remind myself, I didn't get here because I put trust or faith in my environment or people or a man I put my faith in God in His plan for my life and I chose, I choose to lean in that no matter what.

Mr. King also mentioned his belief system and how it has sustained him when little makes sense regarding opportunities or the lack thereof for Black men within the district.

> If God opens this door, who am I to not walk through it? God has everything happened for a reason.

Mr. Alpha had a successful tenure as a principal; however, he does note that it was not without adversity. During the audio, he can be heard pausing as he recounts the role faith played in helping him stay the course he believed the Lord had placed him on. There were times he was

keenly aware that he was being judged by Whites because he had been granted access to the principalship. His presence was questioned and far from celebrated by his White counterparts. As opposed to focusing on what he perceived as their negative perceptions, he maintained the following mindset:

> The reason again is, because once I began to really see how, again I keep going back to my faith and how God ordained these steps. I realized that you know what? No, you can't block me because this is bigger than you. This is bigger than me. This is a God plan for my life... I gotta tell people, you know, my faith tells me this is all ordained by God. Every step of the way was ordained by God.

Mr. Phil has also leaned upon his faith during times of trial within his leadership career, particularly as it relates to having his leadership ability questioned by his White peers. He noted, "What keep it all together for me personally? My faith, family, and friends. You got to have faith, you know, and keep believing."

Mr. Atticus has been trying consistently to enter the pool to advance his career and has noted that the process was frustrating, but to maintain his positive attitude he notes the following:

> And so you know, it's, it's, it's been a part of my making. I use it as motivation today. I've been in my own therapy for full transparency. But I'm a spiritual being. And I don't have, I'm spiritual. I don't consider myself religious. I'm spiritual. And so, I recognize that I would not be who I am today without that part of my life and because of who I am and how I believe my life is set up to be. I believe that God has allowed me to be able to utilize my experience so that it can be a blessing for other people.

What follows is a table that provides a sample of the codes, categories and the themes

that emerged from the participants timeline mapping and subsequent semi-structured interviews.

**Table 7.  Sample of Codes, Categories and Themes**

| Codes | Categories | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| Faith, foundation, answers, explanations, frustration, disappointment, spirituality | Coping through faith; faith as strength. | Faith as a pillar |
| Family, foundation, advancement, expectations, educational experiences | Spoken and unspoken educational expectations from parents and family. | Family as foundational for educational goals. |
| Bias, confusing, equity, hiring practices, disparities, frustration, | Unclear processes and procedures; The process as a gatekeeping measure. | Gatekeeping measures as problematic. |
| Advancement, racism, disparities, time, money, opportunity | Delayed opportunity to join the pool; Black men's delayed ascension rate as compared to that of their White counterparts. | Delayed advancement as problematic. |
| Privilege, fairness, hiring practices, representation, opportunities, difficult, uncertainty | Being interviewed as a form of appeasement; Belief of being relegated to low-performing, low socio-economic, high needs, majority-minority schools. | Racialized placement. |
| Bias, disparities, personal growth, questioned | Being viewed as an athlete and not an instructional leader; Their role as the policer of Black and Brown students; Focusing on discipline prohibits them from fully preparing for the multi-faceted pool process to transition to the principalship. | Bias in duties creates lack of preparedness |
| Stereotypes, identity, self-perception, validation, decision-making, leadership | Overcompensating to prove their intelligence and justify their role; Feeling the need to overcompensate for their physical appearance; Feeling the need to dress for the part. | Personal and imposed perceptions. |

**Theme 2: Family as a Foundational for Educational Goals**

       The participants each shared the role family played in their conceptions of education. For each, there was an explicit and/or implicit expectation laid out by various family members that underscored the importance of education. This expectation was present even if they were not raised in a nuclear setting. The way their elders viewed education, even when the elders lacked formal education, shaped the participants' views on education and each cited the value placed on education as an impetus to their understanding and appreciation for the possibilities associated with academic excellence. However, these origin stories also served to provide a counter-narrative to the dominant storytelling that reinforces the assumption that education is prized primarily in White homes and neglected in the homes of Black families, particularly the homes of Black youth.

Mr. Atticus spoke in detail about the impact of being raised by a single mother and how her emphasis on education laid the foundation for him to persevere through education. The participant also made a note of using his mother as a starting point in his timeline (see Figure 3):

       Education was very serious. And my mom made sure that I knew that. I was, I was raised

       in the era that I got home from school; I did my homework first. I didn't go outside. Um,

       and so it was very serious, but my father was not present and did not play a part in

       that…So, I do feel like that part of my life was something that was very serious again,

       education was emphasized by my mom and my grandma.

Mr. Atticus also went on to say, "I always wanted the affirmation of my mom and always wanted the affirmation of my grandmother." However, in addition to being motivated by his mother and grandmother, the town he grew up in was steeped in the HBCU culture. He recollects hometown students going off to college and returning to teach and serve within the community.

I grew up right there at the backdoor East Carolina University. So that seeing, seeing

even there, my mentors that went on to college, and being from my hometown. I

remember growing up as a small town, and I remember there were certain individuals

that they went away to school, and would come back and teach…And these were people

that went to HBCUs. Specifically, Fayetteville State, Elizabeth City State which was

right there. Within an hour drive from my hometown, and North Carolina Central, and

A&T. I remember growing up particularly I think in like middle school, my freshman

year of high school, we used to actually come to a A&T State University Day and I

distinctly remember just being fascinated with the HBCU feel.

He also connected his early experiences with the HBCU and television. When he noted the

influence of a popular sitcom during that time.

Just recognizing this is late 90s. Yeah, this is mid-late 90s You know, coming off the

heels of A Different World and just those things that we saw on TV and you know,

Denise going to school and all that it was just like okay, I want to see that. And it was just

a part of just something I wanted to experience something I really wanted to experience.

**Figure 3.  Mr. Atticus Notes Single Parent as Foundation and Motivation for Educational Path**
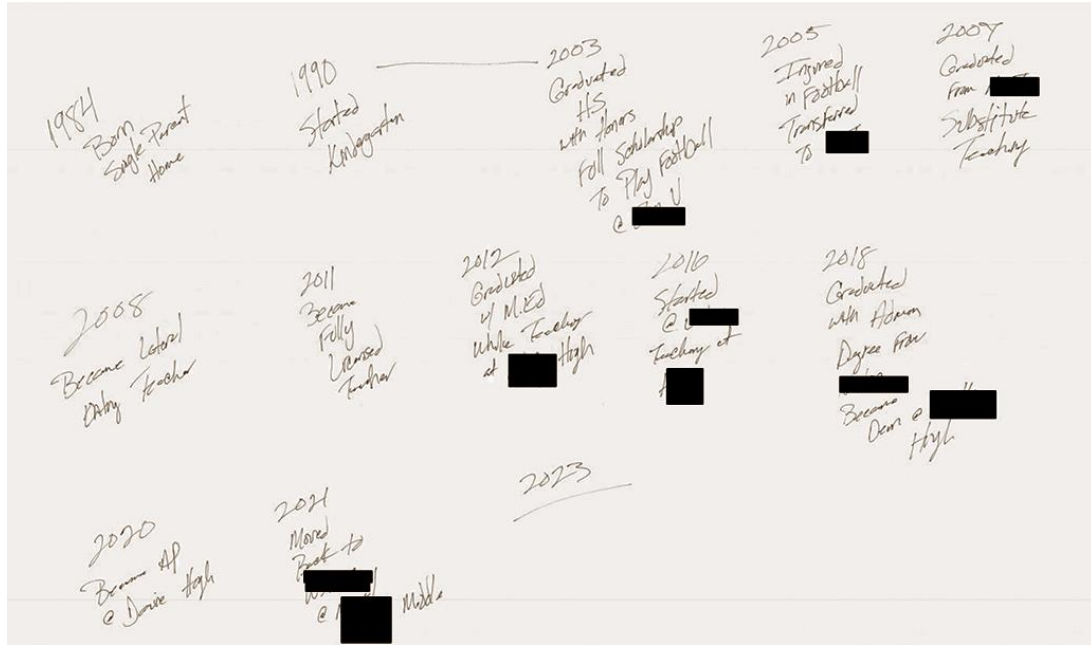


Mr. Omaha, whose mother died during his teen years, came from a blue-collar, nuclear family wherein his father was the silent provider that rarely mentioned anything regarding education, yet Mr. Omaha knew:

> Education was very important in the house.  And expectations were always high. We were we were a literature rich home. We had books everywhere and encyclopedias and college books and things of that nature and those are things that I would go and read and just look up words and learn words and stuff like that. Daddy never really said anything. He never really said anything.  Education was just sort of an unstated expectation just based on his presence.  It was just like an expectation. There wasn't something necessarily explicit.

While Mr. Atticus noted the representation he found in the HBCU and the representation he saw in a popular television series from the 90s, Mr. Omaha noted the absence of representation as impactful to how he viewed education.

> I never had a teacher of color until I got to college. And so I do think it was important that although all my teachers were white...they had a different perspective than what I called the regular white person that I met when I moved down south…We had to learn the words Lift Every Voice and Sing and we had to say we had to sing it. I mean, but we also did, we were very patriotic. We had to do national anthem every morning, and the Pledge of Allegiance, the full national anthem every morning. But we also did a lot of like black history stuff and in retrospect, some of it was just surface but, but even by today's standards, it was a lot for a white person to even do that because now you can't get anything half the time because they don't know the history themselves. So I think that the fact that they were they were just they were kind of like ethnic and it was the city and several of them had actually gone to our school before the neighborhood changed.

Mr. Omaha's exposure to various aspects of Black history and equity within education came from teachers who did not look like him or his family members.  However, it serves as impactful, and he noted it as important to how he viewed education.

Mr. Shonuff 's options were more direct according to his mother and grandmother; however, his father felt there was only one path:

> My grandmother had always told me I was either going to be a preacher or teacher. I couldn't see myself in the pulpit. But you know, but so those words were always running in my, you know, in my mind, that I'm gonna be a teacher or a preacher. You know, my dad told me that I was too lazy to work, so I had to go to college. So as far as second

grade, I will tell people, oh, I'm, I'm going to college. Because my dad just said…you

gone have to go to college and get a good job. And my mom, my grandmother, like I

said, I was gonna be a preacher or a teacher. So that was my introduction into education

(see Figure 4).

Additionally, Mr. Shonuff's parents took his early experience with a Black teacher to expand his

view of who could be an educator.

When I got to kindergarten, I had a black teacher. Okay, granted at that time, there were

about four teachers in the room, one room, but she was one. I never, I wouldn't talk to

her. I wouldn't interact with her because that wasn't normal to me. It wasn't normal to

see, for me to see a black teacher.  I wouldn't say I was scared of her. But I just didn't

trust that she was a teacher, because I had never seen one…by the end of the year, I did

begin to talk with her and saw that Oh, wow. She is a teacher, you know, and not only is

she a teacher, but she's a good one. And I kind of felt bad, you know, I went home I told

my parents about it. And of course, then they get enlightened me that yeah, we can be

anything that we wanted to be teachers, lawyers, whatever. Well, from that day on, I was

determined that you know what, I'm going to be a teacher. So that little black boys and

black girls wouldn't be scared or wouldn't see a Black teacher for the first time.

**Figure 4. Mr. Shonuff's Timeline Illustrating Multi-Generational Influence on the Foundational Role of Education**
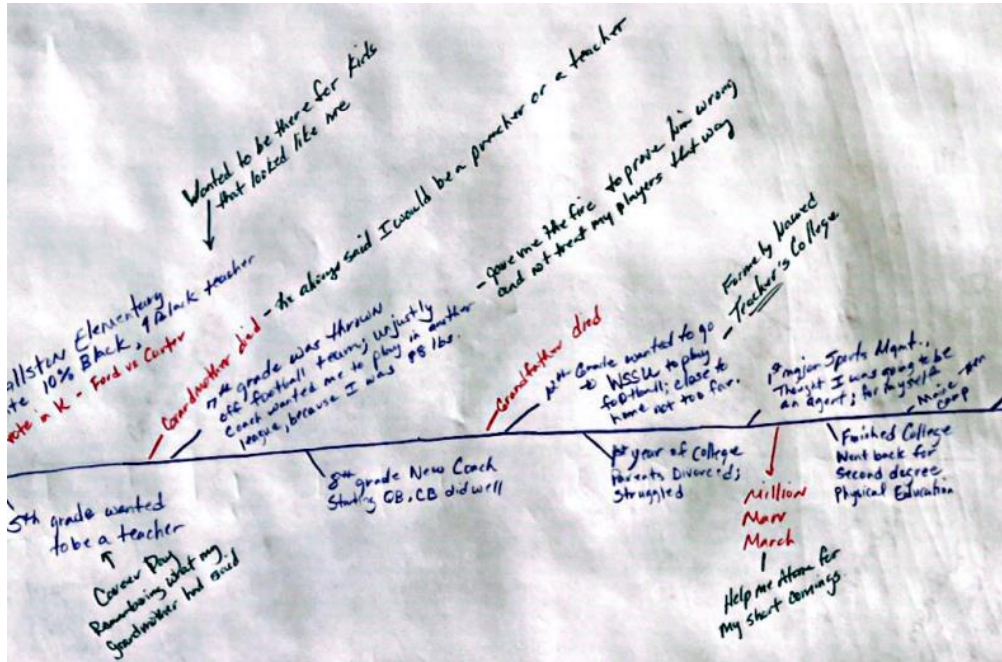
Mr. Lonnon, like Mr. Atticus, was raised in a single parent home with an absent father and with a grandmother. He shared a similar experience and educational expectation when asked who reinforced the importance of education within the home, he said:

> I would say my mom. You know, she did have goals for me. I think her seeing things that she had to deal with, her being a single mom, she always raised me to be independent…I had strict guidelines as far as even being able to go outside. I mean, I was an athlete playing sports, but it was your homework first before you do anything else. You can't go outside. If you want to go outside get your homework done, so that was probably my biggest influence.

In addition to his mother, Mr. Lonnon noted his competitive nature as a driving force in his educational endeavors, "My competitive nature in that 1, I did not want to let them [mother and

grandmother] down. I guess I consider myself a people pleaser so you know I want to make sure that I represented us well."

Mr. Phil grew up in a nuclear family environment of educators and stated:

> So, I grew up in a two-parent home. Mom and Dad were young parents, got married in college, they both went to the university, got married, do what young people do. The value of education was always in my house. My mom started out as a, the teacher's aide and a bus driver and went all the way to the superintendent in the same school district, and so I saw what education could do early on and I saw the value of what education is.

Mr. Alpha also grew up in a nuclear family setting; however, his parents had a minimal education yet possessed a very deliberate educational vision that was imparted on the participant and his siblings. He remembers:

> Neither one of them had a high school diploma, but they instilled that in all four siblings. You will graduate, you will go to high school. And you have three choices: military, job, or college, but at 18 you're getting out of the house. And that was instilled in us from day one. So, do well in school, do sports, whatever, but you're going to do, do well in school. You will not embarrass us. We will not come to the school and embarrass us. If you do, you will be embarrassed. That old school parenting. And with that old school parenting, not one of us had any trouble at school. All five of us graduated from high school, one, two, two of us got a four-year degree or higher, one military and two went to the field to work after high school. Nobody went back home at 18 (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Mr. Alpha's Timeline Noting the Requirement of College**
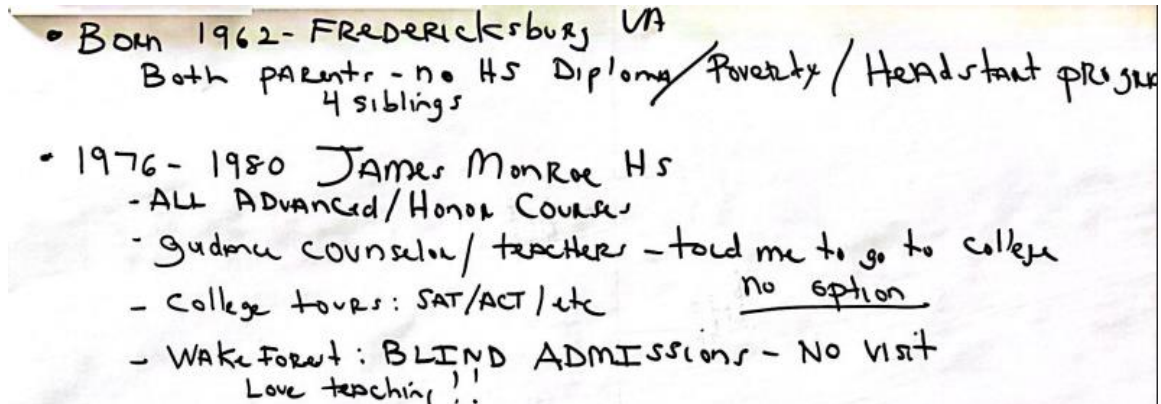


For Mr. Wilson, in 2018, while going through his father's effects and writing his

obituary, to his surprise, he discovered his father had earned an undergraduate degree (see Figure

6). When I asked Mr. Wilson why he thought his father never shared this information, he

believed it was probably a result of limited opportunities within his hometown and the financial

responsibility associated with having a family to provide for that kept him tethered to the safety

of his blue-collar job as opposed to risking it for a white-collar position.

