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This study examines the career transitions of Black women leaving the classroom for the assistant principalship. Overwhelmingly, Black women are underrepresented in school leadership roles. My goal is to understand what unique experiences and challenges African American women faced when transitioning from classroom leadership to school leadership in the role of the assistant principal and how they feel race and gender presented them unique challenges that they feel were different from those of their peers of different races or genders within predominantly White workplaces. In this semi-structured qualitative study, two rounds of interviews were conducted with four participants who identify as Black women assistant principals with two to four years of experience.

Critical Race Theory was used as the theoretical framework to analyze the four participants' responses. From the interviews and data analysis, four themes emerged to explain what the experiences are for Black women transitioning into school leadership and how their race and gender impacted their experiences. Participants expressed that teacher leadership roles were necessary building blocks in preparation for school leadership. However, the hiring process for an assistant principal's positions was prolonged and difficult. Once the participants were hired as assistant principals, they did not receive the support, professional development, or job responsibilities to help them be successful in their new roles. This study contributes to the conversation on career transitions to school leadership and Black women in school leadership. This study extends the existing literature specific to the role and responsibilities of the assistant principal by focusing on the early years of the assistant principalship, honoring the roles intersectionality and Black women's identity plays as one ascends the leadership ladder.

I DIDN'T KNOW IT WOULD BE THIS HARD: THE EXPERIENCES OF

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S TRANSITION TO

THE ASSISTANT PRINCIPALSHIP

by

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Approved by

_____
Dr. Carl Lashley
Committee Chair

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Raymond and Ellen. They are "glue" personified. Their ability to hold things and people together has taught me the unbreakable strength of family. My parents have always believed in all my efforts and encouraged me to dream big. Their support and confidence in me are priceless. In addition to their words of encouragement, I appreciate the model of excellence that they have set for other generations to follow.

This dissertation written by Christina L. Richardson 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

"Where do you see your career going in the next 5 or 10 years?" While this is a common interview question, and one I had posed to me as a Black woman educator, not all educators feel they can choose their career paths. Teachers of Color can have a personal vision for the next stage in their careers, but they do not always have the freedom to create their desired opportunities and outcomes. According to Jeffrey Young (2017), a senior editor at Ed Surge, "millennials will change jobs an average of four times in their first decade out of college, compared to about two job changes by Gen Xers their first ten years out of college" (p. 2). For younger employees, such as millennials and members of Gen Z, changing jobs over time is a common practice. Career moves are not always linear, and there is no mandatory timeline before a person decides when he or she is ready for a new experience and to move up the career ladder. Success for young professionals depends on certain resources whether physical, emotional, and intellectual though those resources are not always equitably distributed. Women, and more specifically Women of Color have had complex routes to their desired leadership positions. The road to leadership for Black women is sometimes laden with complications and disadvantages that go unrecognized by the White majority who teach, lead, and research within the education field.

In the context of this study, and within my working life, I am particularly interested in the voices of these Black women leaders. Here, I will incorporate portions of my personal reflection throughout the research as well. As a woman who has made several professional transitions herself, I seek to explore how black women who are teachers and now assistant principals believe their race and gender played into their ability to transition from a classroom role to the assistant principalship, and eventually to other educational leadership roles. I seek to understand

the relationship and the challenges that are present in ascending the job ladder and express them in the words of Black women who have attained the role of assistant principal.

Historical Context

In the segregated South, before *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* (1954), African Americans taught and led in schools that served African American students. The teachers in the segregated schools were also authentically woven into the local school community. In some of the smaller segregated schools, there were multi-grade levels and ages in the same classroom. As a result, students knew their teachers for multiple years and built meaningful relationships (Love, 2019). During segregation, the teaching profession was revered as a well-respected profession for African Americans, especially African American women. Dr. Bettina Love, the author of *We Want to Do More than Just Survive* (2019), references historical interviews from teachers in segregated schools as a means of gaining a historical perspective. Dr. Love states, "Black schools were places where order prevailed, where teachers commanded respect, and where parents supported teachers" (Love, 2019, p. 28). Home-school partnerships were essential to student success and were commonplace (Peters, 2019).

Specifically for African American women, teaching in segregated schools was one of the first professional careers they held outside of more domestic roles such as farming, childcare, and housekeeping (Peters, 2019). "During segregation, teaching was often the only career choice for Blacks to pursue that provided a stable and secure job (Coursen, 1975), and many Blacks, particularly women were therefore drawn to teaching as a career" (Madkins, 2011, p. 420). Parents and teachers could communicate more consistently because their lives were culturally and otherwise intertwined (Tillman, 2004). Parents and teachers interacted with one another in authentic spirits of community and civic engagement. From the church to the salon, to

the grocery store, parents and teachers mastered the "home/school communication" that present-day schools struggle to authentically maintain (Peters, 2019).

In segregated times, despite having teachers who knew and cared for them, the children in the Black communities received inferior materials, resources, and physical school structures (Love, 2019). At times the Black segregated schools were dangerously under-maintained, and schools lacked the necessary materials that their White peers could access with ease. African American families knew their children received inadequate access to materials and received an education significantly different from the White students in town. Segregation was not limited to schools but was evident in all aspects of everyday society (Love, 2019).

The Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) determined, "In the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (uscourts.gov). When the decision was made for schools to integrate, there was not a mandate for Teachers and School Leaders of Color to retain their positions within the newly integrated schools. When the Black students were bused to the schools in the White community, the Black schools closed and left Black teachers and principals in search of new positions. Very few Black teachers went to work at the White schools. Black school leaders were often required to take lower positions in the White schools, if they were offered a position at all. Dr. Linda Tillman, professor emeritus from UNC-Chapel Hill and a scholar of African American History, noted, "The firings [of Black teachers] threatened the livelihood of Black educators, the structure, values, and cultural norms of the Black community, and ultimately the social, emotional, and academic success of Black children" (p. 281). Unfortunately, in order for the students of Color to earn a higher quality standardized education,

they joined the White communities instead of having more funds invested in their local communities.

After segregation and the closing of many Black schools, Black professionals began to explore other career paths. The pre- *Brown* Era was a time when teaching was a fundamental part of the professional life for many Black people. Before the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board* (1954), nearly 82,000 "Black teachers taught approximately two million Black students in U.S. public schools" (Madkins, 2011, p. 418). "By 1970, 31,584 Black teachers in the 17 southern states had lost their positions as a result of desegregation. Two years later, the number had risen to 39,386 in these same states" (Tillman, 2004, p. 288). Though the *Brown* ruling took place nearly seventy years ago, the nation is still lacking teacher representation that closely resembles the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the student body.

Currently, Teachers of Color still experience vastly different working conditions from their White colleagues. There were residual impacts of integration for the teachers and school leaders in the segregated Black schools. In present day integrated schools or in predominantly White school settings, Teachers of Color report that their colleagues and leaders do not value their input nor recognize their academic abilities (Griffin, 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2017; Griffin & Tackie, 2016). If people of authority do not value an individual's contributions or see him/her as an asset, it may be harder to consider these teachers as future candidates for upcoming leadership roles. Since African American teachers make up such a small percentage of classroom teacher roles, many people may not question the absence of African Americans in formal and informal leadership roles. Research shows that approximately eighty percent of the classroom teachers are white women, while only eighteen percent of superintendents are women of any race (Watson, et.al, 2017).

Problem Statement

When I decided to pursue a doctoral degree in 2017, I had a variety of interests, and they all related in one way or another to my lived professional experiences. Specifically, I am a former classroom teacher who is an African American woman. When I began this degree, I was serving as an assistant principal, working in a suburban school district with mostly White school principals and serving a very White school community. In my doctoral program, I began contextualizing the things I had experienced professionally as a Black woman in predominately White workspaces through the lens of a researcher. I wondered about the evolving state of the field and how impediments toward a racially equitable workforce may affect other Teachers of Color. Taking from my own experience of having had different opportunities and support systems at different points in my own career, I wondered how experiences played out for other Black women educators.

As I continued to learn more and more through my coursework, my research interests became clearer. Initially, I was most interested in learning about new teacher support, especially for African American teachers. I wondered if that support varied from school to school or across school districts where the leadership was majority White. I also wondered how teacher to teacher relationships and school culture played a role in whether newer teachers remained in the field. In thinking about my own mentors and the roles they played in helping me to reach my professional goals, I had an interest in researching the role of mentors in leadership. I wondered how same-race and different-race mentor partnerships impacted one's experience with a mentor. Several issues that inform my research agenda are based on my own experiences, challenges I faced, and assumptions I had as a Black woman assistant principal and former teacher. My exploration is also informed by research I have done on this topic as a scholar. One motivating issue for my

research is based on personal experiences and anecdotal conversations, though the trends I observed have been observed by researchers as well. I have seen and heard reports of Teachers of Color more often being relegated to handle classroom discipline problems than their white peers, which takes a considerable amount of extra time and effort. Researchers have also found that Black teachers are more often seen as behavior experts as opposed to *curricular* experts (Griffin and Tackie, 2016), which implies that they are taken less seriously for the intellectual contributions that they bring to the classroom environment. As a result of Black teachers often being perceived as the best "fit" for Children of Color, they are often assigned lower-level courses and given limited opportunities to teach more advanced courses despite their years of experience or advanced degrees and certifications (Griffin and Tackie, 2016).

Research also has shown there has not been equitable access to advancement opportunities for all staff to teacher leadership positions, principalship positions, and superintendency positions. Bailes and Guthery (2020), authors of *Held Down and Held Back: Systematically Delayed Principal Promotion by Race and Gender,* conducted a data analysis of over 4,600 school leaders in Texas to determine if race and gender were factors in career advancement. When the opportunities presented to Black women educators were measured against the opportunities that were granted to their White peers, Bailes and Gurthery's (2020) ten-year longitudinal study showed that when candidates of both races had comparable certifications and qualifications, Black women were less likely to be promoted to principalships than their White male peers in particular, and if they were selected for principalships, their tenure as an assistant principal was longer than that of their White peers (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). The fact that African American women in education are promoted less often and take a longer time to be promoted were concepts that led me to explore the possibilities of leadership roles and the

paths that Black teachers had to advance their careers as my research topic. Once a Woman of Color is placed in a new leadership role, there are varying levels of support needed to ensure she is able to maintain that role.

Issues of Fair Compensation and Wages

Issues of compensation was not something that I only read about, but something I experienced firsthand. Early in my career, I chose to leave the classroom and pursue an advanced degree to prepare for a school leadership position. I was preparing to enter my fifth year as a classroom teacher and I had to choose what would be next for me professionally. I taught high school math. I was undecided as to how long I wanted to stay in the classroom or if I wanted to pursue some other aspect of the teaching profession. I taught in a medium sized district and I did not know of many specialized teaching roles at that time. I was "rewarded" with teaching my first honors class and that was encouraging. In my school, it was a common practice that only the most experienced teachers were able to teach the honors and advanced placement courses. I knew that I was still the youngest member of my math department, and I was unsure if I would have the opportunity to be the department chair any time in the near future. In my last year in the classroom, I served as my schools' technology representative for the district. I was tasked with learning more about classroom instructional technology tools and sharing those skills with my peers. While I was excited to serve in this capacity, there was no compensation associated with this new responsibility.