**Figure 6. Mr. Wilson's Discovery of Father's Degree**
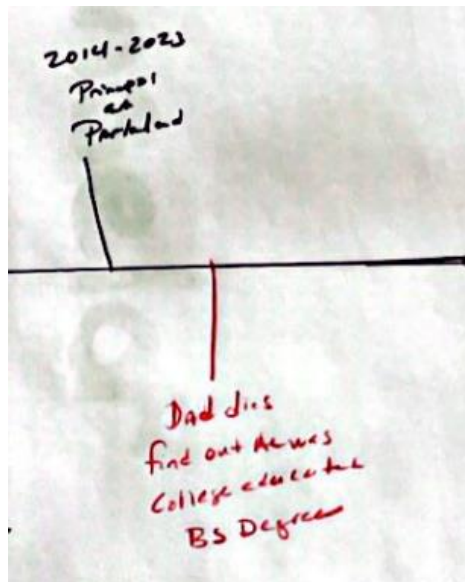
However, as far as the expressed importance of education within the home, Mr. Wilson said:

So, in my family, my understanding was, we may not have done these things, but you are going to do these things. And we're going to provide you with all that you need to get those, that stuff done. And we might not be able to help you with it. But we're gonna make sure you have every material that you need to get to where you need to be… But you know, my dad built a desk in my room. So, I guess it, now that I think about it, it had to create some kind of importance to me about education, education, because you know I had a space to be educated. And that was, you know, that was you know, built in my room (see Figure 7). Mr. Wilson was also the only participant who was educated through the Montessori method in the early 1970s and noted it as impactful to his views on education.

We were free to run all over the place and go to different have different stations and explore and create. And it was just so, so fascinating to me to be able to go to different places and, and create and do different things, you know, different times and to have teachers as kind of guides rather than telling you what you got to do you know what you're supposed to do or how to supposed to look. Instead, I got a lot of positive feedback for what I did. What I created and what I thought, which I think for a and I don't know back then before probably a black male student or for a child to be reaffirmed by your teachers is probably very strong motivator.

**Figure 7.  Mr. Wilson's Timeline Noting Educational Space Built by Father**
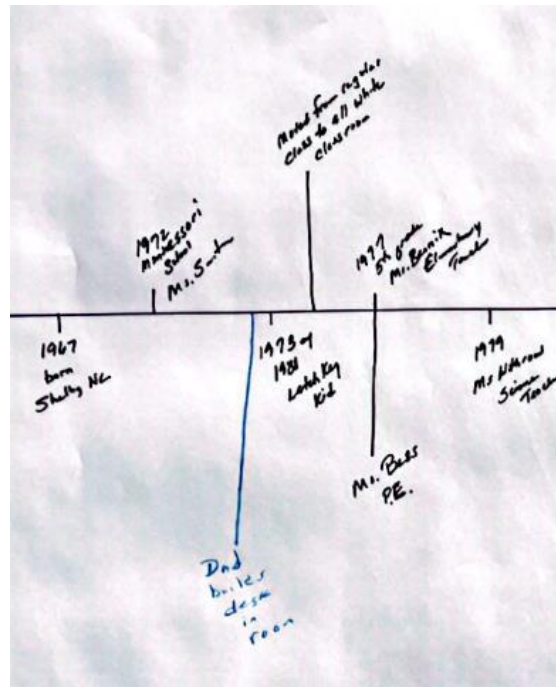


While raised in a family of educators and in a nuclear environment, Mr. King noted that he, "was rough around the edges…and attracted to the street", however with regard to the importance of education, he said:

> I come from a [family of] educators so my dad was a teacher. He taught seventh grade English.  My mom, she was a secretary. She was a hard worker. She was a secretary at a power plant. And she retired from there.  My dad's sister, which was my aunt, she was a teacher as well…my uncle Alan was an educator in my hometown. So, King kind of had a name in education. Education was always kind of promoted to the, to higher learning. And so I think it happened kind of somewhat organic being in my family.

Mr. Method and his younger brother were raised by their single father.  He stated:

> I think it was somewhat of an unspoken expectation.  You know, the expectation was that, hey, look, you're going to do something, you're going to do well.  You know, we're

going to go off to college… My dad early instilled in me the drive of, "Hey, you want to be someone, you want to be successful you need an education to do that (see Figure 8)."

**Figure 8. Mr. Method's Single Father as Educational Impetus**
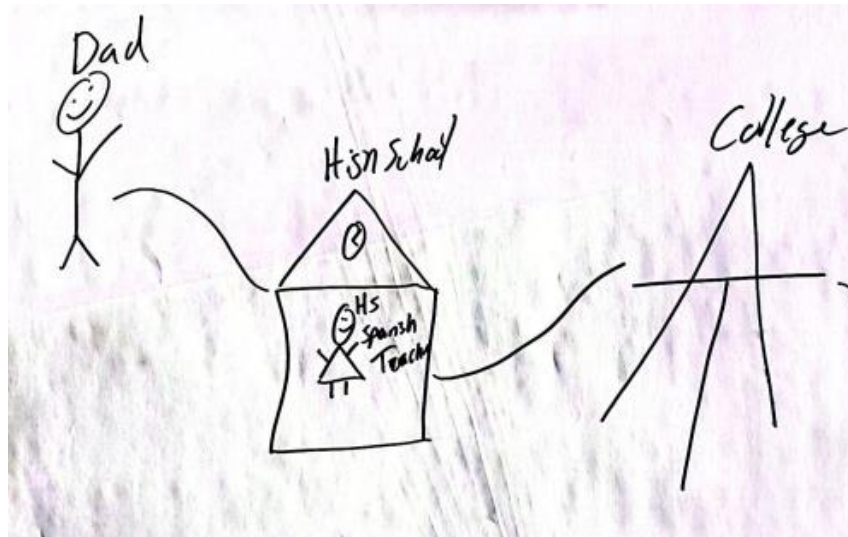


Because of his father's employment at a local university and his activism within the Black community, he and his brother were constantly surrounded by academics and spent a great deal of time on the campus. He connected the upspoken expectation of being a Black man in education and a Black man in leadership and added:
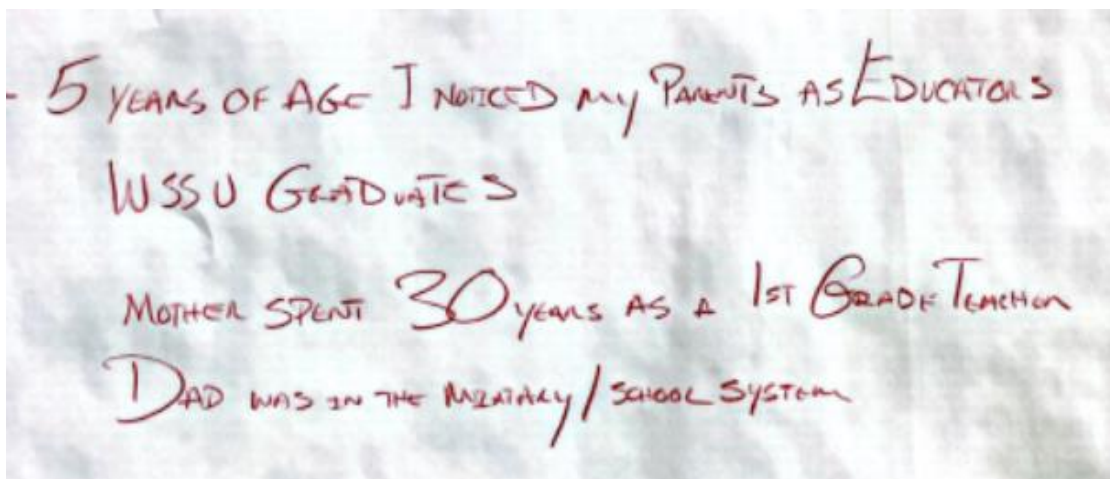
> My father always did a lot of leadership positions on this campus. So being around leadership and being around I guess, black males or black men in a leadership capacity. You know, it's nothing new or strange to me because, again here on campus, he was always in some form of leadership role.

Later on, it would be a high school guidance counselor who would prove essential to his career path, "She was my school counselor, of course, high school. And then after high school. She became just a professional connection that I was able to link to and stay connected to the entire time…one that I could reach out to or she would always call me."

Mr. X. also came from a nuclear family of educators that esteemed academic advancement:

Both of my parents were educators. They were both graduates of Winston-Salem State.

My mother was a teacher for 30 years at Caldwell Elementary. My dad was an educator

as well. He was also in the military. So, at that age, that's where I really started getting

my formative coaching at that, at that age. And so we would always go to Winston-Salem

State and they would take me on campus and kind of show me this is, this is kind of what

they dealt with when they were in school back in the early 60s. You know, their motto is:

Enter to Learn. Depart to Serve.  And that right there is kind of, what stuck with me

through the years just on my educational journey.  I knew that after I got out of high

school that I was gonna go to college.  That was a, that was a no brainer, a non-negotiable

(see Figure 9).

**Figure 9.  Mr. X's Early Recognition of Higher Education**



Additionally, Mr. X noted that having his first son impacted his views on education.

When I started having my sons that kind of gave me a different perspective of I want to

be able to set the tone for them, as you know, male leadership in the school or in society,

so having one of my sons that kind of really kind of probably pushed me more and more

to become a leader in education.

Mr. Q was raised by a single mother and extended family, but the expectation was clear:

> That was the most important thing.  It was, it was no sports without academics. My mom,
>
> she was, you know, on that from the beginning. Like, that's it.  You don't make the
>
> grades, you don't play (see Figure 10).

His mother also used his experience with hard summer labor for the city to teach him the
importance of working hard and getting an education.

> I worked in the hot summer. So after my second year working, I was like my 14 and
>
> again [thinking] I'm not doing, I don't want to do that job is dirty, it's hot, sweaty. And
>
> she's [mother] like, well, I'll teach you something. You know, hard work pays off. You
>
> gotta work hard. And I was like, well, that's not the job is not for me.

**Figure 10.  Mr. Q Notes Mother as a Support and Advocate**
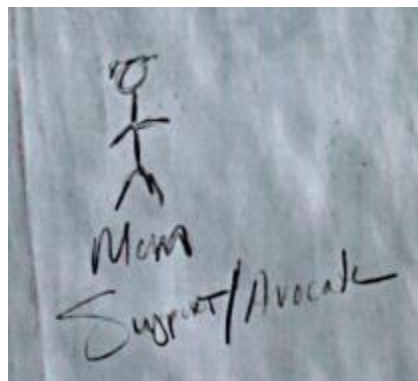


Mr. Paul also grew up in a single-parent household.  As a child, he had inconsistent interaction
with this father until later in life, but education was still an implied expectation where he
understood he was to be a productive member of society:

> Well, my mom was the same one that just looked at me bottom line and said: military or
>
> college.  You got to pick one.  You can't stay home. Go and do your best and nothing
>
> less.

It was during his college years that validation from a professor helped him better understand his potential, "It helped me understand that I'm more than I thought I was. And I'm very much capable like I was always arrogant and confident in some regard but not in my intellect."

This section served to illuminate the theme of family as a foundational impetus for each of the participant's educational goals. While many of the participants had varied and additional factors that served as fundamental to their later educational goals such as early experiences with representation, the lack of representation, a non-traditional school setting, a mentor, or a summer job, the participants' stories underscored education as a foundational expectation within the home for each of them. Additionally, the theme presented a counternarrative to the master narratives that further disenfranchises Black man in educational settings by perpetuating a phenomenon from the latter half of the 20th century that posits Black families and Black young men as abnormal. It provides an argument against the historical trope argued by Moynihan in *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, in which the author asserts, "the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which because it is out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male" (Moynihan, 1965, p. 1). Instead, as evidenced by the participants, no matter the familial framework, education was an implicit and/or explicit expectation within the immediate and extended family structure. This 1965 ideology is still an ongoing negative belief system that influences the cultural perspectives of the adolescent Black man and the Black family's relationship with education. Researchers such as Ladson-Billings (2000), Delpit (2012), and Puchner & Markowitz (2015) continue to explore the connection between these negative cultural perspectives and their connection to educator preparation programs. While the participants' stories in this research add to the body of work that troubles the widely

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unquestioned beliefs about Black families and education that have, over time, become a part of institutional culture and how we frame the story.

**Theme 3:  Gatekeeping Measures as Problematic**

The participants shared their various stories and how they went about their attempts at securing a principalship.  Some reported their uncertainty about the changes in the district's principal preparation program process and believed it lacked clarity and represented a moving target.  Others spoke of the process as a gatekeeping measure that has less to do with allowing access and more to do with creating a barrier that would deny access to those lacking the right connections.  Their views of the gatekeeping processes and requirements in place had a direct correlation to their attitude and eagerness to pursue a principalship and their belief that they would ultimately be selected to interview for a position once they made it through the process. The district has instituted various processes over the last decade that are aimed at creating a talent pool from which schools can select qualified candidates to interview.  At one point assistant principals were tiered through a battery of interviews and assessments. However, it was noted by the participants that while it was advertised as a mandatory process for all, there was never a clear indication as to who was required to go through the tiering process and who was not.  The process has now been revamped and rebranded, and those cleared through the tiering process to be interviewed, but not hired, were now required to enter the talent acquisition pool. The Talent Acquisition Committee for the assistant principal and principal pipeline sends periodic emails to all district staff members with the following details seen below.  Additional details are provided after replying to an online link.

**Table 8.  District's Advertised Talent Acquisition Process**

| Advertised Talent Acquisition Process | |
|---|---|
| I.  The **Qualification Screening** | Requires you to provide your updated **resume**, **current administrative certificate** (must be active), and **last summative evaluation**.<br><br>Principal candidates must have completed 3 years of experience as an Assistant Principal. |
| II.  The **Readiness Assessments** | Require **written responses** to prompts that provide insight into your thought processes and competencies as a potential school leader. These responses (with name redacted) are scored by a trained committee of current instructional leaders in the district. |
| III.  **Supervisor Recommendation** | The absence of a completed **Supervisor Recommendation** will result in your removal from the process. |
| IV. **Screening Interview** | If your Readiness Assessments and Supervisor Recommendation qualify you, you will advance to the **Screening Interview**, conducted in-person, and scored by a panel of district leaders. Principal candidates will be asked to complete a PowerPoint presentation prior to the interview and deliver the presentation as part of the Screening Interview. |
| V.  **Application**. | V.  If you receive a qualifying score, you will be able to **apply** for future administrative vacancies. |

What follows in Figure 11 are the district's equity domains for leadership.  While the

scoring rubrics are not made public, they do use an equity-driven leadership framework to

underpin the process the candidates engage in upon completing the electronic link and

submitting their information. The participants noted that while there is much emphasis placed on equity as an action, they do not see the process to gain access to the pool for educational leadership as equitable. Their responses indicate that while the process seems clear, the scoring is subjective. Any additional details can only be gathered by completing an online form after submitting identifiable information.

**Figure 11. District's Equity Domain for Leadership**



| Domain | Competency | Equity Actions | Guiding Questions |
|---|---|---|---|
| Leads Instruction | Believes all children can experience academic success | Recognizes biases and is willing to adjust practices as needed to create rigorous, culturally responsive instruction. | --How do leaders address the need to adjust practices to deliver culturally relevant instruction? --How do leaders use data to track participation for those students who are most underserved? --How do leaders ensure access to accelerated learning opportunities for underrepresented student populations? --How do leaders use observation data and student work to create an environment for feedback and development? |
| | | Ensures equitable access to technology resources for all students, especially those most underserved, and ensures full participation of all learners in both face-to-face and digital learning environments. | |
| | | Ensures both access and support for accelerated learning opportunities for underrepresented student populations. | |
| | Prioritizes instructional observation, feedback, and coaching | Implements systems that address disparities to improve outcomes for all. | |
| Builds Relationships | Models high expectations and growth mindset | Utilizes social-emotional learning competencies to provide an equity-focused culture that promotes student achievement for all. | --How do leaders model social-emotional competencies in an equity-focused culture? --How do leaders exhibit high expectations for all students and staff? --How do leaders create a safe environment for difficult converstions around race, culture, and socioeconomics? --How do leaders help students learn to make better choices based on individual need? --How do leaders build positive relationships based on trust and integrity? |
| | | Creates an environment and models practices that help teachers and students identify and implement equity practices while valuing an asset-based mindset. | |
| | Communicates effectively to strengthen relationships | Engages in critical conversations centered around anti-racism and culturally responsive practices. | |
| | | Utilizes restorative practices to build community and strengthen relationships. | |
| | | Develops positive relationships with the diverse communities served by the school. | |
| Facilitates Change | Creates a clear, compelling vision for the school | Creates, with all stakeholders, an equity-centered vision for the school that is consistent throughout the school community. | --How do leaders communicate and drive the school's vision and goals? --How do leaders use data to initiate change using research-based strategies? --How do leaders effectively address policies and practices that perpetuate inequities and remove barriers for students of color? |
| | | Strives to influence the thoughts, actions, and attitudes of stakeholders to create positive outcomes for all students. | |
| | Uses transparent, data-driven decision making | Creates processes for self-reflection based on data and observation, and then seeks solutions through research-based strategies and communication with stakeholders. | |
| | Solves problems with a systems thinking approach | Identifies and addresses policies and practices that perpetuate inequities. | |
| | Encourages risk-taking and innovative thinking | Creates policies, practices, structures, and expectations that remove barriers for students of color. | |
| Manages Resources | Allocates resources effectively and equitably | Uses equitable resource allocation to provide more services to students who need the most support. | --How do leaders allocate resources to support students who need the most support? --How do leaders make decisions about staff retention and allocation? |
| | Evaluates decisions for impact | Possesses skills to hire and retain high-quality, diverse staff. | |

Mr. Shonuff, who has not entered the pool indicated that:

> The pool and the tiering system are unclear and coagulated. I think the pool or tier process is too murky to be, to be honest.

He believes he has the capacity to lead any school; however, the process to enter the pool has been laborious and he did not indicate whether he would definitively complete the process. He discussed the collective difficulties his Black colleagues and how very few of them have been granted access to the talent acquisition pool.

Mr. Wilson believes:

That pool started in the last few years. And that pool seems to be some huge mystery that

nobody can solve. To me. I have never heard anybody understand that pool… So the pool

is a very small pool and you know that.

Mr. Alpha noted that the steps associated with gaining access to the pool served as an added step

that served as a barrier.  He noted the challenges with getting into and out of the pool:

In order to get in, you got to get into the pool first. And then they put in so many barriers

and stuff to be in the pool. Now that you get them in a pool, how do you get him out of a

pool? I think this, this whole certification thing is still there and you got to go through so

many certifications to be administrator certified.   Now, once you are an administrator,

you gotta go into, you got to go through these pre-tests and you gotta get into the pool.

You got to do this and after four or five years being in the pool, if you don't renew or

have a job-you're, you're, you're taken out of the pool. They've built in so many other

small steps in the system that hinders and blocks people from getting that way.  Some

Black males have been in the pool for five years.  They have applied for these schools

and he [the Black AP] is not getting to the interview. Whereas, if you are White or a

Black female, they are in the pool less time and get to the interview level. Help me

understand the dynamics.

Mr. Atticus shared:

I recently just got in the pool, the principal pool which in all honesty, I felt like I had to, I

feel like I had to jump through a million hoops to get in the pool just to then, to be able,

to be able to apply for an opening.

Mr. Shonuff added:

> And that's the problem I'm having. You call it the pool, the tier or whatever. But the
>
> process is still the same. To be a high school principal or let's talk about to be an assistant
>
> for the high school, middle school, elementary - the committee or the principal gets to
>
> decide who they want to interview and who they want to hire as a principal or an AP.
>
> And it's not fair because it really comes down to who you know.

Mr. Alpha, Mr. Atticus, and Mr. Shonuff's quotes speak to what they view as a lack of
transparency and inconsistency in the implementation of the process. Although the pool has
been touted as a measure to level the field of opportunity, participants still view it as an arbitrary
process because of its subjective nature. To that point, committees are still able to select the
candidates they choose to interview regardless of how well or poorly they rated on the battery of
assessments. The tiering and pooling processes mentioned by the participants align with the
research of Bush & Moloi (2008) on the underrepresentation of Black principals as the result of a
system that is decentralized and localized. They found that while participants are required to
pass a centralized licensing procedure at the state level, districts enact local procedures that
include a variety of subjective routes to the high school principalship that can be riddled with
independent district biases that are based upon the propensities of the superintendent and board
members involved in the hiring process.

**Theme 4: Delayed Advancement as Demotivating**

Participants shared experiences of a lack of opportunity and not being able to gain access
to the principal pool which would ultimately delay the probability of securing an interview for a
principalship. Some participants also compared the ascension of Black men to that of their
White counterparts within the district. Subsequently, they noted many Black men, who recently

and after years of attempting to gain access to the pool or principalship, left the district and were immediately hired in neighboring districts. There was also mention of simply deciding to remain a career AP after many years without career advancement.

Mr. Omaha said:

> There's a lot of different White people that get into the pool and have opportunities…So I don't think he [Black AP] knows any less and can do any less of a better or less of a good job than these other folks are doing but the opportunity to just get in the pool. That has been a stumbling block and I'm not sure if he's in or not and he has tried like at least four times.

Mr. Omaha added:

> Black male APs in the district, they're not getting opportunities to really move into roles that are going to prepare them for the principalship or even get into the principal pool for that matter. Some can't even get in because I'm thinking of another one [referring to another Black man AP] who can't even get into the pool, and *he's* (emphasis added by participant) tried four or five times to get in and I know that he is capable.

At one point, the district had a woman of color as the superintendent and Mr. Omaha spoke of her swift recognition of gatekeeping measures and her swift action to remove them. However, after her tenure, the measures were retooled:

> But then you get people who come in, like the Black female superintendent, who have an equity mindset and seek to tear down kind of barriers that may be preventing people of color, men in particular, of it from keeping them from advancing.

Mr. King explained:

I don't think that there are the equities of the amount of assistant principals that are

promoted to principals, in what you call the pipeline.

Mr. Omaha spoke of the delayed ascension rate for Black men as compared to that of their White

counterparts within the district. Mr. Omaha was involuntarily reassigned to a role at Central

Office and subsequently left the district, asked (see Figure 10):

What has the district done to put supports in place? If there are deficiencies in

somebody's performance to help build them up knowing that there is a gap in Black male

leadership, but you have some good Black men that could be strong and great if they

have the right encouragement in the right environment and the right sort of opportunities

to you know, get stronger in areas they may not be as strong. But then you flip it and you

have a lot of White administrators who got jobs who were not strong who really should

have probably never been a principal either. But they got an opportunity. And so you just,

you look at those sorts of thing, and you try to make sense of it.

**Figure 12. Mr. Omaha's Reassignment and Departure**
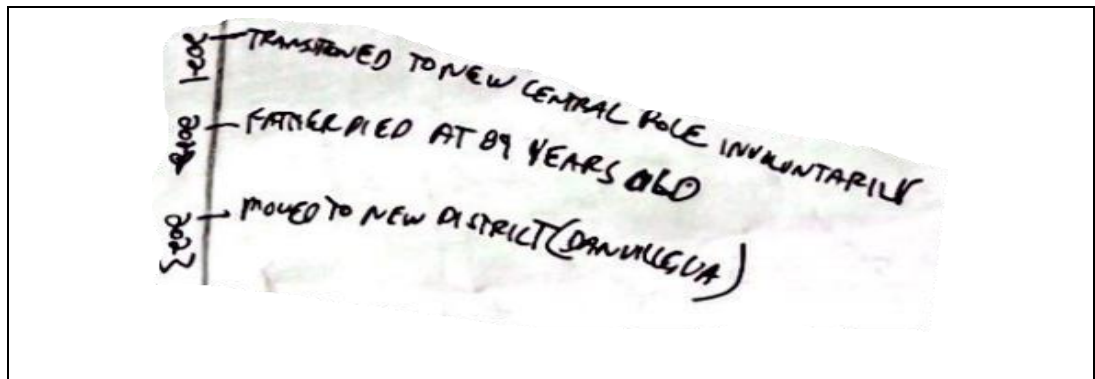


Also with regard to ascension and opportunity, Mr. Wilson noted:

You know, that, you know you got three schools and you waiting for one of them, you

know. Your career's probably on hold until one of those schools opens up. The delayed

advancement! In this district, you can bake that into the pudding that you know, that

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okay, when I'm starting out this; I gotta' be flexible about where I go.  Because if not,

then I'm going to have to wait this thing out for a while before you know, I get a shot.

Mr. King explained why many leave the district in search of opportunity:

> There's about four or five that I know who interviewed and then couldn't get in as a
>
> principal in the district, and they went outside the district.  I think sometimes they feel as
>
> though they're not getting the opportunity. Whether it's, whether they get an interview,
>
> where they've been on several, about three or four, no…maybe five who just went
>
> outside the district because they couldn't get a principalship and they end up getting a
>
> principalship somewhere outside of the district.

Mr. Q, believes that given the same opportunity to lead in any school, Black men assistant

principals would excel:

> Institutional racism and bias plays a role. Plays a major role. We [Black men] are
>
> champions, as well. And we can get the job done. Um, if given the opportunity, we just
>
> need a chance.  White men have the advantage to me always.  You asked me why I
>
> believed that.  You asked me why. I really don't know why, but I feel they, they have
>
> more opportunity. I can't answer why. I just don't know why, but they do.

Mr. Q's, request was:

> I just want to see us at least just get the opportunity. Just someone to take a chance on the Black male, to say, "Hey, I'm going to give this guy a chance." But we don't get the same opportunities as our White counterparts!

Mr. Omaha also noted that with regard to career advancement:

> White men and females have advanced you know, well beyond any of the, the Black administrators or Black leaders in this district. It's not our policy. It's just in practice and not being intentional on reaching out and building up Black male leaders. Can it turn around? Of course, it can, but it has to be some intentionality around helping that to turn around and placing people in places of success and supporting them accordingly.

Mr. Lonnon questioned whether White counterparts within the district were promoted on merit or relationship:

> I quickly saw that seemed, that seemed to be more of how [White] people got positions was through friendships versus through work. Some of the guys [White Aps] mentioned to their superiors that they had some things lined up. They were promised positions versus them, quote unquote, earning but they were kind of promised. And to get overlooked. I think that is crushing for them [Black Aps]. It gets to a point where, because I know some of the people that discussed it and I talked with that feel defeated. It was like, you know what? I'm just gonna settle into being assistant principal till I retire. And that's sad because, again, once you lose that drive, you know, you just settle in, and where you could be someone that could pushes the district forward you now become someone on the sidelines as a spectator.

Mr. Paul spoke of the frustration that slowly builds because of the systems within the district and watching those less qualified receive opportunities while he is being overlooked:

> I've had to deal with anger and frustration regularly throughout my journey to get to a point where I use it to focus and make sure that I go to bat and go to war with what is going to help me be successful which is letting people know that I am intelligent, and I am capable. And I don't know I don't intentionally try to, to perceive it but I walk around like, 'I can do your job. And you better not slip up.' Because at every opportunity I'm gonna show you I can do your job and do it better than you. But I'm not going to brag about it.

The experiences of the rate of ascension for Black men participants as compared to their White counterparts serves as a narrative to underscore the research of Bales & Guthrey (2020) that found that "Black assistant principals are 18% less likely to be promoted across all time periods relative to White candidates holding education, gender, experience, urbanicity, and school-level constant" (p.7). Additionally, their research pointed to another issue where in "... Black assistant principals are both less likely to be promoted to principal positions and more likely to wait longer for promotions, should they ever be awarded" (p. 9). The participants in this study have the minimum qualifications and similar years of experience as compared to their White counterparts who are currently sitting assistant principals or principals. And all participants possess the minimum years of experience to enter the assistant principal or principal talent acquisition pool.

**Theme 5: Racialized Placement**

Participants reported a consistent theme when discussing the limited professional options for schools, particularly high schools, within the district. Many participants lamented over the

fact that they are relegated to low-performing or majority-minority schools. Others spoke of being interviewed for White traditional schools as a form of appeasement. Finally, there was discussion of the community's role in deciding which candidate was a fit for the school and that was almost always enacted through parity of race between the student population and the candidate's race. Throughout the interviews, there were repeated references to the Black men's group of assistant principal and principals, either informally or by name, as a need to form a brotherhood to encourage one another and band together against what was viewed as a biased system that represented institutional racism and a lack of equity. As mentioned prior, the most common name used for the brotherhood was "The Black Caucus". As a part of this brotherhood, the participants were extremely familiar with the details of the delayed ascension, placement or district assignments of their Black men counterparts. They were also able to name White counterparts with less experience and their placement at schools for which they had applied. They frequently labeled these placements as the inner workings of the "good old boy network" and named it as bias and institutional racism.

Mr. Paul noted that he sometimes felt he was being interviewed as a form of appeasement:

I feel like people in positions [interviewers] sometimes present to us, they know what they want and who they want more than they realize. And I think the biggest issue I have with our district is: Don't insult my intelligence; like I don't know how to connect the dots. To try to make me think I am stupid…. when we both know you already know who you are going to hire.

Mr. King echoed Mr. Paul's thoughts on being interviewed as a form of appeasement:

You may get an interview for it, okay? Doesn't necessarily mean that you're going to get it. And if you're constantly going to interviews, and not getting those opportunities, you start questioning, "Are they really opportunities?" But then when you start looking at the pattern of principals at those type of schools, you'll see that they aren't necessarily hiring African American males.

It is important to note that Mr. Lonnon's assistant principal and principal assignments in other districts were diverse. Upon joining the district where the research took place, he felt there was a need to be favored by the dominant culture in order to secure an opportunity. He, along with other participants, noted the importance of going along to get along with the right people in order to get a leg up. Mr. Lonnon stated:

…it's good to try to wedge yourself in with the good old club, good old boy network [for an opportunity].

Mr. Atticus began with a long and deep breath before he carefully shared the following:

In leadership there are, there are unspoken, unwritten rules to the game, or I guess I would say, I would quote it as, "you play the game." That's part of the politics of the game.

Finally, Mr. Atticus spoke on learning how to play the game for advancement and to please Whites, he said he received a vital piece of advice from a professor:

The male professor, he spoke, he spoke to me mostly about knowing how to navigate the other side of the river, as he would call it.

The quotes that follow illuminate research by Bell (2005) that explores the CRT tenet of interest convergence. CRT "challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain

racial and ethnic groups" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p .2). By adding the lens of interest convergence, I was able to interpret the placement of minoritized males a low-performing, low-socio-economic, high-needs schools as a method of appeasing Whites.  According to research conducted by Wilkerson & Peck (2022) and as researched by (Bell, 1980; Milner, 2007) "...interest convergence, is defined as a process by which the White majority group supports efforts by the minority group to obtain equality only when such efforts benefit the White majority group as well" (p.193).  In Bell's (2005) research he stated:

> Any number of other examples can be found throughout almost every area of public life. Blacks with skills are hired by corporations, government, and other institutions, but usually in limited numbers so as not to arouse concern among white employees, customers, and suppliers. When this unacknowledged number is reached, blacks of equal or even higher qualifications are turned away...all manner of procedures are in place to limit their numbers. That remains the unspoken policy in much of academia. Each black or Hispanic or Asian that is hired for a tenure-line position makes it that much harder for any subsequent minority applicant. Policies of involuntary racial sacrifice prevail, despite the obligatory "equal opportunity" statements on business stationery (p.75).

The participants' views, which will be quoted in Theme 6, indicate that they were seen as fit for the policing of Black and Brown students and as such are continuously relegated to struggling schools when they are provided an opportunity for leadership acutely represents the idea that they serve two roles: 1) controlling those that resemble them and who are predisposed to being viewed as a threat, and 2) checking the "equal opportunity" box for the organization. Mr. Lonnon explained the significant impact of being relegated to low-performing, low-socio-

economic, high-needs, majority-minority schools. It played a direct role in his decision to leave the district.  He stated:

> There is no place for us in most main schools.  I wanted the full spectrum of secondary schools, but I also did not want to be pigeonholed into only going to Turnaround Schools or quote-unquote Black schools. I want to show that, "Hey I could run a school, that was majority White!"  But the feeling I got coming to [the district] was that a lot of the Black principals were in schools that they felt that need to be quote unquote, turned around and the other schools were not where they would be given a chance.

Mr. Shonuff believes the hiring patters support a segregated system:

> We're in a segregated school system. We're in a very segregated school system. We preach equity all the time, but it's very hard to have equity in a segregated school system. The students and the hiring of principals is segregated.

Mr. Wilson said:

> When a Black man becomes school leader and he more than likely is going to get a hard to run school or an alternative school.  And so when he gets that school, it means lower pay because you got lower, low, you got low, a smaller amount of students.  It's a special program. It's you know, and so and the kids either don't take standardized tests so you don't get the bonus money, or they don't do well on standardized tests so you don't get the bonus money. And so that affects your salary, both the school size, and the, the lack of bonus.  If you don't meet those goals, you're always in trouble or under the gun. You're always you know, trying to stay one step ahead of the hatchet man.

What follows is Mr. Paul's embodied experience of Mr. Wilson's quote. Research has found that first-time principals are more likely to be assigned to low-performing, high-needs,

high-poverty schools where a lower percentage of students pass standardized and state

assessments and have fewer highly qualified teachers (Bastian & Henry, 2015).  As a first-year

principal, Mr. Paul was assigned to the lowest performing elementary school in the state and was

subsequently demoted.  His lived experience highlights the unrealistic expectations when a Black

man is given the opportunity to lead and the challenges he faces:

> I learned through Bake Elementary, a Title One school, a high-needs school, because this
>
> was the lowest school in the state, an elementary school. The lowest elementary school.
>
> No first-year principal has any business being in a Title One school their first time around
>
> at bat.

While Mr. Shonuff, has not secured a place in the talent acquisition pool to be a principal, he

added:

> I believe in my ability. I'm confident in my ability. I believe I can lead any school that
>
> you put me in, regardless of the demographics, I believe I can lead.  Not only do I believe
>
> I can lead that school [referring to a Black school], I believe I can motivate and
>
> transform, and galvanize the staff, and I also think that I can grow that school [referring
>
> to a White school]. But because of the internal racism because of some of the powers that
>
> be some of the games that we play in this system, I won't be able to have that as a Black
>
> male.

Mr. Shonuff later added that:

> People always ask, "Mr. Shonuff, why aren't you a principal?" It's not, because I can't be
>
> a principal it's because I've turned down jobs because the jobs that you want to give me
>
> is, is at a low-performing school where you've had multiple, multiple principals, and then
>
> you want me to come in there to be the Savior and I feel like my ability to connect and

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build relationships and to turn schools around and to help grow schools is far more than being a babysitter. Don't get me wrong, our predominantly black schools or our Title One schools, they need people like me, but guess what the [White] High school needs people like me for those kids that look like me over there. We'll have a voice. Every time for a while when [Black] school came open: "Mr. Jackson, we're calling to see if you're in interested in [Black] school." I said, "I'm not even in the pool." "Yeah, I know. But we're just calling to see if you're interested in interviewing for the job." "No, thank you." They have a high turnover rate on average of 1.8 years to principals coming in. Excuse me. 2.8 years a principal a new principal was coming in. Look at what that does to your career.