Unfortunately, my experience is not uncommon, and the impact of salary and promotions helped to shape the interview protocol of my study. Fiscal concerns are highly personal to many African American women educators that I have in mind while conducting my own research study. Because I am exploring how Black women experience their assistant principal positions in

the context of racial difference, and within a larger context of the predominantly White workplace, it is necessary to address other variables and life commitments that further complicate the issues that Black women face as they wish to transition to leadership positions. There is a myriad of commitments that women and Women of Color have such as financial needs and family and personal commitments. In general, as educators want to transition to school-level or district-level leadership positions, not all the roles are accompanied by a pay increase. An advanced degree is often required for many of the positions that provide a pay increase from the teachers' salary scale. While money is not the immediate motivator for many educators, the desire to be compensated for additional hours of work and additional levels of training or certification is not an unreasonable expectation. As of 2017 Pew Research data, 71% of single-parent households are led by women. When a woman advances, so does her family and her community. Advancing a woman's career will directly impact the lives of her children. Women are most likely to be caregivers for parents and older generations. So, advancing the career of a woman advances the quality of life for her elderly parents and neighbors.

Purpose Statement

I believe that promotion to a new position should be based on merit, experience, and explicit qualifications for the role. A person's racial and/or gender identity should not be a hindrance or an advantage for getting a new position. The purpose of my interpretive qualitative research study is to understand the experiences of Black women who are early career school assistant principals and how they transitioned from teacher to school leadership roles. I desire to hear and understand these experiences in their own words. I will use the term assistant principal, but I acknowledge that other states and regions refer to this role as a vice principal. When

researching text and searching scholarly articles, I searched using both terms- assistant principal and vice principal- to ensure that I was not inadvertently excluding and pertinent research.

Though my research focus is on formal career advancement outside of the classroom, I fully recognize that teacher leadership also happens *within* the classroom. "Teacher leaders carry the weight of responsibility for ensuring that reforms take root in the classroom and deepen the learning of all students" (Ackerman & Makenzie, 2006, p. 66). As a current school administrator, I see first-hand the impact that teacher leaders have on their students, their peers, and the overall school culture. Without leaders in the classroom to continuously provide direct instruction to students and critical and explicit feedback on current initiatives, school leaders would not be able to fully achieve all given goals and mandates.

Wage Gap and Leadership Opportunities

It is significant to note that there is a national wealth gap between White households and Black households (Darity et al., 2018). The wage gap falls along racial lines and directly impacts Black women in education. As educators begin to explore more leadership roles, many of the available teacher leader roles are paid on a teacher pay scale, meaning there may be more responsibility but not necessarily more compensation. For staff members who already have other obligations, whether at work or outside of work or with family, taking on more responsibility without being compensated for that work may be a deterrent. The acknowledgment of the wealth gap directly impacts the role of my research because school leadership roles are always paid at rates that are higher than teacher roles. As a result, a woman choosing to leave the classroom and move into a school leadership role knows that such a move comes with a pay increase and that a pay increase may be a motivating factor in pursuing the new role. Black employees are more likely to be underemployed while simultaneously earning less than their white colleagues with

the similar levels of education (Winters, 2020). The ability to move into a leadership role can have long lasting financial benefits for women. Knowing more about how African American women can advance their careers and how they are supported during the transition from the classroom to the school leadership role is essential. The African American workforce is not gaining wealth at the same rate as their White colleagues. "The median Black household holds just ten percent of the wealth of median White household, and while Blacks constitute thirteen percent of America's population, they hold less than three percent of its wealth" (Darity et al., 2018, p. 28). There are several positions that come with more responsibility but do not always come with additional compensation. If Black women are already experiencing a wage gap when compared to their White peers with similar or less formal education, the lack of fairness and equitable access to leadership becomes even more blatant.

Public education has historically been viewed as a low wage job when compared to other positions that require the same level of education (Podolsky et al., 2016). According to a college pay scale report (2020), a person with a bachelor's degree who begins a career in engineering is likely to start with a $70,000 initial salary. North Carolina ranked 34th, with an average salary of just over $51,000 thousand dollars per year. The National Education Association's 2018 report reveals that New York state has the highest average teacher salary of $84,00 thousand dollars per year. Despite the differences that may be evident based on the cost of living in each state, it still stands that the teacher salaries are not comparable to jobs that require the same level of training, education, and certification, regardless of where those teaching positions are geographically located (Podolsky et al., 2016). "Beginning teachers nationally earn 20% less than individuals with college degrees in other fields—a wage gap that widens to 30% by mid-career" (Podolsky et al., 2016, p. 9). There are financial implications for leaving the classroom and moving to

school leadership positions. However, as the level of responsibly increases, so does the pay. Teachers of Color, and specifically African American women should have the opportunity to choose when and how they enter professional transitions, and their racial and gendered identities should not negatively impact their professional opportunities for advancement.

Research Questions

My research explored the connections between race and gender and the transition from a classroom leadership role to an assistant/ vice principal role. To better understand how race has affected leadership opportunities for African American teachers, my research questions for this study are:

1. What are the experiences of Black women educators who transition to school-level leadership?
2. How do Black women educators experience issues of identity (e.g., race and gender) in their leadership roles?

Research Methods

"Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). I interviewed four new assistant principals to inform my qualitative research study. Traditionally, new staff members are considered people with less than five years of experience in their current role. For the sake of my study and criteria for my participants, define new assistant principals as those with two to four years of experience.

My philosophical approach to this research is interpretivist, which will allow me to focus on describing and understanding the experiences my research participants share by asking open-ended research questions. This approach will allow me to make sense of the participants'

experiences and perceptions of their work environments. I will conduct multiple interviews with each candidate to form a stronger relationship with them and to allow for a time of reflection between each interview round. Meeting with the same person for several interviews will allow for a fuller story of their experience.

Research Participants

My interview participants are first time school leaders with two to four years of experience in their current role. I interviewed a total of four assistant principals, two at the elementary level and two at the secondary level. One of the secondary APs has also had experience serving as an AP in the elementary setting. Leaders from all grade levels were represented in the study. I intentionally sought out participants from different grade levels to see how their experiences are alike and different from one another despite the differences in the age of the students they serve. Choosing to interview assistant principals at all grade level will open the largest possible pool of participants instead of focusing only on either elementary, middle or high school APs.

Researcher Positionality

I am an African-American woman serving in a school setting. When I began my graduate work, I was serving as an assistant principal. During my graduate program, I accepted a different leadership position in a North Carolina laboratory school. The change from one leadership position and geographic area to another has reminded me of the many phases and stages of professional transition. I have worked in three North Carolina districts in my career. My personal experiences and expectations shape how I analyze and interpret the data that I will receive from my research participants. While reading the literature on my topic, I had to make sure that I did not gravitate to the data that confirms my personal experiences but listened for the broader story.

While researching and analyzing the data, I made a point to not only look for information that confirms what I already thought and what I have personally experienced.

Personal Connection to the Research: My *Own* Career Trajectory

As a young educator, I continued to think of other traditional aspects of leadership in the field of education. I was undecided if I wanted to stay in the classroom or move toward a school leadership role. I attended an information session for the national board certification process that my school district offered; I thought that national board certification had to be the next move. Since I knew I wanted to continue to grow professionally and to learn more about education as a whole, I thought National Boards would do the trick. I thought National Board Certification would satisfy the "itch" that I had to do something new in my career. After some consideration, I knew I wanted to move into a more traditional school leadership role as an assistant principal. When I tried to decide about attending graduate school, I knew that pursuing another degree would be a challenge for me to fully fund on my teacher salary. I began my teaching career when there was a pay freeze on raising teacher's salaries. For the entire five years that I served as a classroom teacher, I earned the exact same salary-- no raises for five consecutive years. As a result, when I thought about the next steps for my career, I had to consider what I could afford to do, in addition to what I desired to pursue. The increased cost of living, the increased educational debt, and the return on my investment in a graduate program were high priorities in deciding my next career move.

I applied for the Principal Fellows scholarship and was fortunate enough to get that scholarship award. The North Carolina Principal Fellows program is a state funded scholarship and fellowship program. Though this program, I was a part of a Principal Fellows cohort. Outside of the coursework in my school administration graduate program, I received monthly

professional development from state leaders and experts in the educational field. I also had the opportunity to network with other aspiring principals from across the state. By earning the Principal Fellows award, I was able to again become a full-time student and focus on completed my Masters in School Administration degree. Several current principals, state leaders from DPI, and government officials came and spoke with our Principal Fellows cohort. Unlike part-time master's programs, as a Fellow I was afforded the opportunity to complete a full-time yearlong principal internship. I know without an opportunity to have a full year's internship and a mentor who provided me with a large variety of administrative experiences, I would have had a harder time securing a position as an assistant principal and making a successful transition from the classroom to school leadership.

As my graduate career progressed during the research process, I am again experiencing a professional transition to a new role, district, and varied levels of responsibility. All of my teaching experience was in secondary math, and I came to a school that was heavily focused on early reading and foundational literacy skills. I have very little context on teaching and evaluating teachers' teaching literacy. I sought out many professional learning opportunities to help me feel more confident and competent and prepared to serve as a leader in this role for the evaluation process it was challenging for me to give critical feedback because I felt that the teachers were the experts, and I was the novice despite my academic preparation.

The concept of career transition was already a research interest; now I am also living this transition while simultaneously researching the experiences of African American women's professional transitions. I served for six years at my most recent assistant principal position. When I began searching for additional career opportunities, the elementary principalship would have been the next traditional career move. At the time, I did not desire to immediately get a

principalship. I struggled to find positions that fit my expertise, my passions, and my desired pay. I knew I did not want to be too far removed from working with students daily and I knew that I did not want to be limited to the managerial expectations of an assistant principal. After several months of searching for positions, networking with colleagues and interviewing for new positions, I accepted a position at a North Carolina laboratory school; and it is exactly what I desired, but could not fully articulate until I found the positions.

> The establishment of the UNC System laboratory schools provides the opportunity to redefine and strengthen university partnerships with public schools, improve student outcomes, and provide high quality teacher and principal training. (University of North Carolina, 2021, p. 1)

The transition from a traditional school to a laboratory school has been unique. Each day I am learning new things and unlearning other things that I long accepted as "the way things were and the way they had to be." I more keenly aware of the transition process as a result of my current professional experiences and my research.

Passing the Baton: The Critical Role of the AP

One image that came to mind when thinking about transitions, whether professional or personal, is the passing of the baton during a relay race. The idea that one person must receive a baton *while in motion* and be able to maintain their speed, focus, direction, and connection to the next person is a unique and extremely challenging aspect of professional transitions. Most relay races are lost during the transitional times of handing off the baton from one person to another. If one runner drops the baton due to incorrectly estimating the pace, or not securing holding on to it, then the entire team feels the impacts of that drop. The same is true for the APs' transitions and their role in the school. There are some anticipated challenges when leaving one position for

another, but for school leaders who struggle to successfully make the transition, their transition impacts the students and the school community as a whole. For many, the assistant principalship is seen as a middle management role, and not quite as pivotal as the principalship. However, the assistant principal has impact and influence over almost every facet of the school building and the lives that come through the doors each day. My research focused on the pathways of African American women into these pivotal positions, including any stress incurred and the determination and skill necessary to make their path successful.

When a woman is named to a new school leadership role, she is often already working in another position. From my perspective, she must prepare to enter her new role seamlessly while concluding things in her current role in a way that will prepare her successor to continue the race in her previous role. To make things more challenging, these transitions can happen at any time during the school year. In a matter of weeks, a teacher can go from leading in her classroom to leading a school. The new school leader can feel uniformed and unprepared for the days that lie ahead in her new AP role.