Mr. Q believed:

It's like that for us. It's like that for us. Okay, we get the crumbs. I hate to put it like that, but we'll give you this and see what you can do. And some people, some of my colleagues are like, OK, I'ma take it. Some take it for different reasons: some money, some to get a foot in the door. Or if you go to another school, it's a lateral move. Not any higher, about the same. You might go to a different level, like a middle school and change that but it's still gonna be low performing. Just my opinion, but I don't see us getting the Smiths, the Donalds, the Eagle Highs. But here in our district, I had an opportunity. It was presented to me to become, become a principal. But um, just my observation over the years our Black males, and it's, there's nothing wrong with it, but our Black males are always going to low performing schools. Yes, I believe in equity, and all that but, you know, sometimes why can't we, as Black males be portrayed as being good enough. That he is good enough to be at a White school. We are good enough to be at a Donald High School or high-performing school. Or a majority

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Caucasian school that's high performing. I mean, it's like the African American male is seen as we can only take care of this [Black] community. It's like we don't, I just don't see it a lot in our district, where we are given the opportunity, you know, to lead a school of non-minorities and high performing.

Mr. Wilson added:

If the school is predominantly White, if the school is not Title One, then you know, that's where the White people gone go work. If there's a Title One school and the kids are mostly minority, and low socio-economic, that's where the Black people are going to go work. That's where you got your shot. Not because you necessarily want to. When you start looking at there's only X amount of high schools, right? So you know which ones you gonna have a shot at? You know, that White people have a shot at any of the schools they want work at. And you know, you got a choice between probably three or four.

Mr. Alpha stated:

There's cultural capital associated with being a high school principal, there's capital and monetary and yet that's reserved for White males.

Mr. Phil lamented that:

For lack of a better word, the good schools, the easy school are not set up for African American males to go into. A lot of the schools that I have been in are Title One schools, have been majority-minority schools. I have tried to branch out. There's a group of us in Winston-Salem, we call ourselves the "Black Caucus", Black principals, and we talk about the fact that you know, we are limited to certain kinds of school.

Mr. Omaha recalled:

I think that there are Black people, men in particular that would do great at White

schools, predominantly White schools. I remember having a conversation. This was a

year that we hired 13 new principals. And in that group, I think there were only five black

males [principals] at the time and so we actually had dinner the five of us and I remember

one of them saying, "Don't even think that you can ever apply to be a principal at such

and such and such and such school because it's a White school."

Mr. Omaha concluded:

There are times and even still today you don't see a whole lot of Black male high school

principals. It's like it's still a white man's game. And if they let women in, it's usually a

White woman, or if it's a Black school, they might let a Black female run it. They might

let a Black man with a Black high school occasionally, but it's still seen as like a White

man's thing.

Mr. Atticus sarcastically used air quotes when he used the word "placement" in the following:

I do think there is some intentionality when it comes to "placement". The ultimate

decision should be for what's best for kids. And who's going to be able to put those kids

and that staff in the best position of success. Most of the time, it's about matching race.

Mr. Lonnon believes the community can play a negative role in hiring decisions when they seek

to maintain control over what are perceived as White spaces:

I would like for there not to be a stranglehold on the quote/unquote, upper echelon. I

would love to see someone of color run one of those schools in this district. Do I think

it'll happen? I think that's very unlikely. Unfortunately, just because someone has to deal

with the influence of the actual people who send their kids to those schools.

Mr. Atticus believes:

Institutional racism does come into play, because I want to be successful, wherever I am. I want people to want me to be successful granted, you know, challenges are inevitable, but I want to be able to feel respected regardless of my color. I want to be successful. And I want to be able to, I want to feel like yes, I'm a fit and a fit should not mean the right color for the stakeholders.

Mr. Method also spoke to the influence of White community members and their impact on hiring:

So I think honestly, I think a lot of times they try to consider, what's the word I'm looking for, the school community, will this send the [White] school community in an uproar if we were to hire a Black male or Black female or more specifically, in this case, a Black male at the school, and then fear of placing a Black male at a school and how that would then you know, send the school to this community and uproar and then of course, then now going back to the drawing board. I have to find someone that that will appease the community. So I think that is the unfortunate, just institutionalized part that I think district office or district leaderships are always having to consider when it comes to how they advance and hire Black males in any school, or it's okay, well, this isn't a predominant Black school. So yes, that's an easy decision to put a Black male at that school.

As a vocal member of the educational leadership organization, Mr. Shonuff stated he had shared the following:

But I always fear, and I've told some ex, some former superintendents, I always fear the community that would never let someone that looks like me. Be the leader at that [White] school.

As evidenced by the responses of the participants, there seems to be a perception that

they are only fit to lead high-needs, low-performing, low socio-economic, majority-minority

schools.  Thus, the participants see this as reproducing a segregated and dual system that

replicates the Pre-*Brown* era.  As noted by Delpit (1995), well into the Civil Rights movement

White educators held the perception that Black principals were insignificant in roles of

leadership and inadequate in roles of leadership as compared to their White counterparts and

only fit to serve in Black schools. Furthermore, the participants' responses seem to reiterate the

stereotypes about the Black principal's intellectual and professional capacity based upon

"ethnically socialized constructs of African American leaders" and perceptions that their

leadership can only be relegated to schools that serve predominantly Black communities (Jones,

2002, p.9).

**Theme 6:  Bias in Duties Creates a Lack of Preparedness**

Participants lamented that they were viewed by stakeholders as disciplinarians first and

educators second, if at all.  Some participants believed they were assigned duties based upon the

dominant stereotype of Black men athletes who lacks the ability to contribute to academics in a

meaningful and transformational way.  Some participants mentioned being viewed and valued as

overseers of Black and Brown students and tasked with doling out exclusionary discipline to

satisfy White female teachers.

Omaha s lamented: that Black men were typically viewed as athletes or coaches and not as

instructional leaders:

> Black men definitely do not get looked at as instructional. We're not supposed to be
>
> smart. We're not supposed to be academic. We were athletes, we played sports. We play
>
> sports in high school, we play sports in college, you know, we probably coached

something at some point and then we became administrators. And, you know, we don't really have an interest in instruction. And that's actually a narrative that actually was in my head.

Mr. Atticus stated, "As a Black man, I feel like White people see my lane as athletics and discipline of Black males."

Mr. X stated:

Just trying to get to the point of being a Black male in education and them [White teachers] thinking that I'm all about discipline. Like I cannot overcome any type of issues when it comes to growing a school or even looking at data and trying to figure out how can we improve depending on what subject is that we're, you know, we're looking at or trying to grow because I can.

Mr. Lonnon believed:

It has made me want to push for things that we will regard that, not we as Black people, plus Black males are regarded as not being able to do or not have the capability to do you know, because a lot of Black males are known to be quote unquote what I call the heavy disciplinarian, but you can't do anything instructional. So we want you to enforce this discipline.

Mr. Shonuff believes his role is seen as the policer of Black and Brown students:

As a bigger black male, I'm more needed to keep law and order, so to speak. They want me to keep law and order, and keep you know the people that look like me in line or in check. I think I'm valued more than disciplinary. That saddens me sometimes.

Mr. Phil's first opportunity as an assistant principal was in a correctional facility that housed and educated students. He explained that when he decided to seek employment within the district,

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interviewers were often impressed and celebrated that aspect of his resume. His time as an

assistant principal within the facility and how it helped his career advancement was noted on his

timeline below (see Figure 13).

Mr. Phil said:

> So, we get stereotyped into, If you're strong black male and you can handle this strong
>
> school. "We need you in the school where the kids are acting up. You can handle a bad
>
> kid. You know how to approach those kids; you're not scared to break up a fight. You're
>
> not scared to deal with the rough kids." I was valued because I had worked at the
>
> correctional facility. That was a point that was brought up when I interviewed. I could
>
> handle discipline. White people want to know you can be used to keep Black kids in line.
>
> Black males are a threat.

**Figure 13. Mr. Phil Notes Time as AP at Correctional Facility**
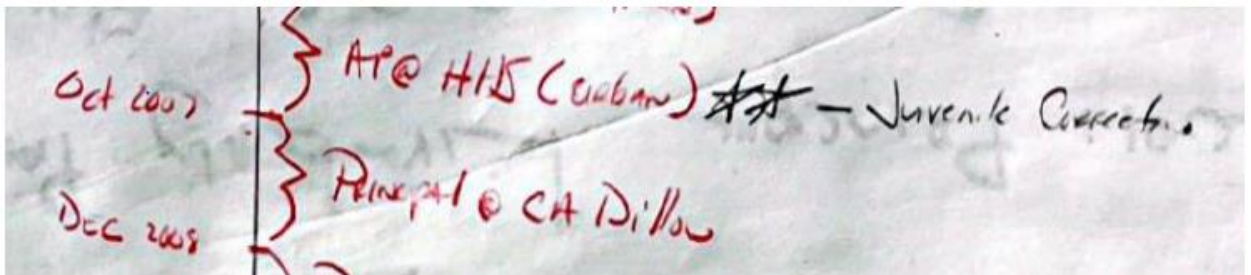


Mr. Method stated:

> I was expected, as the, the new tall and large, Black assistant principal to police or to, to
>
> render consequences over the black and Hispanic students. I was, I was viewed as a
>
> disciplinarian. It was my job and my day-to-day routine was processing write ups from
>
> teachers and then appeasing the teachers as best as possible by suspending kids or giving

them the consequence they[teachers] felt that they needed which removed them either from the building or remove them from the classroom. The write ups were specifically predominantly either your Black or Hispanic, Hispanic students coming from predominantly White teachers.  Being a black male, I was always over the BBBs…the books, butts, and buses, so I didn't feel as though I had received and had the opportunity to really to shine and to impact education at the school that I felt were those key pivotal area that you impact education for everyone...I was put over athletics, I was put over grounds.

Mr. Lonnon stated:

I was the only male the only Black and everyone else was White females and so they just gave me every disciplinary issue. They just passed it to me, which I think helped shape me also was, was unintended as a benefit versus a consequence. Was that helped me learn how to manage behaviors.

Mr. Lonnon went on to explain how being relegated to the role of disciplinarian and the policer of Black and Brown youth as an assistant principal has a direct impact on the career advancement for Black men because it limits their exposure to instructional issues that are an expectation for the principalship.

Mr. Lonnon said:

…that pool process you got to think that is a barrier. If I have never been taught because I've always been looked at as the disciplinarian or whatever or to get those [Black and Brown] kids in line. Then I've never been taught how to lead instructionally they, that's setting me up for failure. So when I get to a pool process, which is a battery of questions, and then I don't know how to answer because I've never been given an opportunity to

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experience those, to answer it with fidelity, or with some sort of knowledge of it. Then

I'm already working from a deficit. Because let's say it's five questions and two or three

of them have to deal with an instructional focus. Well, if I've never done any of that, if

I've never learned how to read data, how to make changes to a master schedule, how to

do things that are going to lead kids into a way of driving scores up, then I'm going to

look foolish answering those questions, and it's going to be painfully obvious that that

hasn't happened. And so when you get to that, and then you have, there's a writing portion

too. So if you haven't had the opportunity to respond to certain things, then that writing

piece is not up to snuff, either. So I think those are some barriers that could influence up

or that can hinder. You know because all you have done is discipline.

Mr. Q passionately shared his thoughts on his educational leadership ability and how it compares

he believes he is viewed by others:

It makes me feel some type of way and talk about the racial piece. Just like a slap in the

face because like, we're not good enough to be the educational leaders that we are. And

we do the work every day as an assistant principal. Every single day, we walk in the

schools and go in these classrooms. We do the walkthrough. We speak the language. Talk

the talk**.**

As the participants noted, the single-story narrative of Black men is often told from the

White lens which amplifies a few of the main narratives with regard to education: the Black male

athlete before an academic, the policing of Black and Brown youth, or the young Black man as a

problem to be solved in educational spaces.  Their intellectual abilities are not celebrated as the

norm. When mentioned, the intellectual narrative is often couched in conversation that centers

around special education, exclusionary discipline, and delayed academic advancement. This

narrative serves to diminish the strengths and problematize presence of Black men in academic

spaces as a student and as an educational leader.  As Ladson-Billings (2011) acknowledges:

> We see African American males as "problems" that our society must find ways to
>
> eradicate. We regularly determine them to be the root cause of most problems in
>
> school and society. We seem to hate their dress, their language, and their effect.
>
> We hate that they challenge authority and command so much social power. . . .
>
> While the society apparently loves them in narrow niches and specific slots—
>
> music, basketball, football, track—we seem less comfortable with them in places
>
> like the National Honor Society, the debate team, or the computer club. (p. 9)

The participants were keenly aware that their role as an intellectual was not as prized as their role

as the policer of Black and Brown students. Thus, this majoritarian narrative continues to other

Black men in education.

**Theme 7:  Personal and Imposed Perceptions**

The participants shared stories of having to overcompensate to justify their role and prove

their worth as educational leaders.  Participants also reflected upon internalizing doubts about

their ability to lead in various spaces and be respected as an academic.  Other participants also

shared their concerns about their physical appearance and being viewed as menacing or

threatening when in the presence of White people.

Mr. Paul and other participants emphasized that they felt the need to overcompensate to prove

their intelligence or justify their presence in the role.  Mr. Paul believed, "I have to bust my ass

to try to make sure people respect that I am intelligent."

Mr. Lonnon stated, "I try to make sure that people understand because they, there's always a

wondering if, 'Is he really capable or was he put in that position?'"

When discussing earning a terminal degree to advance his career, Mr. Omaha viewed it as a major accomplishment that would add value and be applauded. What should have been viewed as a credential was questioned and mocked by some. He said:

> Some people don't see us in the roles of educational leader. I have heard of conversations like: "Where did he go to school? Probably some online university" was side conversation somebody overheard and told me and so even still with a doctorate, you know, there were questions because that must be the case if a Black man has a doctorate. Where did I go to school? And oh, must be some online school.

**Figure 14. Mr. Omaha Notes Doctoral Program and Career Setbacks**
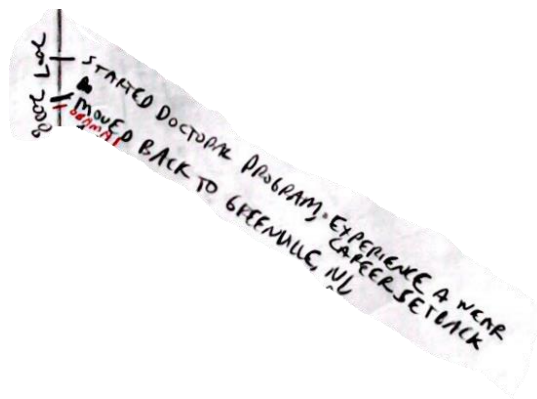


Mr. X. stated:

> I think that we are not looked as, as good or prepared to lead. But I think it really came down to [White teachers] just realizing that I'm more than just a coach. I'm more than just somebody who just rolling the balls out and PE.

Mr. X also added:

> That's, that's the one thing that kinda you pick up on that very early once you start getting into educational leadership. There's a view of what the Black male is known for, and it's

not instructional leadership it's more of disciplinary. And that right there is something that you have to constantly fighting.

Mr. Atticus consistently attempts to gain a seat at the table when it comes to instructional conversations; however, he noted:

I have the ability to lead anywhere.  Yes. To the fullest? No. I got a lot of pushback, a lot of pushback every day in everything, literally everything that I took the initiative to implement primarily instructionally. I got pushback from, from top level leadership.

Mr. Atticus spoke to the stereotypes associated with being a larger Black man and how he has adapted his delivery and presence based upon those stereotypes.

So, being an educational leader, I am mindful as I was instructed by one of my principal mentors, um I am six three in height. My principal mentor-he is six, six in height. And one of our conversations that we have had multiple times is to be mindful of body posture. Be mindful of how things are spoken, how things are said. Be mindful of all of those things when it comes to leading so that I'm not branded as the quote "big angry black man". So, I always am like that. Now, when I'm talking to parents, when I'm talking to staff, I always try to make sure that I lower my voice. And I typically sit back. I typically sit back and I typically sit with my hands folded.  I sit back because I don't want people to assume that I'm taking, taking an aggressive stance or an aggressive approach to them.  I sit back. I sit with my hands, my fingers crossed in my lap. I'm mindful, of just those, those small things, because they, they can play a role and they can play a part in people's perception and perception becomes people's reality.

Mr. Method said:

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You know, being a Black male I'm always fearful of, I'm a six foot four 290-pound

African American male, so I'm always fearful of okay, let me make sure I'm not coming

off to mean too aggressive and make sure I'm not, you know, making my body posture or

body in such a way that is alarming or aggressive to anybody. So, a lot of times I try my

best to talk to people when I'm sitting down or I'll stand up, shake hands, and then, you

know, I'll make sure I move back to make sure they don't feel as I'm trying to tower over

them. I'm making sure that, you know, although if they're saying something I've already

made the decision or what I'm saying, you know, I intentionally go around the mulberry

bush.

Mr. King indicated:

The perception I had…which is what made me say, "Oh, no, they will never hire a Black

man especially, especially a dark-skinned Black man." Because I think just America has

a different sense of how they look at skin color. And skin color, even in African

Americans, the darker has been described as negative. And this goes back into, from a

historical perspective, from slavery, and the light skinned or fair skinned to be a little bit

more exceptional, I think is deeply rooted inside of the fabric of America, the internalized

racism.

Mr. Paul shared a similar sentiment about being aware of how his physical appearance impacted

those around him. He also explored learning to control the controllable as a Black man being

judged by the White gaze and trying to alter their perceptions of him through his interactions:

To walk in and, you know, look threatening, just because I wasn't smiling or because I

walked a certain way or because I was hunched over a certain way because I wore, you

know, certain apparel, you know, …it took a while to outgrow that and realize I had to

you know, change like, you know, because later in point I stopped being angry about those type of things, and started to accept that some things are just going to be what they are. Like people are going to perceive what they want to perceive…You know, so I learned that it didn't really matter how much I cared or tried to present myself physically. People want to see what they want to see. What I need to look at is the impact I leave them with after they've interacted with me that I have control over. So, you may perceive me, when you first see me as a threat, because of my stature because of my demeanor. But if you take time and you and you interact with me, you'll see I'm much more than that.