Significance

As I conducted my literature review, I found that more information was readily available about new teacher programs of support and some initial teacher retention ideas (Gist et al., 2019; Eddy, 2018; Gordon, 1994). As I continued to research, I found professional teacher journals within research studies gave ideas on the roles that teacher leaders could play within their buildings and how teacher leaders impact their schools. Of the sources I found, however, few studies interrogate race and took an intersectional approach to examine how race and gender of the staff intersect with the teacher leader and school leader opportunities. Davis and Maldonado (2015) found the same lack of research during their work in 2015; "while some scholars have

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studied African American female leaders from a sociological perspective, few students have

researched how race and gender intersects to inform their leadership development" (p. 48). This

knowledge helped to shape my research interest. My hope is that knowledge and themes gleaned

in this study can support African American women in educational leadership and shed light on

the challenges so that these women can be better supported. I also want to shed light on the

special skills, gifts and perspectives African American women bring to the field. Few studies

explore leadership development of African American women. "Much of the literature has been

limited to the traditionally defined views of leadership: that is, most of the research concentrated

on leadership and managerial aspects" (Davis and Maldonado, 2015, p. 48).

Significance for School and District Leaders

My research can address specific ways in which new school leaders of Color are

experiencing the work force and the transitions from the classroom to the office. The need for

varied career options is not unique to Black women, but it is exacerbated for Black women.

Teachers of all races and genders are presented with minimal career paths. The two most

traditional options are to stay in the classroom as a teacher for the duration of their career or

become an administrator. My research can help school and district leaders understand how their

support and structures are either helping or hurting African American teachers to transition to

their desired leadership roles. My interview protocol allowed my research participants to share

specific suggestions of implementation for principals and superintendents to better address the

specific needs of African American women leaders of Color.

Significance for Students and Families

It is significant for me to point to the ways in which African American women provide

critical mirrors for a student populace, especially when students of color may not see themselves

represented amongst their teachers. Not all people of one ethnicity automatically have shared

cultural experiences. However, there are some ways that members of shared cultural groups

could likely relate to one another. According to John B. King, Jr. the president and CEO of The

Education Trust, "When students of Color see themselves reflected in their instructors' identities

and in the curriculum, studies show that the positive impact on student achievement is far

reaching, not only for students of Color but for all students" (Dixon & Griffin, 2019, p. 1). All

students benefit from having teachers of varying ethnicities. "Teachers of Color boost the

academic performance of students of Color, including improved reading and math test scores,

improved graduation rates, and increases in aspirations to attend college" (Carver-Thomas, 2018,

p. 6). Students cannot experience the richness of diverse teachers without school and district

leaders creating opportunities for these staff members. "Greater diversity of teachers may

mitigate feelings of isolation, frustration, and fatigue that can contribute to individual teachers of

color leaving the profession when they feel they are alone" (McKenna, 2018, p. 2). Researchers

have shown the benefits of having teachers of color in the classrooms. These same benefits

extend to have leaders of Color in the school. With leaders of Color in the school, all students

can benefit from the leaders, skills, expertise, and culture. School leaders share the same feelings

of isolation, frustration, and fatigue as teachers, if not more, because of a greater level of scrutiny

from a larger population of people. Preparing and supporting Black women leaders through the

professional transitions can benefit countless schools and students.

Significance in the Post-COVID-19 Era

My research is focused on career advancement and supports that are necessary to help

Women of Color advance; instead of only the traditional ideas of mentorship and advanced

degrees, one must also consider the role that childcare and child rearing plays in being offered

and being able to accept career advancement opportunities for women of color. I conducted this study amidst the COVID pandemic, which gives perspective to how teachers grappled with their experiences and duties during such an unfamiliar and devastating time. New research is still developing around the extent and the long-term impact that the COVID-19 pandemic will have on women, particularly women of color and their career trajectories in the immediate as well as in the long term. For many Women of Color, they were deemed as essential workers and were required to continue to report to work while others in more formal professional, and often computer based, roles were able to transition to working from home (Winters, 2020). During the times of remote work and distance learning for students, many mothers bore the burden of caring for themselves, their businesses, their homes, and their children who were now in their homes all day.

Some mothers found support from one another, from a babysitter or caregiver. Some women had to choose to leave their professional jobs in order to maintain and provide for the daily needs of their children while they were learning from home. Budding research suggests that more women than men are leaving their careers in order to support their school-aged children through distanced learning (Boston College, 2021). Also, there is not yet enough research to fully understand the impacts of these roles and how women were displaced from their positions, it is already evident that women of all professional ranks continue to bear the majority of child rearing responsibilities whether in two parent households or single parent households. There is a direct connection between women's career trajectories and the effects of the interruptions, including childbearing, child rearing, and the current public health crisis. Many of the mothers who left the workforce in 2020 were not guaranteed to walk back into a lateral job. If they were offered positions at their current companies, they may have to take a lower

role just to get their feet back in the door and "work their way up" all over again. My research is focused on career advancement and supports that are necessary to help women advance; instead of only the traditional ideas of mentorship and advanced degrees, one must also consider the role that childcare and child rearing play in being offered and being able to accept career advancement opportunities for women of color.

There is something to be said about working years and years to reach a so-called *dream* position and then not being able to maintain that position because of a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic that has impacted the entire world. During the pandemic women, many of whom were rmothers, did not lose their jobs because of negligence, or poor performance; it was just the opposite. They chose to leave their jobs to care for their families during a time of great uncertainty and need. Time will tell if these women who had to leave their professions due to the pandemic will return to the workforce and if they will regain a position with the same level of seniority and pay as their position prior to the pandemic. According to Boston College's Center for Work and Family, "four times more women than men dropped out of the workforce in September 2020" (Boston College, 2020, p. 1).

While COVID-19 is the timeliest and most widespread evidence of women's role in the home and the workforce, these needs are not isolated to the present pandemic. The demand on women to serve in the home and the workforce is present. For families and two parent households, women often bear the largest burden of caring for the children on a daily basis. Choosing to provide care for one's child (or aging parents) can often directly impact the ability to move forward in some professional settings. Whether there are time constraints where a mother cannot work past a certain time of evening due to childcare needs or some other factor

for why she must care for her children, all these incidences can negatively impact her opportunity for upward professional movement and sustained professional progress.

Chapter Overview

My first chapter outlined the research text further and provide my historical context and my theoretical framework. The second chapter serves as a review of the current literature specific to Teachers of Color and how they navigate education. Some of the research explored how they chose to become teachers. Due to the depth of research on Teachers of Color, I use that data as a springboard for exploration. I later focus more specifically on the experiences of African American teachers as they transition into school leadership.

Teacher recruitment, retention, and teacher career pathways are explored as a structure to build a foundation of understanding for teachers of Color are informed of leadership opportunities. "A familiarity with previous research and theory in the area of the study is necessary for situating the study in the knowledge base in the field" (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 95). The literature review also provides a rationale for why one's research needs to be conducted because the author can show a gap in the current literature. Accordingly, chapter three focuses on the methodology of my research. This chapter outlines the research methods, research participants, and research considerations. The third chapter also includes how I conducted my research in compliance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Chapter IV contains the collection of the research findings. Chapter IV is organized into four themes that emerged from the participant's responses to the interview protocol and research questions. The themes address their teaching experiences, their early AP transition, and the impacts of their race and gender on their leadership. Chapter V, the final chapter, concludes the

research study by providing an analysis of the findings as well as recommendations for future

researchers and current practitioners.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the current research related to the career trajectories of African American women as they transition to the role of an assistant or vice principal. The scope of this literature review is limited to the experiences of African American teachers; the terms African American and Black will be used interchangeably. My research is limited to members of the African diaspora as opposed to all Teachers of Color. However, the term Black is more inclusive of a larger cultural diversity, such as people of African descent with roots in the Caribbean and South American countries.

In Chapter I, I provided a historical context of how segregation impacted the number of Black teachers in the field and the changes the country experienced since the legendary *Brown v. Board of Education* case in 1954. In Chapter II, I begin by explaining why it matters that Teachers of Color are necessary members of the teaching workforce. Here, I described the African American teacher's journey as documented in prior literature--from grade school to retirement, addressing impediments, challenges and success that may occur along the way. I begin by examining causes for high school Students of Color not entering teacher preparation programs and choosing education as a career choice. Beginning in grade school, Black women could experience obstacles that can make working in a school seem unappealing. After a Black woman decides to become a teacher, she must overcome challenges within her undergraduate coursework, funding the degree, and feeling valued and respected as a teacher. The absence of many peers and role models that share her race and gender exacerbates these challenges, as she has fewer people with whom to share these experiences and from whom to seek advice. Grade level schooling, teacher preparation, and classroom experiences serve as foundational knowledge to understanding what Black women experience before transitioning from the classroom to

leadership. Next, I examined opportunities for advancement, or lack thereof, and how advancement opportunities impact teacher retention as well as how race impacts those opportunities. I discovered the challenges of Women of Color transitioning to leadership roles are not unique to education; rather, what holds true in education is also true for corporate America and the governmental sector. I end with examples of some of the changes that occur during the transition from the classroom to the assistant principalship.

Challenges for African American Women Leaders

Women of Color face various unique challenges because of their intersecting identities. Success may be difficult to achieve due to intermingled systems of oppression and exclusion that negatively impact Black women. For instance, the challenges facing Black women who could potentially ascend the professional ladder may begin early in life, adolescence, or in young adulthood. One of the formal most essential educational experiences, despite how common it may be, is a high school diploma. A diploma is one of the foundational stones to building almost any profession. The dropout rates, and "push out rates" of school suspensions and expulsions impact the long-term career opportunities for Women of Color (Morris, 2016). "In 1970, only 33% of Black women had graduated from high school. Today the proportion of Black women with a high school diploma or higher is 90.5%" (Morris, 2016, p. 46). Over the last decades, Black women have progressed in their high school matriculation. That progress is not mirrored in full-time, first-time Black women's college graduation rates (Morris, 2016). A potential factor for this disparity is the lack of formal networking or sponsorship opportunities from which African American women could benefit.

Double Outsiders

The intersection of multiple minoritized identities impacts the level and frequency of networking opportunities a person experiences. Arguably, black men can benefit from their gender even when they are discriminated against for their race. White women can benefit from their position in the majority culture, even when they experience discrimination due to their gender (Sleeter, 2017). When Black women enter education roles, scholars have documented that unique challenges persist due to their multiple minoritized identities.

According to McGirt (2017), Black women are considered double outsiders when compared to their White male colleagues. Jean-Marie, Williams, and Sherman (2009), refer to this same concept as "double jeopardy" (p. 563). Regardless of the term chosen, double outsider or double jeopardy, researchers are highlighting that multiple identities of oppression shape how Black women experience life and advancement in their careers. Jean-Marie et al., conducted an interview study with Black female leaders at predominately white institutions (PWIs) and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) to learn what their experiences were as Black women in predominantly White spaces. "As more women earn professional degrees for entry into traditionally male professions, women experience isolation, exclusion from informal networks, and systematic discrimination" (Jean-Marie et al., 2009, p. 563). Having the necessary credentials for a position does not mean that Black women will be treated fairly or have a positive experience once they enter their desired role.

Desired Leadership Traits

Davis and Maldonado state "barriers to leadership opportunities are a global phenomenon where women [of all races], when compared to men, are disproportionally concentrated in lower-level and lower- authoritative positions" (Davis and Madonado, 2015,

p. 49). A challenge for women in leadership, specifically women of color, could be attributed to traits deemed desirable for leaders. In corporate or male-dominated fields traits such as competitiveness, assertiveness, and authority are seen as qualities of a successful leader (Jean-Marie, et al., 2009). Women may intentionally choose to lead differently from men, but that does not make their leadership styles inferior to men. However, when African American women in particular *choose* to lead from a collaborative and interpersonal leadership framework, those same strategies are not recognized and valued to the same degree as the traditionally male leadership traits. In other scenarios, women may feel pressured to assume more traits that are traditional male to be seen as successful by their peers. (Davis and Maldonado, 2015)

Corporate Leadership

Gender disparities persist within higher levels of leadership across a variety of arenas. Classroom personnel are overwhelmingly female, and the superintendency is overwhelmingly male (Dawney, 2019). The same is true for university executive-level leadership and various other aspects of leadership in the corporate, professional, and political arenas. C-Suite level leadership within the corporate world is very slowly starting to diversify staff. C-Suite executives include chief executive officers (CEO), chief operations officers, (COO), chief financial officers, (CFO), and chief information officers (CIO). When Ursula Burns left her position as the CEO of Xerox in 2016, there were no longer any Fortune 500 companies run by African American women (McGirt, 2017). "Even with black women graduating from college in record numbers, not enough are coming out of the education system to get them all the way through to the C-Suite" (McGirt, 2017, p. 2). The author suggests mentoring as a strategy to allow more African American women to gain access to corporate positions, or positions of leadership. "Unlike the 'glass ceiling' White women have to break through, Black women have to shatter the

'concrete ceiling' to move up the echelon of corporate America" (Jean- Marie, et.al., 2009, p. 567).

Political Leadership

Despite pervasive racism that effectively prevents People of Color from ascending certain career ladders, Women of Color have been appointed to two of the US' highest offices, suggesting change is not only possible, but change is occurring. On November 7, 2020, Madame Kamala Harris was selected as the forty-ninth vice president-elect of the United States of America. Madame Harris is the first African American, Indian American, daughter of an immigrant, and woman to be selected to serve as the second highest office in the United States. Madame Harris' presence in this role encourages other women and girls of color to continue to pursue their goals of leadership. Many women of all races celebrated as they were informed that Madame Harris would soon be in the White House and representing the constituents of the United States. As a result of her new role, Madame Harris resigned from her Senate seat, leaving no current African American women in the Senate. However, there are currently a record-setting twenty-six women of color serving in the House of Representatives.

In February of 2022, President Joe Biden had the opportunity to recommend a new justice for the supreme court. He and his committee nominated Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, an African American judge with incredible law credentials and experience. After several days of interviews with the senators and other congressional leaders, Dr. Brown Jackson was able to move forward in the selection process for the supreme court. On April 7, 2022, Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson became the first African American woman to sit on the highest court in the land- the United State Supreme Court (https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/). She is yet another example of African American women in political leadership that is rising through the ranks to accept the

challenges and responsibilities that come with leading in very public and high-pressured roles. Both Vice President Kamala Harris and Justice Brown Jackson are sitting in positions where Black women never have sat in the entire history of the United States of America. They serve as examples that women and Black women are capable of all levels of leadership- including the school assistant principalship.

Diversity in the Teaching Corps

The desire to increase the presence of Black women in leadership roles is to benefit students' growth and achievement. Similarly, the corporate and political leadership, women in these roles are focused on their stakeholders and how to positively impact the lives of those they serve. For teachers in the classroom, there is data to support the positive impact of Teachers of Color on their Students of Color. Lindsay and Hart conducted a quantitative study to find a correlation between student test scores and their teachers' race. They found that students of Color benefit from having a Teacher of Color in elementary school (2017). Lindsay and Hart (2017) also found that students of Color who have an African American teacher in grades 3-5 are less likely to drop out of school. "The benefit of having a Black teacher for just one year in elementary school can persist over several years; especially for Black students from low-income families" (Carver-Thomas, 2018, p. 4). More specifically, for black boys, the risk of dropping out of high school decreases by almost 40% when those students have a Black teacher (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Black teachers and Black administrators are vital members of their respective schools and vital contributors to student success for all students.

Teachers of Color bring benefits to classrooms beyond content knowledge and pedagogy. As role models, parental figures, and advocates, they can build relationships with students of Color that help those students feel connected to their schools (King, 1993). Furthermore, they are

more likely to teach in high-need schools that predominantly serve students of Color and low-income students. Black teachers especially are more likely to stay in schools serving Black students, meaning that their sustained and consistent presence makes a difference in the lies of students (Griffin and Tackie, 2016). As Teachers of Color are in their classrooms and making a positive impact in their respective spaces, there may be opportunities to increase their level of impact by transitioning to a school leadership role. Moving forward, I will examine the lack of diversity in educational staff, the barriers that Teachers of Color experience as they transition into the role, and the challenges of retaining Staff of Color in schools. These barriers or Teachers of Color entering and remaining in the profession directly impact the number of potential teachers of Color are transitioning to school leadership roles. Black women teachers are invaluable assets for the school and for students' learning trajectories. Their level of care, concern, and commitment make them especially suited to support learning. If women choose to leave the classroom for school leadership, they must endure unexpected challenges and preserve to achieve their goals.

Value of Teachers of Color in the Profession: Building Connections, Fostering Growth

One of the most significant components of teaching is developing meaningful relationships of mutual trust between students and teachers based on respect of the students' culture. The term culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) was introduced in the 1990s but has become a buzzword in recent educational circles. Three key components of culturally relevant pedagogy are student learning, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Will & Najarro, 2022). CRP is not a new concept, especially in the experiences of Teachers of Color. Culturally relevant pedagogy can have far-reaching positive effects. In the words of Monique Morris (2016), author of Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls, "If the curriculum being taught

does not even consider the unique needs and experiences of Black girls to climb out of poverty, as is often the case, do they *really* have equal access to education" (Morris, 2016, p. 39). Teachers of Color often shared many aspects of a shared cultural heritage with their students, specifically in the segregated South. Through shared experiences and shared values, school personnel were able to make connections with students inside and outside of the classroom, and the results were profound. "These [Black] teachers saw potential in their Black students, considered them to be intelligent, and were committed to their success. Teachers and principals collaborated to help students build on their strengths and improve their weaknesses (Tillman, 2004, p. 282)." While Tillman's work focused on Black teachers and school leaders in the segregated South, the same holds true to date. Harrison-Berg (2019), a leadership coach and school improvement consultant, shared that Teachers of Color are more likely to "be seen as positive role models, have high expectations, implement culturally responsive teaching, develop trusting relationships with students, and advocate for equity and against racism" (p. 87).

My research is focused on African American professional educators' paths to leadership and what supports make the transitions more successful. Before I can fully examine the leadership opportunities for Black women educators, or the lack thereof, I must first examine the literature around teachers of color entering the profession. If there are few to no African American teachers in the classroom, it would stand to reason that there would be fewer African Americans to transition into leadership roles. The teacher pipeline does not start with college recruitment fairs; it begins when a child walks into school on the first day as a student.

The ability to create and maintain meaningful relationships with students is a driving force for teachers who want to make a difference in students' lives (Kay, 2019). Some teachers may choose to stay in the classroom because of the direct contact they can maintain with students

daily, helping them to succeed. School leaders and district leaders also interact with students on a regular basis, but those interactions are drastically different from the student to teacher relationship. Everyone has had some schooling experiences. Each comment from an adult, each discipline referral, each kind smile, each engaging activity shape a child's perception of school. Each day children subliminally and overtly make judgments about their educational experiences; each interaction, from their perspective, can be positive or a negative. Whether a person knows that he/she wants to pursue teaching as a career or not, their first experiences with the profession will be as a student, and not as a pre-service teacher candidate or administrative intern. This is not true for many other professions. For example, if a student wants to pursue a career in the hospitality industry, that child may go on approximately two vacations per year. So, they are only interacting with people in their potential career field twice a year. There are few careers, other than education, where children have daily exposure to someone in that career field. It is imperative to discuss the inequities in public school settings, as they directly impact the teacher pipeline, specifically for Black teachers.

A recent social media post poses the question, "When was the first time you had a Teacher of Color?" For far too many students across the United States, the answer can easily be secondary level, university level, or no teachers of Color at all. However, scholars argue that "Teachers of Color bring benefits to classrooms beyond content knowledge and pedagogy. As role models, parental figures, and advocates, they can build relationships with students of Color that help those students feel connected to their schools" (Griffin & Tackie, 2016, p. 1). Many teachers of Color report that they choose to stay in schools that predominantly serve Students of Color (Kay, 2019; National Education Statistics, 2018; Griffin and Tackie, 2016). In 2018, there were 55% of Teachers of Color serving in schools that served 90% or more of Students of Color.

On the converse, in schools were only 10% of the student body were Students of Color, the Teachers of Color were only 2% (National Education Statistics, 2018). School districts across the country have a goal of decreasing the disciplinary consequences for students of Color as well as closing the opportunity gap for the academic performance of Students of Color as compared with their White peers. Teachers of Color can help to decrease discipline referrals for children of Color as well as provide increased academic success for students of Color (Carver Thomas, 2018, Lindsay, 2017).

Lack of Diversity in Education Staff

The road to professional success to the highest positions on the career ladder must include success in entry level and mid-level jobs first. However, a hiring disparity is prevalent at entry level positions. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 81% of traditional public school teachers are White and 19% are Teachers of Color (NCES, 2016). Only approximately 2% of the nation's public school teachers are African American males. While the teaching force remains largely made up of white females, the student population continues to become more and more diverse (Boser, 2011). The student population is currently 42% students of Color (Lindsay, Bloom, and Tinsley, 2017), and teachers of Color make up less than 20% of the teaching force (Lindsay, Bloom, and Tinsley, 2017).

Further, the teaching imperative for Black teachers is most often rooted in their early childhood and young adult personal experiences in education. "Schools are, not surprisingly, one of the largest influences on the life trajectory of Black girls" (Morris, 2016, p. 37). Oftentimes, teachers had a positive teacher in their lives, and they wanted to emulate that level of influence and impact. For others, their motivation to become a teacher was because of their lack of positive mentors and role models as a child and the desire to serve as a role model for the next generation.

For students, elementary and secondary schooling experiences shape whether or not a person sees teaching as a viable profession.

Negative Schooling Experiences

School resources are often supplemented based on local taxes. School with higher income brackets and higher property taxes often have access to more auxiliary resources that lower income communities. If current students have repeated negative experiences at school that makes careers in the educational field less desirable. "Many young people of color see school as a thing that one escapes. Black and Brown children of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and post-NCLB era have found themselves over tested and over disciplined" (Kay, 2019, p. 88). Low graduation rates directly impacted the number of students who were eligible to enroll in a university program to pursue a teaching license. At the time of Gordon's research (1994), only two percent of the Native Americans in her target community enrolled in college.