Mr. Omaha and Mr. Phil felt they needed to dress for the part in order to fit in. Mr. Omaha stated:

Because, you know, historically people only view, they view black men as coaches. If I ever, whenever I would wear a polo shirt, they would say, "Where do you work?" I tell them where I work, and they would say, "Oh, what do you coach?" or "Are you one of the coaches?" "No, I'm the principal."

Mr. Omaha also noted:

Look at White male principles now that wear polo shirts. It's fine for them to wear a polo shirt to work, but you know Black administrators can't necessarily do that and still be respected. Because again, you're the coach. You're the football coach. We are not associated with educational leadership. So yeah, that is very interesting.

Mr. Omaha recounts:

…always dressed above and beyond everybody else. We have a whole lot more to prove and you know, in some circles and you got to earn a whole different level and measure of

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respect and first appearances and first impressions goes a long way. Especially for Black

men. Profile means a lot.

Mr. Phil said:

I have to be in slacks and only on Friday's do I not wear a tie.  But we have got to

represent. My [White] colleagues are going to show up in jeans and flip flops.  I tell my

APs, we cannot do that. The playing field has never been fair. And so in order to stand

out, I have to look the part always. The minute I decide to look like everybody else;

people are always looking. People are always looking to see why you don't fit into

education.

The participant responses reify the historical belief that Black educational leaders are viewed as

intellectually inferior and/or not appropriate leaders for White teachers and students. As Mr.

Omaha noted, the legitimacy of his credentials as a PhD were questioned by the faculty.  Adding

credence to Clarida's (2023) study that found that when many Black principals are charged with

leading in White educational spaces they are seen as "incompetent and simply a diversity hire"

even when they possess the same academic credentials and leadership experience as their White

counterparts.

The participants represented varying outcomes and transitions to the role of assistant

principal or principal.  It is important to note that some of the experiences overlap and some

participants have multiple experiences.  For example, a participant could have been tapped for

the position and then transitioned out of the district because of their lived experiences relating to

leadership within the district.  It is also important to note that the district has not always had a

consistent procedure for talent acquisition; therefore, not all participants were hired as a result of

tiering or the pool process.

Throughout this chapter, I have examined the many factors the participants perceived as a hindrance to the advancement to the role of assistant principal or principal.  During the initial timeline mapping interview and the subsequent curated semi-structured interview, I was able to recognize the factors that serve to impact the ascension of Black men to the role of principal within the district.  The participants represent credentialed and contributing members of the educational community that hold varying perspectives on the obstacles that have impeded their career aspirations. It was interpreted that all participants were extremely eager to be accepted in all educational settings without regard for their race and gender but held little hope that the systemic structures and institutional biases would allow them to be realized within the district.

While each of the participants' stories was unique to their lived experiences, there were unifying themes that served to answer the research questions.   Theme 1 was key for five of the twelve participants as they operationalized it to make sense of their various experiences and transitions into the through leadership.  Theme 2 served to underscore their early understanding of the role of education. For some participants it came in the form of family members, mentors, working conditions, early educational experiences of being validated.  However, family as the foundation for the emphasis on education was consistent for each of the participants.  Themes 3-7 emerged as underpinning for all 12 participants and what they named as biases in the district's assistant principal and principal pipeline process; delayed opportunities to join the pipeline; being relegated to low-performing schools or special program, non-traditional schools; limited duties within the role of assistant principal; and stereotypes surrounding their identity and ability.

Chapter V will answer my research questions to outline the similarities and differences and add to the academic conversation about the lived experiences of Black men principals.  It will further explore the impact these experiences have on their professional decisions to pursue

various leadership positions.  It will conclude with a discussion about how my research will add

to the larger literature, current research, and recommendations for practice.

# CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I began my study almost through reverse engineering with a qualitative course typically reserved for the final semester prior to writing your proposal. My qualitative research focused on the story behind limited presence of Black men in educational leadership and my aspiration to tell those stories has never wavered. As I was considering my role in qualitative research, I added this quote to my reflexive journal, (Goldfarb & Keyser, *Julia,* 2023):

> We tell stories. More important, we decide which stories get told. The ones we do not choose are, over time, forgotten. Which means we have a very consequential job to decide what is remembered.

The research consisted of 12 participants. Mr. Alpha and Mr. Wilson are retired principals who had no formal experience with the district's current principal pipeline process. Mr. Paul had been demoted after a stint at the lowest-performing elementary school in the state. However, he currently serves as instructional support within the district. He does not plan to join the principal pool. Mr. Lonnon chose to leave the district after less than two years for a role as principal at a large, diverse high school in a neighboring district. Mr. Method chose to leave the district and was quickly promoted to the role of principal in a neighboring district. Mr. Atticus is currently serving as an assistant principal. At the beginning of this study, he had just been granted access to the pool and has been actively seeking a role as principal within the district. Mr. Q and Mr. Shonuff are also still serving as assistant principals and continue to have doubts regarding the process. Neither of them has decided whether or not to begin the process. After being demoted from his role, Mr. Omaha took a promotion in a neighboring district. Mr. X has secured a place in the talent pool and is awaiting interviews for an assistant principalship. Mr. King continues to serve as the principal at an alternative high school. Mr. Phil continues to serve

as principal of a middle school.  The purpose of this current research was to add counter-narrative stories to the educational conversation to explore the lived experiences of Black men assistant principals and principals as educational leaders.

An additional purpose was to understand how those experiences influence their decisions in applying for leadership positions. There is growing research that focuses on the experiences of Black men in educational leadership positions, my intention was to add research that is grounded in the voice of Black men as an explanation for *how Black men principals weigh access to positions and opportunities for success*.  What culminated as a result of my interests was a way to trouble the problem-oriented narrative that acts as preamble to most conversations about the Black male demographic in most educational spaces.  Phrases such as school-to-prison pipeline, exclusionary discipline, achievement gap, and learning disability all act to reinforce *dysconscious racism* (King, 1991) wherein unexamined assumptions operate in concert to isolate and problematize young Black men in grades K-12. It later becomes a background understanding that uses the single-story narrative of today's adolescent Black man to explain the absence of the adult Black man in educational leadership.  Research conducted at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University was based on troubling the assumption that young Black men represent a struggling demographic in schools and therefore that must serve as the reason there are so few Black men who matriculate to the educational leadership role of assistant principal or principal.  On the contrary, their study indicated that a lack of academic performance should not be the default point for consideration when examining the pipeline for Black men from student to educational leader.  The 2011 found that:

> Three themes emerged to offer a counternarrative that could potentially add to the
> conversation when considering why Black men may be underrepresented as teacher or

educational leaders.  Instead of a lack of academic performance, it was found that Black

males may be dissuaded from pursuing a career in education because they have (a)

negative perceptions of teaching, (b) beliefs that schools are oppressive institutions, and

(c) a vision of black males as nonconformists (Graham & Erwin, 2011).

To that end, I sought to gain a first-person account of their presence or absence in the

principalship by formulating my research questions and conducting my qualitative study to

attempt to answer the following questions:

What are the career experiences of Black men educators who are credentialed to be

principals in a southeastern school district?

    a.   What is the nature of their early career experiences?

    b.   How did they experience their various transitions into and through leadership

        positions?

I, without reservation, acknowledge that this study is incomplete.  No single dissertation can

wholly answer what has been systemically created through hegemonic structures over decades.

There is a need to explore various districts and garner additional testimonies to begin to ascertain

what would begin to resemble a nascent understanding of the problem.  However, this research

does serve to offer the important perspectives of 12 Black men within one urban, southeastern

district who are credentialed to be principals.  The research also begins to add their voices to

conversations regarding their absence or presence in certain educational spaces.  Additionally, it

provides points for consideration when creating principal acquisition and retention programs.

In this chapter, I answer my research questions and discuss the implication of my

research on increasing and diversifying the presence of Black men as assistant principals and

principals at all educational levels and in diverse settings. I also explore additional questions that

arose from my research.  Finally, I share my ruminations for the future of this work and the need

to continue to engage in additional qualitative research with the intention of supplanting the

current third-person, monolithic that serves as a replacement for the voice of Black men in

understanding the root-cause for his experiences in and through leadership.

There is often the assumption that Black men do not actively pursue educational

leadership roles as assistant principals or principals or that there are not enough qualified

candidates within education to join the talent pool.  On the contrary, the responses of the

participants indicated something altogether different.  The Black men interviewed as a part of

this research were all qualified, based upon years, experience, and credentials, to hold the

position of principal in any K-12 school within the district.  The participants all shared a desire to

serve in the capacity of principal at some point in their career.

## Summary of Findings

What follows is a summary of the findings that emerged from an analysis of the data

accumulated from the research study:

1. Coping through faith.

2. The role of family served as a foundational impetus to educational

   goals.

3. The principal pool and other gatekeeping measures to determine

   access were problematic.

4. Delayed advancement over time served as a demotivating factor and a

   deterrent.

5. Racialized placement and a lack of school options served as a

   demotivating factor.

6. Bias in assigned duties that lead to a lack of preparedness when seeking a principalship.

7. Personal and imposed perceptions of the ability of Black men to perform the duties of an instructional leader.

Five of the participants' stories were predicated on the role that faith played in their lives (Theme 1). In their desire to remain authentic and fulfill what they perceived as their calling, they used faith to remain motivated and maintain their fortitude. It was a part of what they used to fight the circumstances of the environment in which they work. Their respective faith was what they used to demonstrate care and maintain peace of mind.

When asked about the nature of the childhood experiences that shaped their perception of the importance of education and acted as a foundational impetus to enter the field of education (Theme 2), the participants noted that family served as the primary influence on their views and their subsequent educational goals, whether implicitly or explicitly. While all participants noted the desire to serve in the capacity of assistant principal or principal, they indicated that the principal pool and other gatekeeping measures to be eligible to interview for positions were problematic and subjective (Theme 3). Regarding questions that explored their perceptions on the rate of advancement (Theme 4), the participants indicated that delayed advancement over time served as a demotivating factor and a deterrent to their professional aspirations. When asked what additional challenges hindered their path to the role of assistant principal and/or principal, they noted that racialized placement limited their options and served as a demotivating factor (Theme 5). The participants addressed the biases they encountered in assigned duties that led to a lack of preparedness when interviewing and seeking a promotion (Theme 6). Finally, they spoke to the personal and imposed perceptions of the ability of Black men to perform the

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duties of an instructional leader and how it impacted their ability to transition with fluidity out of certain roles and/or schools (Theme 7).  There were five major causes noted for the lack of Black men in the role of principal within the district: access to the pool, delayed advancement, limitations of racialized placement, bias of assigned duties and lack of preparedness, and perceptions of Black men as a non-instructional entity as impediments to their professional progress.

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**Analysis and Interpretation of Findings**

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This section will provide my analysis and interpretations of the findings related to the seven themes and significant findings of this study.

**Theme 1:  Faith as a Pillar**

It was interpreted that faith served as a grounding force when faced with inexplicable circumstances, particularly those associated with working in a culture predicated upon whiteness. As noted by Lomotey (2019) faith is central in the lives of Black principals he researched. Considering the bias, racialized placement and delayed advancement as described by the participants, it is no wonder the utilize faith to help them build resiliency while serving in environments which are disproportionality low-performing, high-need, and high-stakes.  As noted by (Sheppard et al., 2018), faith has played a foundational role in the lives of the African American educational leader.  The candidates' espoused beliefs demonstrate that the "concept of faith, spirituality, and religion refer to a broad set of beliefs that are perceived by some to be distinct constructs and by others to be overlapping and interrelating" (Hicks, 2022, p.6).  These beliefs are what candidates identified as the pillar that they leaned upon when faced with challenges.

**Theme 2:  Family as Foundational for Educational Goals**

It was interpreted that while the participants grew up with various familial structures, education was prized and acted as a construct for advancement through life.  The participants stated the positive impact that the implicit and/or explicit expectations had on their outlook towards education.  While not all Black men in the study represented above-average academic progress at all times and in all subjects, none expressed a wavering of the familial expectation that they do well in school.  They also articulated a clear understanding that their parental figures expected them to be educated and productive members of society beyond high school whether they attended college, joined the military or the workforce.  My analysis and interpretations serve to dispel the accepted and unquestioned narrative that education is not prized in Black homes, and particularly in the homes of Black adolescent men.  As noted in the review of literature, Jones (2002, p. 9) stated that, "A person's socialization has an impact on the perception of and interaction with people who are ethnically, culturally, and socially different. Therefore, as people are socialized about others dissimilar to themselves, they make value judgments, character assessments, and stereotypical comments."

My analysis is also supported by additional research that examines the harm of widely accepted cultural narratives about the Black family and the low value they place on educational expectations that, over time, become "racist background stories embedded within institutions and …become expressed in individual cultural scripts about race" (Puchner & Markowitz, 2015). As a result, Black men enter educational spaces as a student and an educational leader shrouded by bias and deficit perceptions regarding their ability to achieve and perform as an academic and intellectual.

These perceptions may manifest in how Black men are treated and responded to in educational spaces and the roles to which they are assigned. The grand narratives that are enacted serve to undermine and question his ability to perform the more academic and intellectual roles of the position. Over time, the foundational narrative constructed by the dominant culture creates a thread that becomes pervasive in the duties of Black men in education who attempt to ascend from the classroom to the role of assistant principal and principal. Thus, this can have a negative impact on his advancement in educational leadership and his placement should he be fortunate enough to receive a position as a principal.

The interpretation of Theme 2 serves as an underpinning for Theme 6: Bias in assigned duties and a lack of preparedness and Theme 7: Personal and imposed perceptions which will be examined and connected later in the analysis. Theme 2 provided a counter-narrative to the belief that education is viewed differently in Black homes as opposed to White homes. When Theme 2 goes unchallenged, it supports additional narratives that can bring to bear biases on the types of administrative duties to which Black men are assigned. When this belief about the early educational experiences of Black men is combined with the general deficit framework, it adds to the negative narrative. It perpetuates the belief that they are only able to lead in certain schools and as a disciplinarian that reigns with an iron fist as opposed to a caring and student-centered individual who is capable of leading with compassion. When Black men are seen as an entity that must be policed, the assumption is that they should be used as a policer of their own kind. When unchallenged, it can directly impact how he views himself and how he is viewed within the fabric of education and the confidence placed in his ability to lead as an academic.

From the beginning, the participants viewed education as a catalyst and a natural next step from a very early age. For example, Mr. Atticus, Mr. Lonnon, Mr. Q, and Mr. Paul were all

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raised by a single mother and in a household where education came before all extra-curricular activities. Mr. Method and Mr. Omaha were raised by single fathers, yet the expectations were the same: academics were prized above athletics and all extracurricular activities. Both men noted that academic excellence was an unspoken expectation that was never questioned, and they never viewed the expectation as abnormal.

Even in the nuclear families of Mr. Shonuff, Mr. Phil, Mr. Alpha, Mr. Wilson, Mr. King, and Mr. X, being a contributing member to the educational setting was a given. For Mr. Shonuff it came in the form of possibly being a teacher. In Mr. X's family, by the age of 5 he became aware of his parents as educators, the organic expectation for matriculation into higher education and the fact that he wanted to become an educator just like his mother. Likewise, Mr. King's lineage was embedded in a family of educators and in spite of his personal attraction to street life, he never wavered from his desire to become educated and enter the field of education. He began mentoring and working with youth camps in his teens and made the natural transition from student to mentor, to teacher, to assistant principal to principal. In fact, his involvement with the youth program in 1994 was the one thing he noted on his timeline that let him know he was on the right path and supporting youth would be his lifelong course. And in Mr. Phil's nuclear family, both of his parents were college educated. His mother began her career as a teacher's aide and matriculated to the superintendency within the same district. He expressed that he understood from a very early age the cultural capital that education possessed. In Mr. Wilson's home, his parents made certain he and his brothers possessed all the necessary materials for academic excellence although they felt as if they may not have been able to directly provide instructional support. To that end, his father chose to build a desk in his room to provide a designated space for encyclopedias, library books, and course texts. The same value system held

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true for Mr. Alpha.  Neither of his parents had a formal education, but the expectation was explicit.  He and his siblings were expected to do well in school, behave, and sports serves as a secondary and conditional activity.  He also had the standard 3 choices: college, military, or work.  His academic endeavors led him to a life steeped in education and a the principalship.

As a commonality for all participants, education was primary, and athletics were secondary and conditionally based upon satisfactory completion of academic expectations regardless of the family structure.  My interpretation aligns with Bonilla-Silva's (2003) research that looks to combat the generally used racial discourse that is underscored by the use of culturally based arguments and color blindness to structural racism while advancing stereotypical narratives.  In this case it is the narrative of the Black family as a trope that prizes athletic prowess above and to the exclusion of academics that has been troubled with a counter-narrative from the participants.

**Theme 3:  Gatekeeping Measures as Problematic**

I interpreted the participants' experiences with entering the applicant pool for the role of assistant principal or principal as problematic and frustrating.  These gatekeeping measures explained by the participants and researched by scholars present as infallibly discriminatory practices that privilege Whites and subordinate the minoritized through sifting, sorting, and selecting while simultaneously reinforcing the culture of power (Hooker, 2000).  As was coded and categorized and later found to be a theme, the participants noted a lack of equity in the talent acquisition process.  As an assistant principal for the district, the tiering process and an iteration of the pool process was in place when I took on the role of assistant principal.  I was never required to participate in either process. This supports the argument made by the participants that the process is inconsistent and arbitrarily enforced. Prior to the data collection for this project, I

had no idea the hiring process would become a theme.  This is simply because I had no

experience with the process.  As it became a consistent category, I felt the need to revisit my

positionality and name what I failed to see as an exclusionary practice because it had not served

to delay my career in the same manner as was perceived by the participants.

Of the 12 participants, Mr. X was only recently able to join the pool after multiple

attempts, but he has not been able to secure an interview or a position as an assistant principal.

As argued by Bush & Moloi (2008), the delayed advancement and underrepresentation of Black

men in educational leadership could be linked to the district's decentralized pool system.

Because the candidates are rated by humans, there is an argument that the process has a

subjective element that works against candidates who have already completed university and

state requirements to become an assistant principal or a principal.  It must also be noted even

after the battery of assessments, there is still no guarantee candidates will be selected for an

interview since the choice of who to interview is still left up to the principal in the case of filling

an assistant principal position and the community and the committee (Superintendent and Board)

in the case of hiring a principal.  This subjective route to the assistant and/or principal role can be

riddled with independent district biases based on the propensities of the hiring process members.

Mr. Atticus was recently able to join the principal pool after multiple attempts at passing

all written and oral components of the assessment.  Mr. Shonuff does not believe he will have

equity in opportunity just because he enters the pool.  He named the experiences of others and

the lack of representation within the district as evidence that entering the pool does not assure

advancement for Black men.  Despite having 9 years of exemplary experience and holding

district-level representative positions as an assistant principal, he laments the added localized

process which he viewed as subjective.  He has expressed doubt that he will ever join the murky

waters of the pool because of the convoluted process. He believes the process continues to allow access for Whites while maintaining the quota and relegating Black men in principal positions within the district. Mr. Q has decided to resign himself to being a career AP as opposed to trying to repeatedly overcome the pool process. Mr. Paul decided to remove himself from the pool after multiple attempts to secure a position as an assistant principal. Mr. Method and Mr. Lonnon both left the district.

Mr. Method worked as an assistant principal for 2 years and became a principal, and Mr. Lonnon became a principal at a large high school in another district without participating in a tiering or pool process. According to the participants, both of those districts are relative in size and have almost twice the number of Black men in diverse and traditional principal roles than the researched district. Mr. Omaha also left the district for a district-level position in a neighboring state with no tiering or pooling process for applicants and exponential representation in diverse settings for Black men.

As Mr. Lonnon shared when Black men are viewed as disciplinarian it limits the facets of the job to which he is exposed. There is a need to be mentored daily on how to lead instructionally. He believes this will lead to greater exposure to the academic portions of the role and a greater level of comfort when interviewing. It will allow Black men to speak with first-hand knowledge to the various dynamics of the role. The perceptions of Black men as academics have a direct impact on their ability to gain access to the pool and become a viable candidate because they have limited experience beyond discipline and athletics.

The following figure demonstrates the domains of the district interview for the pool process that the applicants are expected to address. As Mr. Lonnon stated, if Black men have been primarily relegated to certain duties such discipline, then they may be woefully unprepared

to create their personal story during the interview process. As noted previously, there are multiple facets to the pooling process. What follows below is the interview portion and the requirement that applicants craft their "star story" based on the domains. They are tasked with naming a specific situation, the task, the action, and the result of their action taken. While their roles tended to be discipline-heavy, the domains do not place an emphasis on being a disciplinarian as a part of their "star story".

**Figure 15. The District's Interview Requirements for a "STAR" Story**

| DOMAIN | COMPETENCY | YOUR STAR STORY | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Leads Instruction | Believes all children can experience academic success | 1. SITUATION 2. TASK 3. ACTION 4. RESULT | | |
| | Prioritizes instructional observation, feedback and coaching | | | |
| Builds Relationships | Models high expectations and growth mindset | 1. SITUATION 2. TASK 3. ACTION 4. RESULT | | |
| | Communicates effectively to strengthen relationships | | | |
| Facilitates Change | Creates a clear, compelling vision for the school | 1. SITUATION 2. TASK 3. ACTION 4. RESULT | | |
| | Uses transparent, data-driven decision making | | | |
| | Solves problems with a systems thinking approach | | | |
| | Encourages risk-taking and innovative thinking | | | |
| Manages Resources | Allocates resources effectively and equitably | 1. SITUATION 2. TASK 3. ACTION 4. RESULT | | |
| | Evaluates decisions for impact | | | |

Mr. King and Mr. Phil are currently principals and serve as mentors to Black men attempting to enter the pool or secure a position. Their years of experience and the fact that they were already principals when the process began, prevented them from having to participate in the pool process in order to interview. However, they did have experience with the tiering process from years ago and the tiering also included a similar battery of assessments that were written and oral. As members of the "Black Caucus" they share their historical insight with Black men looking to enter the current pool process and matriculate to the role of assistant principal or principal. Similarly, Mr. Alpha and Mr. Wilson, while recently retired, are still mentors and

supporting members of the "Black Caucus" because the tiering process, while not required for all, was in place as they attempted to secure principal positions.

Throughout the analysis, I noted that the participants routinely and repeatedly named the pool process as "racially biased," "subjective," "arbitrary," "a mystery," "gatekeeping," "murky," "a barrier," "unclear," "coagulated," and "as a way to keep people that look like me out or to get certain [White] people in". According to Arnold and Brooks (2013, p. X):

> Current leadership thinking and practice has greatly influenced a culture of individualism and idealism in the United States. Traditional conceptualizations of educational leadership assume that individuals have attained leadership positions based primarily on their talent, natural ability, or achievements. This assumption overlooks the many manifestations of structural racism.

Furthermore, research conducted by Banaji et al (2021) asserted that an analysis of structural racism exposes "racially unequal opportunities and outcomes that are inbuilt or intrinsic to the operation of a society's structures… Its [structural racism's] power derives from its being integrated into a unified system of racial differentiation and discrimination that creates, governs, and adjudicates opportunities and outcomes across generations. Racism represents the biases of the powerful (p.2)". My research study found that the talent acquisition process was a structure perceived by participants to ultimately serve as a legitimate local measure to limit access and reinforce traditional hiring practices that disproportionately favor the Whites within the district. This interpretation is supported by Hooker's (2000) conclusion that found, "racism within the realms of educational leadership development does advantage Whites and subordinate Black people and those from other racial minority groups" (p. 79). There are two issues with the pool process as noted by the participants. It was subjective and unclear in nature and it fails to

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address the issue of placement. The model focuses on program inputs and program processes; however, there is no process in place that focuses on program outputs that include placement and retention rates (Fuller et. al, 2016). As was evidenced in the participant profiles, each candidate had exemplary service records and substantial years of experience. They possessed the certification to become a principal and they were school and community leaders. But their experiences aligned with research that found one very important caveat. The findings indicated that Black educators were more likely to become assistant principals and less likely to become principals (Crawford & Fuller, 2015). As opposed to increasing equity, subjective and localized procedures may actually be working in concert to underpin social and professional structures designed to sift, sort, and select while reinforcing and reproducing cultures of power.

**Theme 4: Delayed Advancement as Demotivating**

When interpreted, the findings indicated that the Black men in this research study perceived the delayed advancement over time, as compared to their White counterparts, as a demotivator and a deterrent to their ascension. Systems and structures seem to be at work as the participants aspired to matriculate into positions of educational leadership. They perceived interactions within the district as disrespectful and doubtful of their intelligence and ability to lead. They noted that those around them considered their leadership position as illegitimate (i.e., affirmative action or a diversity hire) or felt the need to perform at a different standard with smaller margins for error to prove their competency. The participants' experience was that they had to "work harder and make fewer mistakes to prove they were competent" (Clarida, 2023, p. 37). As noted by Mr. Paul, "I have to bust my ass to try to make sure people respect that I am intelligent." This is of particular importance when underscored by the fact that he has been unable to secure a role as an assistant principal or a principal since his demotion.

Scholars argue that this will infallibly breed discriminatory practices that manifest in the delayed advancement or strategic placement for Black principals. The theme of delayed advancement is often underpinned by research such as Hooker's (2000) paper that concluded that "racism within the realms of education leadership development does advantage Whites and subordinate Black people and those from other racial minority groups" (p.79). Working in one of the top 4 largest districts within the state would seemingly provide additional opportunities for advancement. However, what was noted by the participants was that their opportunities were relegated to a few non-traditional schools with smaller populations and an infinite number of needs. This limited number of schools meant that all Black men were either waiting or vying for the same positions at about 4 schools.

In recognition of the impact this delay could have had on his career, Mr. Method left the district. As Mr. Lonnon perceived, Black men are delayed by the unwritten and biased district policies that serve as behavioral constraints and impact who advances, where, and how quickly. In the study by Fuller et. al (2016), it was found that:

> In making such calculations, individuals consider their own personal characteristics and circumstances as well as the characteristics of the school in which the job is located. Research in this area suggests that individuals focus on salary (salary relative to workload and salary relative to current salary), working conditions, and the impact the position might have on the applicant's personal life (p.646).

Mr. Wilson's lived experience supported this, "I've seen Black males leave because they feel like they are not going to get the shake that they thought they should get. So they have to leave to go somewhere else."

Mr. Q and Mr. Paul shared how these silent perceptions marginalize Black men and delay their career because there seems to be limited intentionality in creating equity in hiring Black men for schools other than high-need, majority-minority, and non-traditional settings.

These institutional patterns can begin to read as "anti-blackness" as Black people aspire to matriculate into positions of educational leadership (Dancy, 2018). As Mr. Wilson pointed out, Black men have an average of 3 or 4 schools for which they have a legitimate opportunity to lead and for which the district has ever hired a Black man. The likelihood that a Black man will be hired at a White school, or a traditional school has not been a standard practice. Mr. King shared that Black men continue to interview if they are admitted to the pool, but the hiring represents parity with the demographic of the school. Therefore, to expedite their career opportunities, candidates go outside the district for principal positions.

**Theme 5: Racialized Placement**

Through critical analysis, I interpreted the responses of the participants regarding racialized placement as a demotivator. Black men noted their frustration with racialized hiring patterns that limited their opportunities and marginalized their leadership.

Black men hold an integral role in creating and maintaining diversity at all levels and in all types of schools. Unfortunately, stereotypes about the intellectual and professional capacity of Black men to lead in all environments is often based upon ethnically socialized constructs about Black leaders which perpetuates stereotypical perceptions which ultimately serve as a bias that relegates them to schools that serve predominantly Black communities (Jones, 2002). Most participants recounted that the coveted and financially beneficial role of a traditional high school principal, as evidenced by the current hiring, is reserved for the White man and lacking diversity (Tillman, 2003). Mr. Method stated, "I will say I am working harder for the same money as my

White counterparts. You're still working way harder for pretty much that same amount of, pot of money."

For example, Mr. Phil, Mr. Atticus, Mr. Omaha, Mr. Lonnon, Mr. Alpha, Mr. Wilson, Mr. King, Mr. Q., Mr. Paul all explained that if a school serves a White population, is traditional, non-Title One, while a Black man may be interviewed, the hiring pattern indicates it will be assigned to a White person, and most often a White male.  This racialized hiring for Black men leads to added demands as seen by Mr. Paul's tenure as a first-year principal at the lowest-performing elementary school in the state.  His experience was emblematic of the following:

> Education reform, demands to improve student attainment levels, and insufficient resources are most likely to be a greater challenge for school building-level leaders serving urban and suburban communities of predominately Black and Brown students, with higher proportions of English language learners, than for predominately White principals in more suburban or rural districts and locations serving more homogeneous, majority White, English first-language speaker student cohorts (Smith, 2019, p. 52).

They also shared their frustration with attempting to branch out to increase their pool of schools but are left feeling as if the interview was only a form of appeasement when the ultimate candidate almost always represents parity for schools with a school demographic. As was noted by Mr. Wilson's quote:

> White people can go to work in any school they choose to, whereas Black people can't. We just know that. It's just understood. I don't care what anybody says. So the pool is a very small pool and you know that. So, when you see a White person getting [Black School], you go, 'Well, that's one of the last'.  That was one option that we could have, you know, and now somebody White's got that, you know, so that really burns you up.

Mr. Wilson's description of the limitations of the opportunities for Black men in educational leadership serves as an illustration that they are largely excluded from leadership roles in White public schools (Rousmaniere, 2007, 2013). However, the White male principals are widely accepted in all educational settings, be they White or minoritized (Horsford, 2010, 2011; Tillman, 2003).

Creating parity in hiring does not assure success (Haberman, 1988). Research has consistently indicated that the best predictors of educator success, particularly in urban schools, were life experiences, attitudes, and dispositions toward inequality and difference, not cultural or racial synchronicity (Cherry-McDaniel, 2019). However, representation for minoritized students within education represents a unique set of benefits that have been overshadowed by a preoccupation with Whiteness as explored in the review of the literature.

Over time, whiteness has become the raceless norm and the basis for structural privilege that has colluded with legal rights to exclude minoritized people from various systems such as educational, criminal justice, labor markets, and the law. This privilege serves to protect whiteness and perceived White institutions and systems to reify the preferences of white people (Bell, 2021). This is demonstrated in the recounts of Mr. Atticus, Mr. Shonuff, and Mr. Lonnon and their views on the institutional racism that works in tandem with the modern-day segregation and racialized hiring practices that are often the result of the influence of the community members, Board of Education members, and other hiring committee stakeholders. The socialization of the stakeholders conducting the interviews and assigning the candidates influences their perception of and interaction with people who are ethnically, culturally, and socially different and serves to influence their value judgments, character assessments, and stereotypical comments when viewing candidates (Banks, 1991).

**Theme 6: Bias in Assigned Duties and a Lack of Preparedness**

I found a connection in the interpretations of Theme 1 and Theme 5. The participants indicated that they were not viewed as instructional leaders or were not prized for their intellect. Their primary duties centered on supporting athletics and reinforcing discipline. The purpose of Theme 1 served to illustrate and highlight the academic focus that each participant had regardless of familial structure. They grew up in households that prized academics and viewed athletics as a secondary and conditional factor that hinged upon the satisfactory completion of academics. However, while the participants view themselves as instructional leaders and intellectuals, they are assigned to duties that do not cultivate the academic skillset of instructional leader. Published research has consistently reported findings surrounding the ideology that the Black principal was perceived to be intellectually inferior and unable to lead non-minoritized staff and students. This supports the research of (Pinkett et al., 2011) that notes the particular challenge for Black men who attempt to achieve acceptance as educational leaders and intellectuals when and how that aspiration works in direct opposition to the dominant narrative that can "challenge or attempt to define you based on racial stereotypes, baseless assumptions, or ignorance" (p. 28). Mr. Atticus, Mr. Omaha, Mr. Method, and Mr. X all recounted being seen as an athlete or mistaken for a coach as opposed to an educational leader. Mr. Alpha, Mr. Paul, Mr. Atticus, Mr. Shonuff, Mr. Phil, and Mr. Method, and Mr. Lonnon all spoke of having to prove their worth as an academic as opposed to it being an assumption. They felt they had to work harder and make more of an effort to be included in the academic aspect of school leadership and even then, it was not always a natural or welcomed inclusion.

Mr. X stated:

Just trying to get to the point of being a Black male in education and them [White

teachers] thinking that I'm all about discipline. Like I cannot overcome any type of issues

when it comes to growing a school or even looking at data and trying to figure out how

can we improve depending on what subject is that we're, you know, we're looking at or

trying to grow because I can.

Another point that the participants noted as far more troubling was their role in

policing Black and Brown students which is viewed as indicative of society at large.  This

fascination with Black men as disciplinarians was reminiscent of the world's fascination with the

character of Joe Clark from the much-lauded movie *Lean on Me*.  According to Gooden:

Why did Joe Clark become so popular so fast?  I contend that Clark was sought after by

mainstream media because his "success" needed to be displayed, and it was really

confirming some assumptions about the role and responsibility of the African-American

principal, like the dominant culture's axiomatic view that their responsibility as leaders in

education is to keep African-American children in line (2012, p.71).

The reflections of the participants are emblematic of societies educational expectations of

Black educators and the CRT tenet of interest convergence.  Mr. Atticus, Mr. Shonuff, Mr. Phil,

Mr. Lonnon, Mr. Q, and Mr. Method all took issue with being reduced to a disciplinarian who

was primarily tasked with processing behavior referrals that are largely generated by White

women teachers.  Some of the participants also spoke to the pressure of having to dole out

punishments to appease the teachers in a timely manner and that the teachers felt was appropriate

and severe enough.  Their duties as described by them translated as operational and managerial

responsibilities that did not serve to highlight what they felt was the true purpose of education.

The tasks assigned to them did not require the nuances of critical thinking with regard to

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curriculum and pedagogy. I surmised that the limited exposure to the various facets of the principalship directly contributed to difficulty adequately addressing the battery of assessments of the pool process and interview (Theme 3).

**Theme 7: Personal and Imposed Perceptions**

As noted earlier, I found a connection between Theme 1 which troubled the unfounded, and yet culturally accepted narrative of the lack of emphasis on education within Black homes, and the personal and imposed perceptions of the ability of Black men to perform the duties of instructional leader. These conflicting views were interpreted as impactful on their role in educational leadership. Mr. Atticus, Mr. King, and Mr. Method noted and articulated a keen awareness of how they are perceived through the White gaze as either darker-skinned or larger Black men and how this can be weaponized to the detriment of their careers, particularly when engaging in any interactions with White women. Mr. Method stated, "It's always heightened whenever I'm dealing with, with white people. It's always hard when I'm dealing with a white staff. It's always heightened." Feeling the need to make themselves smaller, less imposing, less direct when articulating points, monitoring tones and tenor, gesticulations, posture, and eye contact all in an effort to make themselves physically less is an arduous and daily task that they must be consistently aware of in all interactions that could possibly be misinterpreted through the White gaze. Hooker's (2000) research resonates with their experience as "racism within the realms of education leadership development does advantage Whites and subordinate Black people and those from other racial minority groups" (p.79).