> About 58% of Black students and 50 % of Latino students who made the decision to leave school were being educated in one of our nation's high poverty, low performing schools. This suggests that a higher percentage of Black girls who dropped out of school-and were likely struggling in school- were also likely to have been attending a low-performing school. (Morris, 2016, p. 45)

If students experience poor school conditions, lack or representation, underqualified teachers, and a high level of discipline infractions in their school, it becomes clear why the idea of becoming a teacher is less appealing. Gordon's interviewees cited how poorly their peers treated their teachers as a reason for not pursuing teaching. One immigrant interviewee believed, "Teaching is not worth the trouble. There is too much freedom in America; students use freedom to intimidate the teacher" (Gordon, 1994, p. 348).

Cultural and Community Concerns: Representation and Racial Disparity

Lack of encouragement from parents and discouragement from school counselors were also hindrances to pursuing the teaching profession (Gordon, 1994). "[Latino] parents are dealing with survival, not long-range goals" (Gordon, 1994, p. 349). Almost half of the interviewees agreed that teaching was not as widely respected as other professions and did not have the same level of status as other professions in their communities. Currently, the vast majority of elementary school teachers are white females (Aguilar, 2020). As a result, White female students can more easily find role models to encourage them to become teachers.

Some states, such as Maryland, Tennessee, and New Jersey, have considered different models for supporting the cost of a degree (Education Trust, 2020). Examining teacher recruitment without finding ways to support access to higher education will be a short-lived intervention for addressing the teacher diversity shortage. The Education Trust highlights the fact that even partial tuition support may be insufficient, but it is a step in the right direction.

Lack of Diversity in the Hiring Pipeline and Lack of Representation in the Workplace

After identifying many benefits of having teachers of Color in the classrooms, one must wonder what hindrances are present for potential Black teachers entering the profession and staying long term. For many organizations, recruitment efforts and strategies are paramount at the beginning of the hiring pipeline. Organizations may post job vacancies on websites or in print media to gather a pool of interested and qualified applicants. However, in "Why Students of Color are Not Entering Teaching" Gordon (1994) explores several contributing factors to the limited diversity in hiring pipelines and retention. During a two-year period, Gordon (1994) interviewed over one hundred early career Teachers of Color from across several states in the northwest portion of the country. Though Gordon's findings are somewhat dated, they hold true

for teachers in the twenty-first century as well. Through de-facto segregation and school vouchers, inner city schools have been negatively impacted by higher-than-average teacher turnover and less experienced teachers (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Polosky et al., 2016). Gordon interviewed over one hundred minority teachers to learn about their experiences and preparation for the teaching field. She found three overarching themes to the interviewees' responses. Education experiences, community concerns, and socioeconomic obstacles were all contributing factors to why Students of Color were not entering the profession.

If students of Color choose to enter the teaching profession, they are often one of few teachers of Color in their departments or grade levels. For example, in California, only 29% of teachers are teachers of Color while 72% of California's student body are students of Color (Bosher, 2011, p. 8). Illinois has a similar composition in its schools; staff of Color makes up only 11% of the teaching force while students of Color make up 46% (Bosher, 2011, p. 8).

Teachers of Color in Pre-Service Programs

All students deserve highly qualified, well-trained teachers who can prepare them for life after their schooling experiences. Some argue that the hyper-focus on diversifying staff will negatively impact teacher quality; that is never the intent. Race should not be the *only* deciding factor for hiring. Praxis and other standardized measures are not the best metrics for measuring teacher candidate preparation and potential effectiveness in the classroom. One of the most common routes to teaching would be to graduate high school and immediately enter a four-year university as an undergraduate and enroll in a teacher education program. These programs would include method courses, placements in a local school as a student intern, and then leading a classroom as a student teacher for a certain number of weeks during their final semester. For

most students, completion of this process would culminate in taking some form of licensure

exam and ultimately graduating with a degree and a license to teach.

Many teachers in today's classrooms followed the traditional route to teaching. The route

that a teacher takes to choose education as a profession, however, may be indicative of and

affected by racial disparity. The racial disparity can affect the quality of education students

receive in terms of exposure to diversity and diverse teaching methods. "Traditional programs

are 69.6% White, while alternative certification programs are only 46.8% White (TNTP, 2020, p.

5). Post high school graduation, potential teacher candidates enter a university certification

process to secure their bachelor's degree and state teacher licensure. Across the state of North

Carolina, teacher preparation programs and schools of education have had decreased student

enrollments for several years (Polosky, et al., 2016). "Between 2010 and 2020, spring enrollment

in undergraduate education programs in the UNC System fell by 44% (Schlemmer, 2022).

Though there are fewer enrollees in school of education programs that enrollment there is a lack

of Black women enrolling in teacher preparation programs. "A significant percentage of [teacher

preparation] programs-- serving a significant number of future teachers--are more than 90%

White" (Weisberg, D. 2020), p.6). If these same university programs incorporated just 10% of

their student enrollment and mandated that their recruiting teams incorporated 10% of their total

enrolment as students of color, there would be a significant increase in the total of teacher

candidates of Color across the country.

Teacher Licensure Exam Requirements

Through several years and various programs, there has been a change in the criteria for

entering the teaching profession. When teacher pay increased in the 1980s, the proficiency scores

for the Praxis also increased. The increase in proficiency scores negatively impacted Black

teachers, and as a result, negatively impacted Black students (Murnane et al., 1991). Fewer Black

teachers were able to initially pass the exam even though they became effective teachers later on.

Though the intent is to have a diverse teaching population and provide students of all ethnicities

with teachers who reflect their cultural backgrounds, that should never come at the expense of

teacher quality.

Educational Debt is a Deterrent

In chapter one, I introduced the special challenges present to many Black women teachers

in terms of unfair monetary compensation and the need for them to support many aspects of their

household while working. It is understood and widely accepted that teachers do not make

comparable salaries to professionals in other fields with similar levels of education. Depending

on the number of dependents an educator has, he or she could be living below the poverty line

with a college degree and working in a professional career. "In 30 states, mid-career teachers

who head families of four or more qualify for three or more public benefit programs, such as

subsidized children's health insurance or free or reduced-price school meals" (Podolsky, et.al.,

2016, p. 10). The level of required training and monetary compensation does not match one

another. When an educator chooses to leave the classroom and pursue a leadership role, the

advance in pay could be an influencing factor in their decision to leave the classroom or the

profession.

The idea of a low starting wage, coupled with educational debt makes it harder for

potential Personnel of Color to enter the profession. "The more college debt that students incur,

the less likely they are to choose to work in a lower-wage profession, such as teaching"

(Podolsky et al., 2016, p. 10). According to the Center for America Progress (CAP) educational

debt directly impacts the teaching field and the ability to recruit and retain diverse candidates

(Fiddiman, 2020). Bayliss Fiddiman, senior policy analyst at the Center for American Progress states "undergraduate students were less likely to choose public interest jobs with lower pay, particularly in education, when they had student loan debt" (Fiddiman, 2020, p. 2). In a 2019 CAP report, researchers found that 91% of the African Americans in their study borrowed money in order to complete their initial degree and licensure.

Retaining Educators of Color

Teacher recruitment is but one facet of addressing the disparity between the student population and Teachers of Color. Without thinking of the retention and recruitment aspects of teaching employment as interwoven, one will miss the true nuances of their interplay. The teacher recruitment and retention paradox are similar to pouring water which Podolsky et al., (2016) refer to as the "leaky bucket; as quickly as new teachers enter the picture, they just as quickly leave for one reason or another. If the pourer does not realize there is a hole in the vessel, he/she will continue to pour the water and never see sustained water collection. The same holds true for teachers of Color. "While more teachers of color are entering the classroom, data reveal that educators of Color are also leaving at higher rates than their peers" (Dixon & Griffin, 2019, p. 1). Attrition is common in all jobs. There will always be people who choose to leave at one time or another. Looking at common patterns for why Personnel of Color choose to leave the field will provide insights into how school and district leaders can mitigate the factors within their control in order to retain as many teachers as possible. Several aspects of life and career impact why a teacher (of any race) chooses to stay or leave the profession. In "If you Listen, We Will Stay: Why Teachers of Color Leave and How to Disrupt Teacher Turnover," the researchers found these five major categories from their research specific to Black teachers:

1. Experiencing an antagonistic school culture

2. Feeling Undervalued

3. Being deprived of agency and autonomy

4. Navigating unfavorable working conditions

5. Bearing the high cost of being a Black Teacher

Other common reasons teachers leave the profession are regular personal and family demands, such as childcare needs, caring for aging parents, or personal health challenges (Podolsky et al., 2016). Family demands could also include geographic changes for a spouse's career or to live closer to family and friends in another area.

Teachers of Color are often second-career educators or enter educator preparation courses at an older age. They may have challenges with paying for the degree or passing the necessary licensure exams. Black educators may experience discrimination or a preservice curriculum that is not culturally responsive. Under the circumstances, some teachers do not stay in the profession long term. The presence of Teachers of Color in entry level educational roles such as classroom teachers and school counselors are prerequisite to these staff members entering the school leadership pipeline. Teachers must be prepared and willing to stay in the education field and be able to visualize future successes in education. Attracting teachers to continue to move up the career ladder implies that there are already in place in a classroom setting. Teachers would not be looking to become administrators if they were not planning to stay in education.

Teachers of Color and Choice in Their Career Advancement Pathways

Educators who stay in the field for over five years are most likely to continue in the profession long term. Conversely, "national estimates suggest that between 19% and 30% of new teachers leave the profession within their first five years, with turnover much higher in low

income schools" (Polosky et al., 2016, p. 1). The question then remains what opportunities for advancement are present for Teachers of Color who continue a career in education? The goal is that all teachers are afforded the same opportunities to advance their careers, regardless of their race and gender. It is common to expect teachers gain some experience in the classroom before venturing off to a formal school leadership position. Yet, there are times when Teachers of Color are required to wait longer to earn a new leadership role than their White peers who share similar education and experience. For Teachers of Color who choose to stay in the classroom and desire an opportunity for advancement, there should be opportunities and explicit criteria to determine who teaches advanced placement and other accelerated courses to ensure that course selections and student placements are equitably distributed among all the teachers in the grade level or department.

Professional Perception from Peers

Implicit bias, racism, and perceived inferiority are potential causes for Black teachers not being recognized as experts. "The dismissal of Black teachers as experts and professionals - (beyond discipline) led Black teachers to feel they were passed over for advancement opportunities, despite being just as—or more—qualified than their colleagues" (Griffin & Tackie, 2016, p. 6). An example of this perceived inferiority would be when teachers' ideas are dismissed. Being dismissed is something one of Griffin's research participants experienced and shared during their focus group of African American teachers across several southern states. "I share ideas, and they get shut down, but my White peers share the same idea, and it is celebrated and implemented. It discourages me" (Dixon and Griffin, 2019, p. 2). There is a level of validation that comes from peers and another level of validation that comes from supervisors. Women in education as well as women in the corporate world have reported work

environments where their bosses and peers "continually overlook their credentials, diminish their accomplishments, and pile on cultural slights about their hair, appearance, and even their parenting skills" (McGirt, 2017, p. 4). Navigating the weight and challenges of daily microaggressions can impact a person's effectiveness in their actual role (Weiner, Cyr, and Burton, 2021).

Mentorship and support from leadership should not be limited to beginning teachers. "Black teachers face racial discrimination and stereotyping that leave them feeling alienated and restricted from participating in the school community, impacting their ability to be effective and ultimately their desire to remain in the profession" (Griffin & Tackie, 2016, p. 1). Good working conditions benefit the students as well as the teachers. Teachers can be better supports for students when they know that their leadership is supporting them. The same is true for school leaders. In North Carolina, there is no required mentor process for new school administrators. School districts may choose to provide principals with a contact person at the central office, but assistant principals do not have a structured or mandatory mentor.