Mr. Omaha, Mr. Phil, Mr. X, Mr. Paul, and Mr.Q's experiences with having to go above and beyond through deeds and attire to be respected as an academic and an educational leader are interpreted as historical stereotyping that questions the presence of Black men and their ability to

lead in educational spaces based solely upon appearance.  The socialization of those working

with participants influences their perception of and interaction with Black men who present as

ethnically, culturally, and socially different while also serving to serves to influence their "value

judgments, character assessments, and stereotypical comments" as it relates to their ability to

perform the academic aspects of the role (Banks, 1991).

Their experiences represent microaggressions and disrespect as their leadership ability

and position are deemed illegitimate.  As Black men, their degrees or roles were reduced to hires

to fulfill a diversity requirement or an affirmative action quota.  For example, Mr. Method shared

his concern of:

Not being taken seriously, not feeling as though they would have the opportunity to

really portray themselves or really to implement the strategies or the procedures that they feel

they would need within the district. Honestly, not being taken seriously enough to or feel that

confidence was being bestowed upon them to be successful at any  type of school.

In light of this, they feel the need to work harder and to a different standard than their

White counterparts who are often equally or less credentialed (Clarida, 2023).  The unconscious

psychological attitude towards Black educators serves to reinforce systems of marginalization

and exclude them from educational spaces.

## Relation of Finding to Research Questions

This section will succinctly connect the research findings to the research questions.  The

central research question asked what are the career experiences of Black men educators who are

credentialed to be principals in a southeastern school district. They each had an early recognition

of the importance of education and the possibilities it holds.  All participants entered the field of

education with the intention of acting as positive representation for all students, and their views

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of an educator were inclusive. However, the process they encountered was one that was bred of exclusivity. Some of the participants described their pathway to becoming a principal as an unclear and tedious localized process that is riddled with gatekeeping measures that disproportionately lead to Black men being placed at low-performing, majority-minority, Title One, low-socioeconomic schools. The first supporting research question asks what the nature of their early career experiences is. The participants were motivated by their childhood experiences underpinned by their parents' perceptions of the importance of education to provide the same opportunities for all students. Through their foundational experiences they entered education with a desire to represent the capacity of Black men to act as agents of change to positively impact outcomes for all students. Their parents, family members and family members within education served as the foundational motivating factor that propelled them into the field of education. The second supporting research question: how did they experience their various transitions into and through leadership positions: the participants were met with arduous gatekeeping and hiring practices that led to delayed advancements and opportunities further limited by racialized placement because of the implicit biases surrounding their assigned duties as an assistant principal that were based upon stereotypical and deficit assumptions regarding their ability to be an instructional leader. The greatest challenge for Black men in the hiring process was satisfying the pool and the racialized placement process which limited their options and delayed their career advancement.

## Relation of Findings to Theoretical Frameworks

This study sought to understand the career experiences of Black men educators who are credentialed to be principals in a southeastern school district and to understand the nature of their early career experiences and how they experienced transitions into and through leadership

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positions.  In Chapter 3, I examined the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework to amplify the tenet of counter storytelling and majoritarian narratives to examine systems of power within education to gain a nuanced understanding about how and why Black men make professional decisions regarding career advancement in educational leadership. The findings of this research study are consistent with the CRT tenet of counter storytelling and majoritarian narratives as a method of telling a story that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths especially ones held by the majority while recognizing that majoritarian narratives are recognized as stories and not assumed to be facts or the truth (Solórzano &; Yosso, 2001).

## Implications of Findings

This qualitative study focused on the lived experiences of Black men credentialed to be a principal within a large, urban school district in the southeast. The study illuminated the experiences of Black men principals or Black men credentialed to be principals while underscoring the challenges that impacted their decision to pursue or not to pursue certain principal opportunities by adding their experiences with education and educational leadership to the critical conversation.  The problem investigated was Black men as a subset of a dominant group and their absence and/or presence in diverse educational spaces as principal.  An additional purpose was to complicate the stereotypical view of Black men and education and amplify the nuances of their stories in order to promote change when necessary (Bales & Guthrey, 2020).

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

1.  The Black men in this study are credentialed to be principals and
    desire to serve as a principal in diverse educational spaces and act as

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culturally responsible representation and agents of change for all

students. Therefore, there is a need to audit and/or eliminate localized

talent acquisition programs and procedures that serve as gatekeeping

measures that disproportionately impede the advancement of Black

men while privileging the advancement of Whites; particularly given

the bias and inequities of assigned duties present in the role assistant

principal and how that reinforces hegemony and marginalizes Black

men.

2. Black men who desire to be principals are disproportionately impacted

by racialized hiring patterns and denied access to a myriad of school

settings and primarily relegated to Title One or special program

schools that are low-performing and high needs or have smaller

populations. Therefore, there is a need for a coherent and

comprehensive recruitment and retention procedure that focuses on

equity in hiring as opposed to parity in hiring.

The current assistant principal and principal selection process of the district maintains

Black men as a minority demographic in the principal role at diverse, non-minoritized, average

to high-performing, non-Title One, traditional school environments. The district and hiring

stakeholders have a responsibility to create equity across the district and at all levels since the

current demographic is: 34% (White); 29.4% (Black); 29% (Hispanic); 5% (multi-racial); 2.7%

(Asian); and less that 1% (American Indian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

## Limitations of Study

1. This basic qualitative study was limited to 12 Black men educators in one school district to create a manageable number of participants for the timeline mapping interview and the semi-structured one-on-one interviews required for each participant. Ideally, the number of participants and districts should be increased, and the district types varied. Because of proximity and familiarity, the participants selected for a representative sample were chosen from the same large, urban district. The district was also chosen because larger, urban districts tend to have a greater representation of Black school leaders than smaller districts.

2. The research did not explore smaller districts as a comparison, surrounding districts, or districts that may have a more diverse hiring pattern and thus may yield a different research outcome.

3. The limited number of Black men in the role of assistant principal or principal within the district created an inherent problem in locating and researching the reason for the absence or presence Black men within the district. In short, the problem being researched contributed to the problem of locating participants.

4. My experiences as a Black woman assistant principal doing back yard research within the district where I am employed represented an inherent connection to with the participants, Creswell (2009) and indicates that there is the opportunity for bias that may compromise the researcher's ability to disclose information as a result of the connection, however slight.

5. Additionally, it must be noted that although the tiering and pool process were in place when I became the assistant principal for instruction, I was never required to

participate in the process in order to secure a position. My positionality and

experience serve to underscore the beliefs of the participants that the process is not

consistently applied to all within the district.

## Member Checking

To support the credibility of the data collected, I utilized member checking. According to

Creswell (2007), member checking involves the researcher "taking data, analysis, interpretations,

and conclusions back to participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the

account" (p. 208). The participants were all educators from a local, large urban school district.

Each participant holds various leadership positions within the district, thus allowing for varied

experiences. After coding the historical timeline mapping interview, semi-structured interview

questions were curated. One-on-one interviews were then conducted, transcribed, analyzed, and

shared with the participants upon request to make recommended changes to ensure my

interpretation was accurate.

The step-by-step analysis process included the following:

- Listening and re-listening to each recorded interview as I read the

  transcript.

- Read and re-read the corresponding interview questions to highlight and

  create color-coded corresponding notecards based upon initial codes.

- Designate portions of the transcript with a separate color if their

  usefulness was not immediately evident. This was highlighted in yellow

  as cautionary and for possible use later.

- Move the color-coded cards to digital format on Excel with the same color

  coding to create a digital format for storage.

- Written descriptions and quotes were synthesized and compared to the research questions.

- Repeat the process as I completed each interview to begin to look for similar patterns and emerging themes.

Each interview concluded with my request for the participant to add any information, for permission to end the interview, and a description of the member-checking process that would follow within 7 business days.  The process resembled the following:  the participants received a follow-up form of correspondence within 7 business days. They were offered a digital or paper copy of timeline maps and interviews. A request was made for them to submit any changes within 24 hours after which they would receive the edited copy.  I followed up by verbally, emailing, or texting salient questions about my interpretations and coding of my nascent ideas, such as:

- Does my interpretation reflect your experience?

- Is my meaning-making accurate?

- Are the patterns I am interpreting, correct?

- Here is what I have been hearing. Is this accurate or far off? Tell me your thoughts.

The goal of this internal and external validity was to ensure the reliability of the data.

## Recommendations for the Practice

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

1. I recommend a centralized policy that mandates quarterly ongoing equity training that explores and exposes deficit and dysconscious racist thinking in personal perceptions at levels of leadership.  The aim should be to curate research based professional

development for all educational hiring levels, including the members of the Board and district-level staff members.  This will work to support the advancement of hiring conditions that are grounded in equity protocols.  As noted by Hooker (2000) there is a need for an examination of policies in education leadership development policies and the manner in which these talent development processes advantage Whites and subordinate Black people.  As an added measure, an equity department that audits staff attrition and hiring data would provide worthwhile feedback that is grounded in data as opposed to cursory glances that do not represent a holistic view of the district hiring demographics.

2. I recommend that the localized procedure for creating a talent pool be audited and/or eliminated.  In the case of auditing the talent pool process, the added element should be grounded in Role Model Theory. The Role Model Theory (RMT) has been used as a comprehensive hiring practice to address structural inequities related to race, class, gender, education and employment, which intentionally or unintentionally exclude Black individuals from various organizations. (Lomotey, 1987; Nesmith, 2013; Stewart, Meier, & England, 1989).  RMT can serve to undergird a true mentoring program that serves to pair candidates with those of the same race and gender when appropriate.  Adding a mentoring program grounded in creating representation for those who seek the same employment opportunities can diversify hiring and placement practices within the district. Same-race and same-culture mentors provide important images of racial and cultural affiliation. This would be intentional integration as opposed to assuming it will happen through a talent acquisition pool. As Delgado argued:

A White-dominated institution hires you not because you are entitled to or deserve the job. Nor is the institution seeking to set things straight because your ancestors and others of your heritage were systematically excluded from such jobs. Not at all. You're hired (if you speak politely, have a neat haircut, and, above all, can be trusted) not because of your accomplishments, but because of what others think you will do for them. If they hire you now and you are a good role model, things will be better in the next generation (1995, p. 357).

Given Delgado's argument, in the absence of a process that emphasizes modeling and mentoring with the purpose of increased hiring of qualified Black men, the localized process will not increase the presence of Black men in roles of educational leadership. The centralized requirement for principal licensure, good standing as a teacher or assistant principal with a resume that reflects their experience and recommendations as reviewed by balanced and equity trained stakeholder committee should serve without the additional gatekeeping measure which has been heretofore, haphazardly applied.

3. I recommend that a study be conducted to create a coherent and comprehensive recruitment and retention procedure that focuses on equity as opposed to parity and inclusion as opposed to gatekeeping. In support of this, the equity department's audits of staff attrition and hiring data could serve as a consistent barometer of the rate of advancement and hiring patterns for a holistic view of the district's hiring demographics and committee hiring trends that aligns with Khalifa's (2018) assertion that, "when schools are able to identify (and help develop) teaching talent within

minoritized and Indigenous communities, they get the minoritized teachers they always claim to seek" (p. 176). This creates a pipeline that could increase minoritized leadership.

4. Finally, I recommend that Area Superintendents be required to document and monitor the equity in which their principals allocate administrator responsibilities to reflect the professional aspirations of the assistant principals within the building and to insure they receive experience with various facets of the principal role such as: curriculum, budget and allocations, testing and accountability, accreditation, school improvement planning and documentation, community and stakeholder engagement, master schedule building, teacher retention and recruitment, and observations. This could come to bear on their opportunities to be better prepared for the talent acquisition pool (Lindsay & Hart, 2017).

## Recommendations for Future Research

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

1. Talent Acquisition Programs: Black men are disproportionately impacted by the current talent acquisition pool process. Research on districts that do not have a localized process and the rate of advancement for Black men within those districts could provide a comparison and add to the body of research that is still centered on the problem and based upon CRT and the tenet of counter storytelling and majoritarian narratives.

2. Dysconscious Racist Thinking: Examining the duties assigned to Black men who aspire to be principals as compared to the duties of White counterparts with the intention of comparing the rate of advancement in similar districts.

## Researcher Reflections

Conversations about the adolescent Black man can operate in a data vacuum, but there is history to be considered. How did we get here? That is the part of the data-dive that is often omitted or, at best, given only a cursory glance. It is my belief that we have all played a part in building the system that leads us to do a root-cause analysis on any demographic that represents a gap, an anomaly, an outlier…a problem. Assumptions cultivated through dysconscious racism reinforce tropes and stereotypes that follow Black men beyond the classroom and into the workplace where their ability to contribute in a critical manner is questioned and they become relegated and othered. This systematic deficit approach to intellectual ability of Black men hangs over his head like a cloud and around his neck like an albatross.

The participants communicated a lifelong appreciation for learning and contributing to the fabric of education. Their upbringing could have been indicative of any White student in Anytown, USA. What struck me was how ordinary their upbringing was. Of course, I know some kids experience unspeakable trauma and inequity. Of course, all students do not grow up with the same advantages. But what struck me was that all things being relatively equal, had they been a White man, their credentials would have given them exponential access to any number of positions. To that end, I wondered at what point the world decided they were not to be honored and rewarded for the sum of their experiences and decided to relegate them, to other them based upon their biases.

My research is in no way complete. My research is in no way perfect. As a qualitative researcher, I allowed the participants to tell their stories. More importantly, as a researcher who used the Critical Race Theory tenet of counter-storytelling storytelling and majoritarian narratives, it was important to allow the voices-of-color to tell their own stories. In the absence

of the voice-of-color, we run the risk of them being forgotten over time. The role of researcher comes with the consequential responsibility of deciding what and who is remembered. I am honored to have been able to amplify the stories of the "Black Caucus" and their journey through educational leadership.

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APPENDIX A: TIMELINE MAPPING QUESTIONS

Hello,

Thank you for joining me today. We will begin the first part of the interview by constructing a timeline over the next hour to an hour and a half. This timeline will consist of open-ended questions on the benchmarks in your life from a micro- and macro- level and how these events have impacted your professional decision-making to enter the field of educational leadership. You may use the paper and markers to construct your timeline in any format you choose: lists, continuous, parallel, sequential or a hybrid of your choosing are all welcome to capture a visual of your life history.

Your timeline may be published in part or whole. It is a research method to study your lived experiences and how those experiences impacted your decision to become an educational leader.

Our second interview will be questions that are curated from today's timeline. Both the timeline and the semi-structured in-depth interview will be used in tandem to enhance data collection.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Ok, please select the markers of your choice. Here is the paper. More will be provided as needed.

1. I'd like you to start by constructing a timeline depicting the most important life events and changes that happened in your life?

2. Now I encourage you to include any events that happened in the wider world that had a seemingly significant impact on your life and/or decision to enter the profession?

3. I would like to explore the relationship between your life events/changes and how this impacted your professional experiences? Would you mind adding marginal notes to connect "the dots"?

4. How did these professional experiences impact your decision to enter educational leadership?

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APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

*The interview questions will be curated after looking for codes that result from the analysis of the timeline life history interviews.*

Hello,

I appreciate your willingness to take the time to talk with me today. Thank you for being a participant in my research study. I will audiotape your responses so that I can record them verbatim during transcription. A copy of the transcript will be provided to you to ensure that I have captured your experience as a credentialed school leader. As we proceed, I may ask a few follow-up questions in order to garner more details with regard to your experiences.

Do I have your consent to audio tape this interview?

Are you ready to begin?

We recently finished your historical timeline interview, and I noticed the codes of _____.  To understand your story more fully, I would like to ask you a few more questions to connect how these experiences may have impacted your professional decisions in educational leadership.


1.  Before we get started with my questions, I'm wondering if you have any additional information you want to share from our first conversation. I understand that people can continue to think about that timeline exercise even after we've finished the interview.

2.  Look at your timeline and tell me where you would like to begin.

3.  How do you interpret the experience of _____ as mentioned in your historical timeline?

4.  In what ways did this experience construct your views on education and your role in education?

5.  What meaning do you attribute to _____ from your historical timeline?

    a.  How did this meaning impact how you made sense of your role in education?

6. What historical or current events do you feel have most impacted how you view education and your role as a leader?

7. What role did education (leadership) play in your early life?

    a. Who shaped your understanding of education, and how? Do you have any specific memories to share?

b. How has that role played out in your professional choices?

8. What or who inspired you to become an educator?

9. What explicit or hidden messages do you recall learning about educators and leaders in education?

    a. What memories do you have about education (leadership) and your cognitive, social, or emotional development as a Black man?

    b. How has it impacted your decisions in how and where you have chosen to lead? Tell me more…

10. I'm interested in understanding how you've made decisions about what leadership positions you've chosen to pursue or not pursue, specifically principal positions. Could you walk me through your experiences applying for a principal position?

    a. What was it like?

    b. What do you remember taking into consideration?

    c. What factors or influences inspired or dissuaded you to pursue school leadership?

11. What role do you think institutional racism has played in your perception of education?

    a. Can you recall any specific moments that stand out in your experience?

12. What role do you think institutional racism has played in your perception of educational leadership?

    a. Can you recall any specific moments that stand out in your experience?

13. Defining internal barriers as psychological factors, i.e. self-image, confidence, internalized racism, etc.., what internal barriers have you or do you face as a school administrator?

14. Defining external barriers such as state and district policies, systemic structures, mandates, etc., what external barriers have you or do you face as a school administrator?