Hiring Process

During the school-based hiring process, the principal or assistant principal is responsible for selecting which candidates to move forward for school-based interviews. The administrative team is also responsible for selecting which staff members will be on the interview teams. Without a team perspective and coaching around implicit bias, it is possible that school leaders can continue to conduct their hiring in a way that perpetuates a homogenous staff. It is essential that hiring teams are made up of diverse candidates as a means to challenge the views of only one person being seen as the most important view. Incorporating staff members in the interview process also provides a sense of buy-in when thinking about supporting new staff members.

Leadership Access Through Professional Sponsorship

The school principal (or designee) almost always has a say if a teacher is chosen to serve as a mentor, cooperating teacher, school leadership team, district representative, or school representative on a district committee. Sponsorship occurs when a leader uses his or her influence and position to benefit a mentee or a newer, less experienced employee. "Sponsorship goes beyond mentoring in that the sponsor can open doors and is more likely to be aware of opportunities for the employee, opportunities that the employee may not have otherwise have privy to" (Stewart, 2016, p. 63). Sponsorship opportunities allow teachers to see if the project or job they were interested in will match their understanding of the role. Sponsorship opportunities are often based on personal connections. Sponsors must have faith in their collaborators to create opportunities for the teachers to serve in leadership roles.

Ursula Burns, former CEO of Xerox, considered herself, and other Black women in leadership as "double outsiders" – neither male nor White (McGirt, 2017, p.3). Without sponsorship opportunities, there are few natural opportunities where people of Color will encounter the highest persons in the leadership of their respective organizations. Through informal networking, people receive insights, suggestions, and ideas that can expose them to information and people that could assist them in advancing their careers. Very deliberate actions and strategies are required to get into leadership roles; people rarely stumble into the superintendency.

"Black women experience situations in which their authority is undermined, their competence compromised, and their power limited" (Jean- Marie, et.al., 2009, p. 565). Authority can be undermined when people refuse to follow their directives. The term 'Man-splaining' is now officially in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, as of 2018. Merriam- Webster dictionary

defines mansplaining as "to explain something to a woman in a condescending way that assumes she has no knowledge about the topic (Merriam-Webster, 2020). Another common practice is also re-explaining something that a woman has already stated as to imply that the thoughts and comments can only be true when stated by a man. Black women experience their competence being compromised by the types of assignments they receive and the lengths of time it takes for them to have opportunities for true leadership. Gaining a title does not automatically mean that the women in leadership have the proper opportunities to lead.

The Transition to Administration

The transition from a teacher to that an assistant principal is very nuanced and replete with different challenges and opportunities. "The road to administration is a spiraling pathway, which is made up of surprising twists and turns. It is neither a straightforward crossover nor a linear, predictable process." (Armstrong, 2009, p. 65) Despite the level of success one experienced in the previous role or at the previous school, there is still a transition to be made and great uncertainty during that time of transition. All the skills and expertise that were gained in the previous role do not automatically transfer fully to prepare candidates for what lies ahead in the world of school leadership (Armstrong, 2009). A woman can leave her classroom in June and return to a school as an assistant principal for the next fall--merely a few months on the calendar but worlds apart in what the day-to-day structures and expectations look like. Changing schools, roles, and sometimes districts is a significant amount of transition that often happens quickly. The administrative transition is intensified when administrative candidates are promoted to managerial positions and are required to navigate a cultural landscape that is radically different in size, scope, and complexity from their previous classroom environments.

My preliminary literature review has shown significant research is devoted to the role of the teacher, as well as the role of the principal, but far less research is devoted to the transition for the teacher role to the principal role. Goldring et al. conducted an extensive study to review the current literature about assistant principals. These researchers reviewed over 70 empirical research studies on assistant principals. Goldring et al. confirmed that there are even fewer research students specific to race, culture and the job of the assistant principal or the transition from the classroom to the principalship (Goldring et al., 2021).

In almost all major life or career changes, there are ripple effects. The changes impact all aspects of life- personal, professional, and spiritual. An educational example of this is the ripple effects of transition from one school level to another. Many districts have instituted sixth grade academies and freshmen academies because they have realized students who do not make these transitions well are more likely to struggle for the duration of their schooling experience in their respective schools. The same is true for new administrators and new Black women administrators that are leaving the classroom for the first time.

Professional Transitions

Life transitions, in general, bring about their own varieties of emotions and experiences. The school leaders in the AP role are sometimes referred to as "middle management." They do not have the same level of authority as the school principal or district leadership in order to make decisions. Assistant principals will also have to execute and enforce politics and procedures and maintain the school and district's vision, even if the day-to-day execution of that vision poses hardships for teachers.

Denise Armstrong, Author of "Administrative Passage: Navigating the Transition from Teacher to Assistant Principal," clearly outsides some common stages of what she coined as "the

administrative passage." It takes time and support to make the transition from a teacher (or counselor, or coach) role to the role of an assistant as smoothly as possible. Armstrong determined that there are four cycles that are a part of this transitional administrative passage. Armstrong suggests that the "administrative passage" also accompanies other rites of passage and has transitional points and processes along the way. There is also a bit of dissonance for new administrators in the sense that they have worked *with* other assistant principals and principals, so they could conflate how much they know about the role versus what their assumptions are about the role. Observing someone else experience something or create something is not nearly the same as doing that work yourself. Being in a school and working alongside other school leaders will provide some insights but not nearly a full understanding of the scope of the work and the emotional toil and toll that can be involved in leadership. Three main aspects of the administrative passage include the hierarchical, functional, and institutional changes that an educator must experience in order to become successful in the assistant principal role.

Hierarchical Changes

Despite attempts to make people feel that they are all in the same playing field, there is a clear distinction between people who work in the classroom and people who work in the office. There may be a team approach, but there is also a clear hierarchy of leadership and the responsibilities that fall within one scope or another. Teachers can positively impact their school and their work, but there is a greater level of responsibility and accountability for those in school leadership. Recognizing that professional friendships and relationships may change as a result the new career move is essential for new school leaders (Armstrong, 2009). There is an expected withdrawal from old habits to become grafted into their new place and new role. The new AP must be able to adjust to the initial feeling of being an outsider and find a way to become a part

of the new school community. The new AP may initially feel like she relates more closely with the teachers, but once a person becomes the evaluator of another, there will likely be a different relationship formed than if they were truly "equal" colleagues. It will also take time to adjust to being a part of a school leadership team, especially if the current leadership team has worked together for an extended period. The role of the assistant principal can also feel more isolated that the teacher role (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). As a teacher there are many peers and potential friends. As an assistant principal, it is like to be one or only a few assistant principals based on the size of the school.

Functional Changes

As a classroom teacher, there are many skills that will be helpful in the new role as an assistant principal. Having classroom experience is often a highly sought-after trait for new school leaders. If an administrator is familiar with the curriculum and the academic expectations, it will likely be easier to provide specific instructional feedback to teachers during the observation cycles and during informal classroom walkthroughs. However, there are aspects of this leadership role that the assistant principal simply will not know on day one (Goldring et al., 2021). "Preservice [principal] programs do not specifically focus on training assistant principals, although graduates are more likely to initially serve as assistant principals, not principals (Goldring et al., 2021, p. 8). Despite the best training and academic program there is still an informational gap about some of the day-to-day tasks and expectations that one is expected to execute and execute well (Goldring et al., 2021).

Institutional Changes

Institutional changes closely relate to the hierarchical changes. As a new assistant principal, or new to any position, a person wants to build trust within their organization and

establish themselves as a valuable addition to the team. The AP would like to make a good impression to their principal and district level of leadership. However, with a more public facing role, than in the classroom, the AP has to consider the views of the members of the community that will likely make a judgment about and be impacted by their work or their school, in one way or another. As a classroom teacher, there is only one classroom's worth of parents to meet each year. As a school leader, it is common to encounter hundreds of parents and attempt to build a strong working relationship and mutual trust with them. The scope of the role of an assistant principal is far more reaching than that of a classroom teacher (Armstrong, 2009).

Summary

Based on my examination of the current literature, I have seen many examples of the importance of the teachers of Color in the classrooms. I have discussed several different researchers who conducted thorough research into the perspectives of Teachers of Color and how their experiences differ from their White peers. There remains room for further research specific to the role of the assistant principal and how the success or challenges of that role can impact an African American women's career path for years to come. My research questions are focused on the unique experiences of African American transitions from the classroom to the assistant principal role. The assistant principal role can be the key that opens the door to a lifetime of professional leadership opportunities, so it is important to maximize this transitional phase and the support that new assistant principals experience. Chapter III explains the methodology for how I will conduct my research to learn more about the experiences of women of color and their transition to the assistant principalship.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of my qualitative research study was to explore how African American teachers transition into school leadership roles as APs and how their identities impact their experiences. Initially, I planned to focus solely on elementary teachers transitioning into leadership roles because I currently work in an elementary setting but realized secondary APs may have differing experiences. It is important to note that middle and high schools often have larger administrative teams with multiple assistant principals due to the larger student populations traditionally found in secondary schools. Working as a member of a large administrative team may impact the leadership experiences of newer assistant principals. Administrators who are leading at a school level different from where they taught can also shape their leadership experiences. The size and demographic populations of a district may also influence the responses of study participants and what they experienced during their transition.

In this chapter, I explain the influence of my pilot study on the development of my overall research process. I also explain the structure of my research, my chosen methodology, and how I will ensure data security and reliability throughout the interview process. Next, I discuss my desired research participants, how I gained access to participants and how I will conduct the interviews in light of the current Covid-19 pandemic and center for disease control (CDC) restrictions. I conclude this chapter with ethical considerations as well as the limitations of my study.

Pilot Study Overview

I conducted a pilot study as a part of my graduate coursework during fall of 2018. The goal of this process was to provide practice with real life research participants and practice the first draft of my interview protocol. As a result of this pilot study, I refined my interview

protocol and gained practice with data analysis. My goal during the pilot study was to ascertain what the teachers had to say about their leadership opportunities. In order to ensure that I was not leading my interview participants in any of their responses, I shared a general overview of my research topic, but I did not share many specifics. They both signed a consent form and gave me permission to audio record the interviews. Both teachers shared that they had African American principals who provided them with unique leadership opportunities.

One of my interviews helped me to shape my definition and view of teacher leadership. Leadership is not solely a title but a vital role that one plays in his/her school building. The other participant shared how her principal nominated her for different leadership and presentation opportunities. She felt that she was still early in her career and would not have pursued such opportunities had her principal explicitly and repeatedly encouraged her to venture out into presenting at the district level. My first pilot participant shared that her principal arranged for her to sit on several district committees alongside the principal and to represent her school and her department. Both pilot participants were encouraged and mentored by the administrators to further develop advanced leadership skills.

Pilot Study Reflection

Based on my pilot study interviews and data collection, I refined my topic and my interview protocol. During the pilot interview process, I recognized that it takes research participants time to build trust and feel vulnerable enough to share personal anecdotes with the researcher. This experience helped me to see value in multiple rounds of progressively more specific interviews and choose to incorporate multiple rounds of interviews with my research participants. Many educators are hesitant to share accolades about their own work and performance and instead minimize their efforts and experiences. By spending more time with the

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same person, I gain deeper insights and built a greater level of trust over multiple rounds of interviews.

The pilot interview process also taught me the value of semi- structured interviews. The pilot study was my first-time interviewing research participants. In an abundance of caution for veering off course, I strictly adhered to my interview protocol and did not deviate despite where the conversation was naturally leading. During my interviews, I made a point to review my interview protocol and ensure I could make connections between topics that were addressed throughout the participants' responses to one question. While they were speaking, I could quickly determine if the given response answered more than one question and adjust my interview as necessary. The pilot study taught me the value of fluid conversations and questioning even if it was not strictly following the interview protocol. I learned to value the conversation and sparingly interject a small portion of my personal experiences to make the interviews much more conversational in nature. I asked both teachers the same questions in almost the exact same order. However, the interviews were twenty minutes apart in length. One interview felt very much like an interview instead of a conversation. As a researcher, I need to learn how to take the responses the participants provide and ensure that I am receiving in depth answers to my questions. Continued practice with my interview questions will allow me to pay attention to the things the assistant principals are saying, regardless of whether they are on the interview protocol or not. The pilot study process helped to refine my interview protocol and ultimately informed my current research questions. Through this experience and through continued reading and preparation during the literature reviews, my research questions became more specific from focusing on all teachers of Color, to Black teachers, to teachers to Black women educators transitioning to school leadership.

Research Questions

I seek to understand what experiences Black women assistant principals have had in their professional and personal lives that have prepared them for the transition into leadership. With change always comes challenge, so I will listen for the challenges as well as the triumphs in their educational journeys. In order to better understand the experiences of early career assistant principals, I plan to conduct a basic, interpretive, qualitative interview study with critical race theory as a lens to examine the experiences of the new school leaders. My research questions are:

1. What are the experiences of Black women educators who transition to school level leadership?

2. How do Black women educators experience issues of identity (e.g., race and gender) in their leadership roles?

Methodology

My research was a basic qualitative study, using semi-structured, open-ended interview questions for all of my participants. I have been a school administrator for the majority of my educational career, but I am keenly aware of how changing from the role of a teacher to a school leader impacted me personally. I recognize many of the social and micro-political experiences that I encountered and wonder what similar or differing experiences others had. I can use my personal experiences and connection to the research topic as a means to foster a sense of comfort with the research participants as well as a way for me to improve my questions based on some of my experiences and would like to hear more about from other women.

In my literature review, I highlight researchers who recognize that Black women are not always recognized for their accomplishments and achievements the same way as their white peers. (Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Sleeter, 2016). I seek to use my research platform to allow these

women the opportunity to share their journeys and also to gain more insight into how to support

black women in their transitions to school leadership positions. "Silencing the voices of

minorities, whether intentional or from a lack of interest, is unjust" (Monk, 2020, p. 90). I had

four participants, and I recognize that there are unique aspects to each of their stories. I do not

presume that all African American women in leadership share the same experiences. Each school

district has its own culture and climate. A community's size, geographic location, demographic

diversity, and median income levels are all factors that can shape the culture and climate of a

community. Having research participants from different districts adds to the richness of the data

collected.

Research Methods

The philosophical approach to my research is interpretivist qualitative methodology. This

viewpoint allowed me to focus on describing and understanding the experience that my research

participants share. The qualitative interview study allowed me to make sense of the participants'

experiences and perceptions of their work environments. "Qualitative researchers are interested

in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their

world and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). I seek to

examine the stories of my research participants and their lived experiences as individuals and

professionals.

Research Setting

I interviewed four Black women assistant principals who are currently working in the

Southern United States. I did not put any specific parameters around the size of the school

district or the school structures in order to determine if there are some universal experiences that

Black women in school leadership face. I was fortunate enough to interview assistant principals across all grade spans- elementary, middle, and high.

Research Study Participants

When I began this process, I thought I would focus on all teachers of color. I later narrowed my focus to only include African American women teachers. As a result, my research participants were (a) African American, (b) women, and (c) early career school assistant principals. I defined an early career school leader as someone in her second through fourth year as an assistant principal. I intentionally omitted first year assistant principals for two reasons. I omitted first year assistant principals because they are so new to the role that they are not yet able to reflectively look back at how the transition took place and what they learned through the transition.

I also excluded first year APs because of the lingering and devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. "COVID leadership" is how I referred to the current state of educational school-based leadership. Despite the best graduate preparation and despite working alongside the most experienced principals, COVID leadership is like no other season in the current generation's history. Therefore, I could not, in good faith, generalize the transitional experiences for a first-year school leader during the current pandemic. By choosing to interview second to fourth year assistant principals, I can hear from people whose school leadership careers are not solely shaped by the pandemic.

I chose to explicitly focus on the transition from a teacher to an assistant principal because the vast majority of school leaders become assistant/vice principals before becoming principals. In North Carolina, the assistant principal and principal share the same licensure requirements. Technically, a candidate *could* go directly from being a teacher to being a

principal, but that is not common practice in most districts. The role of the assistant principal is transitional in nature. It is the "gateway" out of the classroom and into middle to upper school and district leadership roles. Most district leaders served as an assistant principal at one time or another, even if it was only for a brief season.

Number of Participants and Number of Interviews

When determining how many research participants to include, I wanted to ensure that I had enough participants to give me valuable data. However, I did not want to have so many participants that I would be overloaded with data and unable to synthesize it in a meaningful way. I conducted this research while balancing other life and professional obligations, so I had to consider how to realistically execute this research in a way that honors the time and efforts of my participants. Before finalizing my number of participants, I read other dissertations on similar topics and methodologies to see how many participants they chose to include in their studies. I wanted to ensure that my chosen number of participants was in line with similar research studies. While there is no "one size fits all approach," it can be beneficial to know what other researchers have chosen to do and understand some of their rationale behind that decision. The other research studies ranged from two to ten participants, However, for the studies that interviewed the same research participants more than once, they had approximately three to six participants so that helped to confirm my decision for how many participants I included in my study.

I interviewed four participants and conducted two interviews with each person. Each interview had a different focus. The first round focused on getting to know the candidate and learning about their personal lives, the rationale for entering education as a profession and some of their early career experiences. We also discussed their motivation for leaving the classroom, graduate student life, and ended this round with the interviewing and hiring process.

The second interview focused on leadership preparation, professional development, leadership trajectories, intersecting identities and collaboration with the administrative team. The second interview concluded with candidates offering suggestions for school and district leaders on how they can support future female leaders of color in the transition to the assistant principal role.

I initially intended to conduct three rounds of interviews, one hour each. After speaking with my participants and seeing that multiples dates were harder to schedule, they agreed to extend the length of time for each interview and decrease the total number of times we met. Participants agreed to have two, one and a half hour interviews instead of three, one-hour interviews. The longer interviews allowed for a more conversational feel and allowed participants to truly reflect and not feel rushed while we were together. The participants provided great insights and showed genuine vulnerability.

Utilizing multiple rounds of interviews ensured that I had sufficient access to my research participants and allowed for intermittent reflection between after each round. After each interview, I reviewed the audio/visual files to ensure that the participants answered the questions in a way that would provide rich data. If there were questions that were partially answered or omitted in the first round, I made a point to incorporate those topics into the second round of interviews to ensure that I had appropriate data from all participants and that the data gathered from each participant was on the same areas of focus. The second interview provided a means for verifying and add validity to the data that I captured. The second interview also allowed for embedded member checks throughout the interview process.

Access to Research Participants

Through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process, I gained permission to conduct my research. I interviewed assistant principals from multiple school districts, both rural and urban. Having participants from different districts ensured that their professional experiences are not solely shaped by their school district. I solicited participants by peer contacts and in collaboration with colleagues. Through my current cohort members for this doctoral degree and through my network as a Principal Fellow and Teaching Fellow, I was able to find current administrators that fit my criteria and were willing to participate. Anita and I shared a mutual friend, that friend suggested I reach out to Anita to see if she was willing to participate. When I shared my research topic and criteria with classmates from my master's and doctoral programs, Mary, Janet and Kenya were suggested participants. There were two other potential participants that I reached out to that fit my criteria, but they did not express interest in participating in the study.

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Data Collection

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Data collection is one of the most important aspects of the research process. I have included the following sub-sections as essential components of the data collection process—IRB approval, interview protocol, interview platforms and recording, and data storage.

IRB Process

Prior to conducting my research, I completed all necessary components of the Institutional Review Board's requirements. The IRB approval is a prerequisite for submitting research and meeting with research participants. As a part of the IRB process, I shared my consent form with each participant and ensured that they agreed to participate. The consent form shared the topic of my study and what would be expected of the person if they choose to

participate. Copies of my original documents are recorded in Appendix A with the title IRB informed consent form.

Interview Protocol

My interview protocol has been examined and revised to ensure that the questions directly inform my research question with a focus of CRT as the theoretical framework. Questions were specifically developed to examine the intersections of my research questions and the three tenets of CRT that I chose to utilize. A copy of this protocol is provided in Appendix A and titled IRB informed consent form. I read other dissertations with similar topics as mine and reviewed their interview protocols to learn how they sequenced their questions and what they excluded from their questions. Reviewing other studies was important to informing my interview protocol. Within my protocol, I bolded certain questions that I felt were the most informative and that I planned to ask as written. Other probing questions or statements were added into the protocol in the event the participants did not initially provide great detail when I asked a specific question. I utilized probing questions and specific examples if the participants give very short responses (Creswell, 2005). Through individual interviews, I ensured that I heard from each person in my study. Being in a one-to-one setting allowed for more of a personal connection and let the participants feel at ease.

Interview Platforms and Recording

When choosing my research topic, I knew that one-on-one interviews would be the method of my data collection. Descriptive data is a component of basic qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Given current North Carolina and local governmental decisions regarding the COVID-19 safety protocols, there was a possibility of face-to-face meetings, but candidates preferred to have a virtual video conference so that they could better control the

security of their environment and ensure that others would not overhear the responses of their

interviews. Having video interviews also allowed for more flexibility in the timing of the

interviews. The location allowed for research participants to speak more freely about their

experiences than if the interview took place in the schools where they were currently working.

Another advantage to a digital/virtual interview would be the elimination of social distancing and

masks. From a logistics standpoint, the face masks and distance would directly impact the quality

of the interview and the potential audio recording. I video and audio recorded all interviews

digitally, using a videoconferencing platform, so they could be transcribed after the interviews

are completed.

Data Storage

All data from the interviews are stored in UNCG's secure file storage program, BOX.

This site has multiple layers of security and ensures that the candidate's information cannot be

shared unintentionally. Pseudonyms are used to maintain the confidentiality of all research

participants. I intentionally omitted any remotely identifiable information about the school

districts or schools where these leaders worked.

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Data Analysis

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Data analysis is the crux of the work of a researcher. Without analyzing the data that is

collected, research falls short of the original goal of answering the research questions. "The

process of data collection and analysis is recursive and dynamic" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.

195). Each round of interviews provided valuable information that needed to be analyzed to

inform how to proceed with the next upcoming interview. I analyzed the responses to my

interview protocol and determine codes as I analyzed transcripts. I looked for similarities and

differences based on what each participant shared and used that information to help create initial

codes, Saldana considers these "emergent categories for further analysis" (Saldana, 2014, p. 8).

Using these initial codes as I continued the data collection process allowed me to review and

revise during the research process as opposed to collecting all data and waiting until then to

begin analyzing any of the data.