15. To what extent, if any, do you feel racial privilege impacts the lives of Black men in educational leadership?

    a. What about in educational spaces?

16. When you envisioned yourself as a leader, where did you idealize where you wanted work?

17. I am interested in understanding the factors that impacted your professional decision-making. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

APPENDIX C: TIMELINE MAP FOR MR. Q
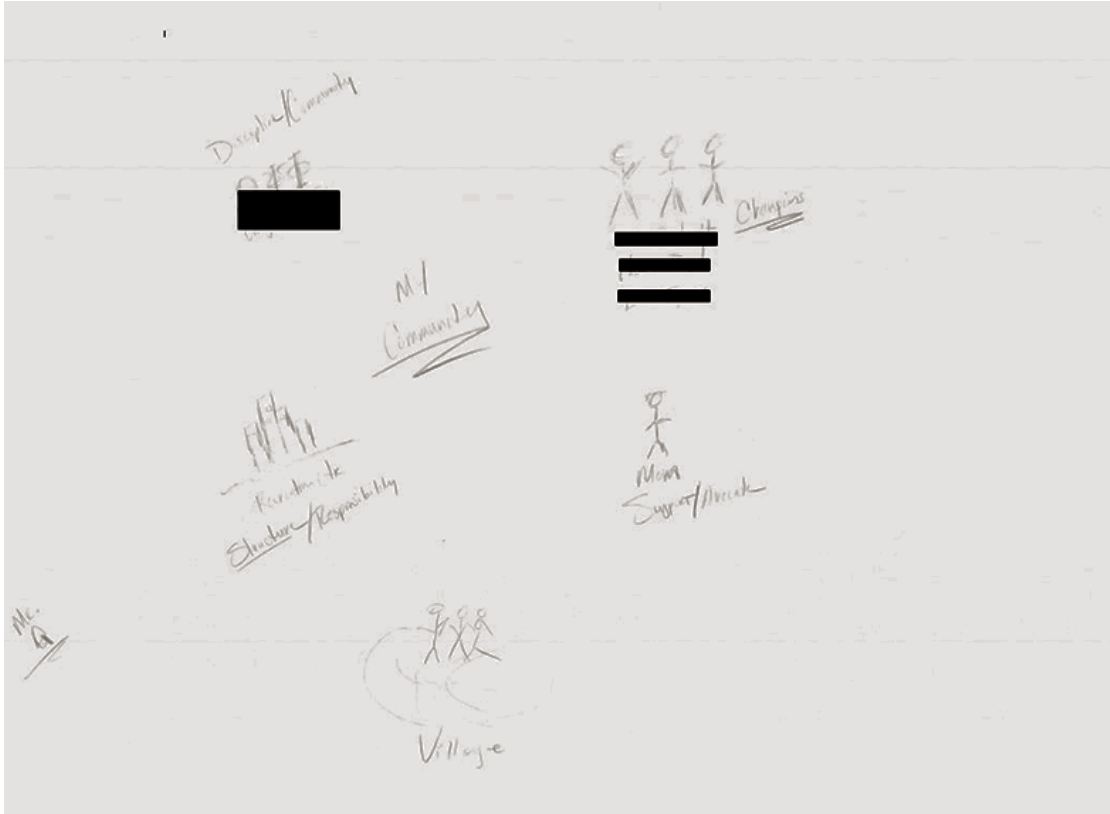
# APPENDIX E: TIMELINE MAP FOR MR. PAUL
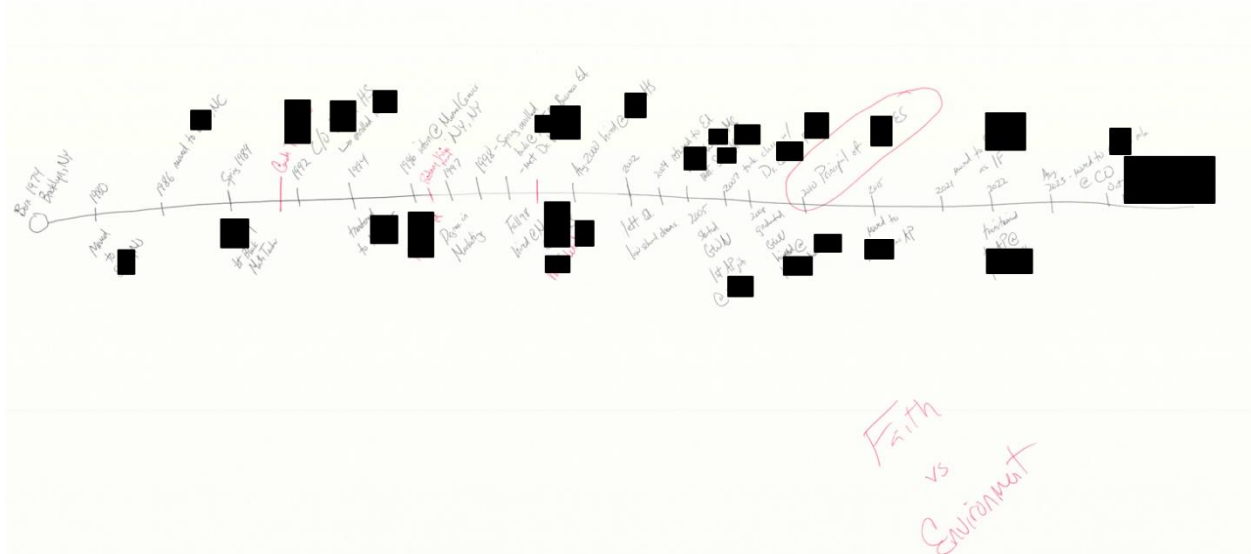
# APPENDIX F: TIMELINE MAP FOR MR. METHOD
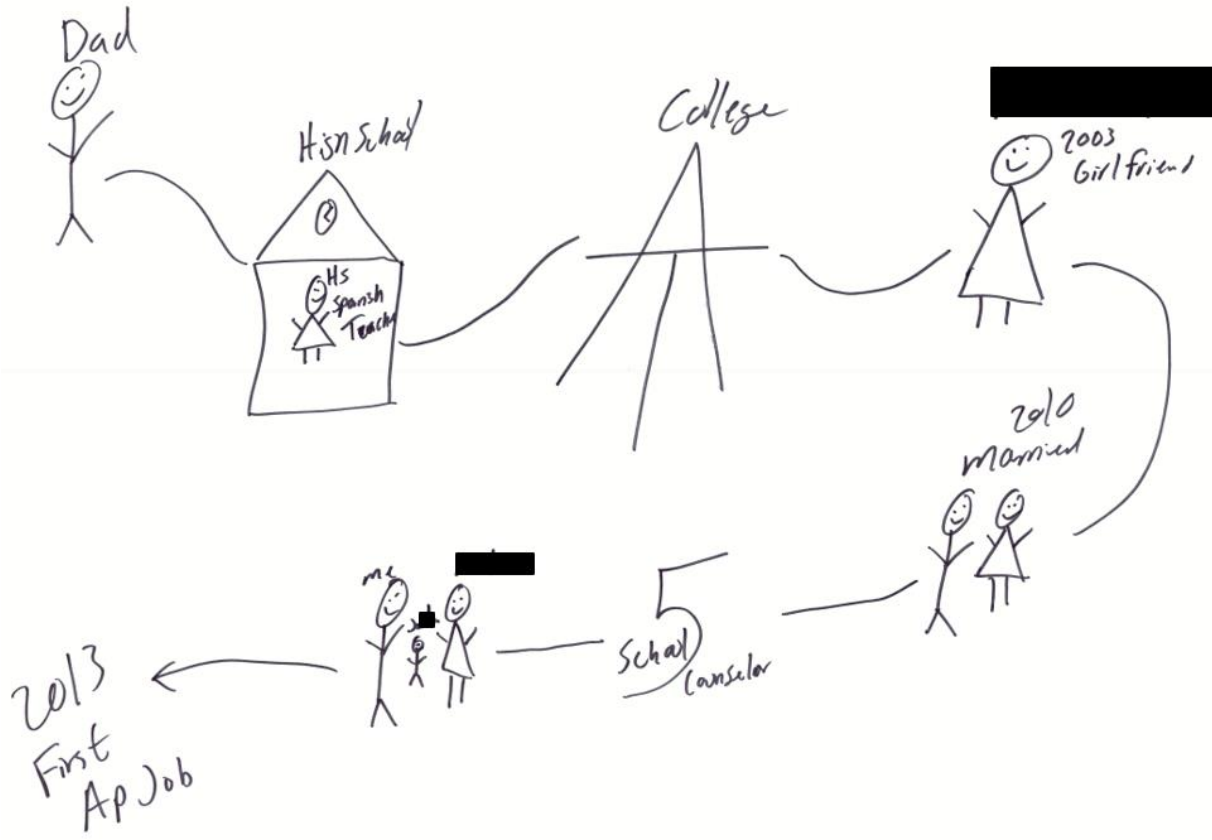
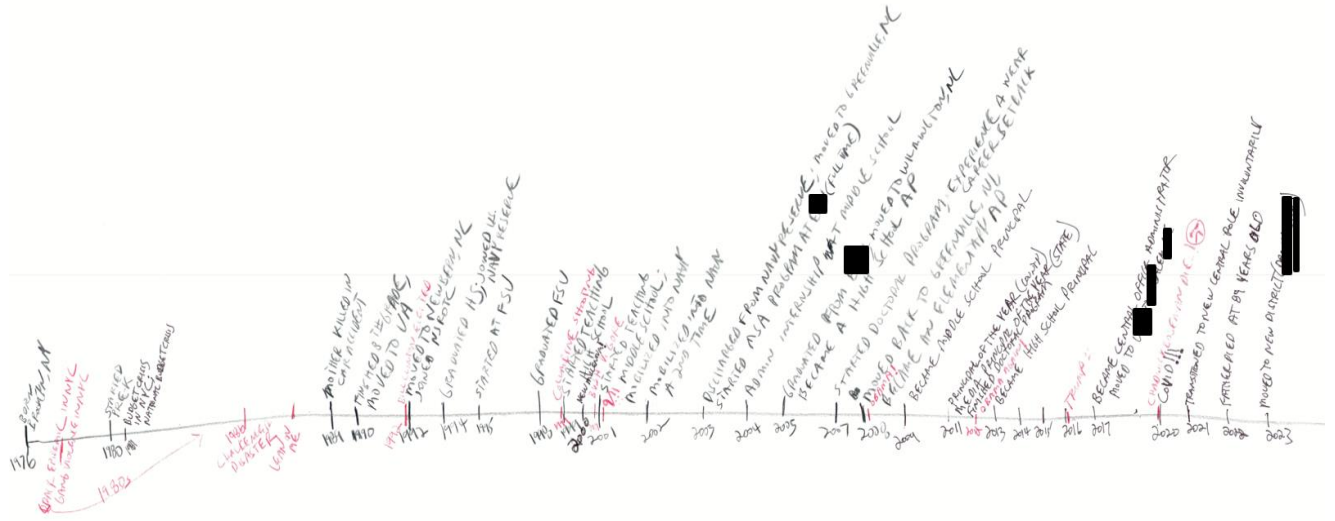1994  Counselor at NYSP
National Youth Sports Program
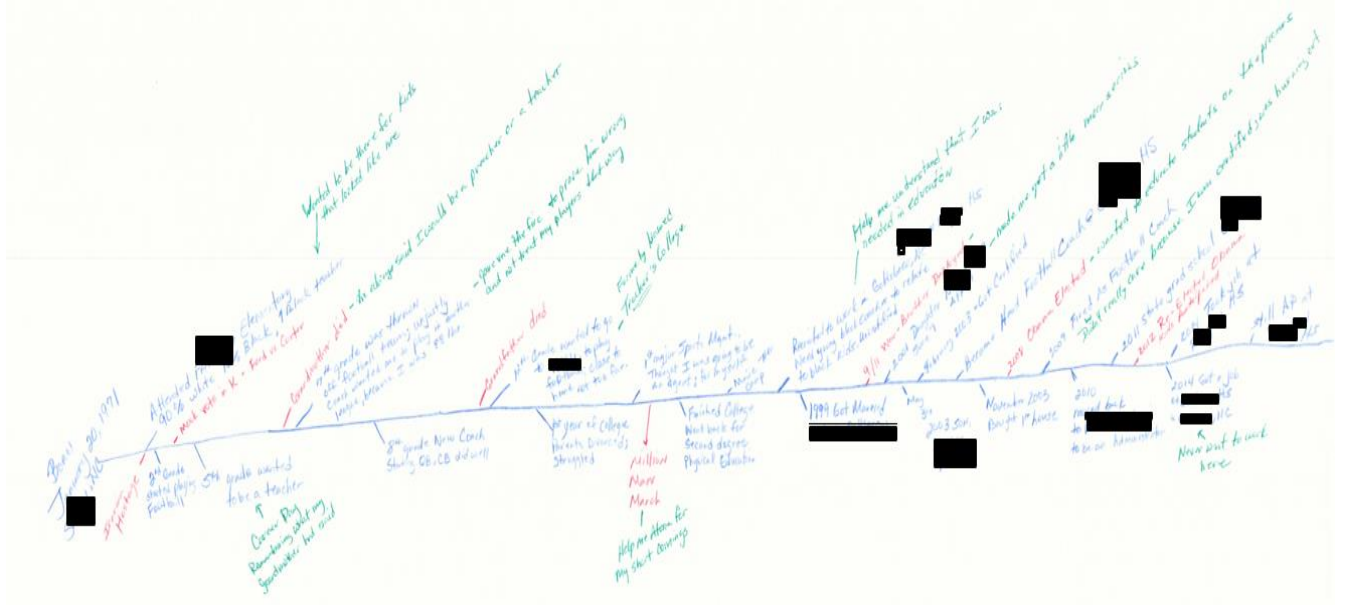
# APPENDIX H: TIMELINE MAP FOR MR. ATTICUS



1984 — Born Single-Parent Home

1990 — Started Kindergarten

2003 — Graduated HS with Honors, Full Scholarship To Play Football @ ███ U

2005 — Injured in Football, Transferred To ███

2007 — Graduated From ███, Substitute Teaching

2008 — Became Lateral Entry Teacher

2011 — Became Fully Licensed Teacher

2012 — Graduated w/ M.Ed While Teaching at ███ High

2016 — Started @ ███, Teaching at ███

2018 — Graduated with Admin Degree From ███, Became Dean @ ███ High

2020 — Became AP @ ███ Drive High

2021 — Moved Back to ███ @ ███ Middle

2023

APPENDIX I: TIMELINE MAP FOR MR. ALPHA

- Born 1962 - Fredericksburg VA
    Both parents - no HS Diploma / Poverty / Headstart program
    4 siblings

- 1976 - 1980 James Monroe HS
    - All Advanced / Honor Courses
    - guidance counselor / teacher - told me to go to college
    - College tours: SAT/ACT/etc          no option
    - Wake Forest: BLIND ADMISSIONS - No visit
        Love teaching !!

- 1980 - 1984: ▮▮▮▮▮ - Forest Univ
    Roommate story: Pre Law vs Education
                    Education won

- 1984 - 1994 - ▮▮▮▮ ms 8th grade teacher
    - MA ASU
    - EDs deg - ASU     — conflict in timing of certification: Back to settle to
                            prove my self
- 1984 - 1997: A.P. ▮▮▮▮▮▮ Elm

- 1997 - 2001: Principal ▮▮▮▮ Park

- 2001 - 2007: Principal ▮▮▮▮▮ Elm : Principal of the year

- 2007 - 2017: Principal ▮▮▮▮▮ : Principal of the year

- 2017 - Retired 32/34 years

- 2017 - 2022: ▮▮▮▮▮ Schools

APPENDIX J: TIMELINE MAP FOR MR. OMAHA

APPENDIX M:  TIMELINE MAP FOR MR. PHIL

# APPENDIX O: EXPLANATION FOR THE EMERGENT THEMES

| Explanations for Emergent Themes | Explanations based on Participant Responses |
|---|---|
| 1. Faith as a Pillar | Participants discuss how their faith supports them through difficult times; the strength gained by their respective faith |
| 2. The Role of Family as a Foundational Impetus to Educational Goals | Participants discuss the implicit and explicit expectations for education within the home, expectations of various parents, expectations of multi-generations, and the education levels of their family members |
| 3. The principal pool and other gatekeeping measures to determine access were problematic. | Participants focus on unclear processes and procedures of the principal pool and how the pool presented as more of a gatekeeping measure that was serving to keep Black men out while seeming to grant easy access to White counterparts |
| 4. Delayed advancement over time as a demotivating factor and a deterrent. | Participants focus on delayed or prolonged opportunity to enter the talent pool, delayed advancement as compared to White counterparts, delayed advancement because of the limited number of schools where Black people are hired, delayed advancement as a factor in deciding to become a career AP |
| 5. Racialized placement and a lack of school options as a demotivating factor. | Participants explain the career impact of being interviewed as a form of appeasement, feeling the need to align with someone White to advance their career, being relegated to low-performing and majority-minority schools, community input that creates racial parity, and institutional racism |
| 6. Bias in assigned duties that lead to a lack of preparedness when seeking a principalship. | Participants reflect on the career impact of being seen as an athlete as opposed to an intellectual, being viewed as a disciplinarian needed to police Black and Brown youth, and how being limited to discipline can limit professional experience and advancement |
| 7. Personal and imposed perceptions of the ability of Black men to perform the duties of an instructional leader. | Participants discuss their need to overcompensate to prove their intellect, having their intellect doubted, concerns that their physical appearance could be viewed as menacing to White people, the need to gain the respect of the White staff and be viewed as more than an athlete |