After each interview, I had the audio files transcribed. I reviewed the transcriptions in

comparison with the audio recordings in order to confirm the accuracy of the transcriptions. I

shared the respective transcripts of each round with the participants and asked for their feedback

and to confirm that was recorded on the transcript accurately portrayed their sentiments.

Ensuring accuracy of the transcriptions was an essential prerequisite to data analysis. Since the

participants had time to review the transcripts before the next round they were able to catch

errors and also able to recall portions of their stories that they wanted to add to their

conversations that may have wanted to share in the first round.

After examining the codes that are present across the various interviews, I further

examined and created categories and themes that were evident in the researching findings. I

engaged in a peer review process with other researchers to ensure that I was allowing for the

most accurate and appropriate descriptions of the work. Another aspect of data analysis was to

have the research participants read the transcripts and discuss the themes that I found in their

interview transcript. Critical Race Theory was especially useful in helping me analyze the

findings of my data. By choosing a critical race lens, I explored some of the teachers'

experiences that are unique to African American teachers and are likely not experienced by their

white peers.

After all interviews were completed and all of the video sessions were transcribed, I

began the data analysis process. During the coding process, I began with fifteen apriori codes

based upon my knowledge of the topic from the literature review as well as my memory of what the candidates shared during the interviews. I listened to the recorded interview while reading the transcriptions to ensure their accuracy. After reviewing the transcripts and coding all the documents, I ended with forty-seven codes and subsequently condensed those codes to six categories. From the six categories, I was able to develop four themes to capture what my participants shared in response to my original research question and in line with my conceptual framework.

Trustworthiness

Embedding aspects of trustworthiness helps to put the research participants at ease. I wanted the participants to know that I was following ethical procedures and that I will not use what they say to fit my personal agenda, but I wanted to use their information to compare and contrast it against the other research participants. "Trustworthiness or rigor of a study refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study" (Connelly, 2016, p.1). As a qualitative researcher, I focused on two aspects of trustworthiness- member checking and peer reviewing.

Member Checking

Member checking, also known as respondent validation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) is an internal validation process for qualitative researchers. Member checking allows for research participants to weigh in early on in the research process and allow them to share feedback before the information is finalized or published. Maxwell states:

This [member checking] is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do in the perspective they have

on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your biases and

misunderstanding of what you observed. (Maxwell, 2013, pp. 126–127)

For my member checking protocol, I shared the transcriptions of our conversation with each

participant after we completed each round of interviews. The goal of allowing the participants to

read the transcripts and starting each subsequent interview with an opportunity to clarify

anything that was stated previously allowed for the researcher and the research participant to

ensure that all information was captured accurately. Qualitative researchers make a personal

interpretation of the data they collect, so it is important to ensure that they are making those

interpretations from valid data (Creswell, 2016).

Peer Reviewing

After I completed my research, found my codes, categories, themes, and wrote up my

findings, I collaborated with peer reviewers who are also researchers that are familiar with my

topic. Peer reviewing is a vital part of the research process as it allows another experienced

professional to vet what is presented in the research findings. "A thorough peer examination

[review] would involve asking a colleague to scan some of the raw data and assess whether the

findings are plausible, based on the data" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 249–250). Peers can

provide critical and specific feedback that novice in the topic would not be able to provide

(Creswell, 2016). Two peers read my finding chapter. Both of my peer reviewers were African

American women who have served as assistant principals and are fellow researchers. Since they

have a background in the current literature around this topic, my two peer reviewers were able to

share what I reported is resonant with the current literature on Black women in educational

leadership. The peer reviewers were also able to reflect upon their experiences as assistant

principals as well as the transitions from the AP role to the principalship. One of the reviewers shared,

> The findings are similar to what I studied and what I experienced. As a black woman rising in educational leadership positions, I resonate with the findings of obstacles early on, the lack of PD for new AP's and intersectionality. I too had to interview in front of large panels and interviewed for positions where it appeared that a candidate had already been selected.

Reflexivity

The late James Baldwin asserts, "Know from whence you came. If you know whence you came, there are absolutely no limitations to where you can go." As an educator, more specifically as a Black woman in school leadership, it is essential to be a reflexive practitioner in my professional role and especially in this research context. Creswell defines reflexivity as "the engagement by researchers in self-understanding about the background they bring to a research study and how it shapes their interpretations, how the participants may be experiencing a study, and how readers are reacting to the study" (Creswell, 2016, p. 222). By explicitly saying how one's personal experiences inform how they perceive their research study and research findings the reader can make better judgments about how the researcher interpreted the data. Life experiences shape one's perspectives and provide insights into how one relates to the world. I kept a reflexivity journal throughout my research process to better understand my role as a researcher and how my personal perceptions and experience shape how I interpret the data I receive. I added, reviewed, and reflected on the entries of this journal throughout the process to maintain an awareness of my role. In my journal entries, I cataloged my personal experiences of

transition, my initial responses to the interviews, and how my experiences are similar and different from my research participants.

Ethical Considerations

Three important ethical considerations are confidentiality, informed consent, and data collection boundaries. In order to maintain confidentiality, I did not use any identifiable information from the research participants. By using pseudonyms, I anonymized names and school districts and ensured that any information presented will not be traceable to a particular interviewee. Another aspect of confidentiality is ensuring that my audio recordings are protected and stored securely so others cannot access that information. Informed consent means the researcher is giving the participants the necessary information they need to decide if they want to participate in the research or not. All audio files, video recording, and text transcriptions are stored in BOX. Box is a multi-layered secured data storage system.

Limitations

As is typical with qualitative research, my research captured findings from a small number of participants. I focused my research on the experiences of African American professional educators who are new to the assistant principal role so it will not include the experiences of other school personnel of Color that serve in classified roles, such as the custodial staff, office staff, and teacher assistants' role. My research also does not include the voice of Black male educators transiting from the classroom nor does it include the voices of non-Black school leaders.

Summary

This chapter outlined how I ensured my research was conducted in an ethical confidential manner. I explained how my methodology was used to inform my research practices to learn

how African American women experience professional transition from the classroom to the assistant principalship. I also explained the criteria for my research participants and how those criteria constraints provided the best data for my study. I explained the processes that were used to ensure participants' data is protected and anonymous. Chapters IV and V present my research findings, data analysis, and implications for future research.

CHAPTER IV: PRESENTATION OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to examine how African American women transitioned from the classroom to the school assistant principalship and what they experienced during that transition. I chose to focus on the role of the assistant principal (AP) as one of potentially many professional transitions; the assistant principalship is a transitional role by nature. The AP serves as "a" leader in the building, but the principal is "the" leader of the school.

As an assistant principal, there is a possibility to transition to the school principalship, district level leadership, or to transition again to a classroom teacher and/or coach role. The skills that are learned in this transition can ease future professional changes. The research findings are beneficial to understanding the needs and the patterns of transition. In this chapter, I discuss the themes that emerged from the data collection during my qualitative research study. At times, I also incorporate my own experiences as an African American woman who made the transition from a classroom teacher to the assistant principalship.

Research Questions

Each interview and each participant added great depth and understanding for me as I sought to answer my research questions. My research questions are listed below.

1. What are the experiences of Black women educators who transition to school-level leadership?

2. How do Black women educators experience issues of identity (e.g., race and gender) in their leadership roles?

The themes that I found from the interviews are discussed at length in the remainder of this chapter. I use the participants' words to chronicle their stories and amplify their voices. After looking at the themes, I chose to sequence my findings in order of the leaders' career

trajectory—their teaching careers, the assistant principal interviewing and hiring processes, and the early years in their roles as assistant principals.

The table that follows outlines the themes and subtopics that are the most salient in the responses of my four research participants and connects the themes to the research questions.

Table 1. Research Questions and Corresponding Themes and Subtopics

Research Question	Corresponding Themes and subtopics
What are the experiences of Black women educators who transition to school level leadership?	Theme 1: Positive schooling and teacher experiences shape the desire for leadership roles. • Teacher leadership builds confidence • Mentors provide access and encouragement • There are few opportunities for networking, though networking is valuable Theme 2: Obstacles were present early in the transition process. • Challenges to financing a graduate degree • Faith was necessary to continue the interview process • More managerial tasks than instructional • Professional development did not match current needs • Theme 3: Support systems are essential for overcoming the obstacles of the transition process. • Families provide a safe place where the leaders do not always have to be strong. • Professional supports provide insights into how to navigate schools, districts, and community expectations.
How do Black women educators experience issues of identity (e.g., race and gender) in their leadership roles?	Theme 4: Intersectionality impacts daily leadership tasks and experiences with colleagues. • Family support is essential • High level of responsibility with minimal recognition • The dynamics of the administrative team directly impacts the assistant principal's transition

All participants experienced some level of success before deciding to leave their roles as classroom teachers and go into school leadership positions. Although choosing to start a graduate program and begin administrative work was not as easy as they anticipated, they continued to pursue this goal. The hiring process was extremely grueling for most of the participants as well as very emotionally discouraging along the way. Each candidate had a unique journey to their initial role as an assistant principal and I was fortunate and grateful that they chose to share their respective stories with me. As Black women in public education, they were able to provide countless examples of how their race and gender impacted their daily work.

Participant's Profiles

I conducted multiple rounds of interviews with four current African American assistant principals from rural and suburban school districts in North Carolina. For the sake of anonymity, I will refer to them as "Anita," "Janet," "Kenya," and "Mary." Table 2 shows the current grade levels where each participant is leading.

Table 2. Participants

Name	Grade Level	Teaching Experience	AP Experience	Community
Anita Anderson	Elementary	7	2	Suburban
Mary Montgomery	Secondary	16	2	Rural
Janet Johnson	Elementary and Secondary	16	4	Rural
Kenya Klein	Elementary	5	4	Suburban

Note. Participant names are pseudonyms.

Participants' Background

Anita is currently in her second year as an assistant principal at an elementary school. She is married and does not have any children. She and I share a few mutual friends, and one of them

suggested I reach out to her as a potential participant. I searched her name and school district to email her and ask if she would participant in this research study. During the interview process, Anita was comical and personable in her responses, while also providing great depth in her recollection of events. Overall, she spoke very positively about her experiences and how she transitioned to her new role as an assistant principal. Anita shared that her previous experiences as an elementary teacher were helpful in guiding her toward her new role. Anita has experience working in three North Carolina school districts as well as working in charter schools.

Mary is currently a high school assistant principal in her second year. Mary is married and has one child. She is working with an administrative team of two other people for a total administrative team of three. She is the only woman on her school's administrative team. All of Mary's teaching experience is in the high school setting, though her first career began in corporate America. She relocated to North Carolina as an undergraduate student and has stayed in the area ever since. She has worked in three school districts across the state of North Carolina. Mary had very interesting insights about her experiences as an African American woman in leadership in a rural area. Mary shared that families in the rural communities were lifelong and multi-generational members of their respective communities. As a result, learning how to navigate a very close-knit community as an "outsider" played into her role and some of the experiences she had with the community and the parents of the children at her school.

Janet is currently an assistant principal in a rural county in North Carolina. She is married and has two children. She grew up in the county where she currently works and resides. She is the most experienced assistant principal of the group and the only AP who has served at the secondary and elementary level in school leadership. Janet has the most overall educational experience with a total of almost twenty consecutive years in the classroom and in school

leadership combined. She has also worked her entire career in the same school district. All of Janet's teaching experience was in an elementary setting and the majority of her career was in primary grades. When she was offered her first school leadership role at a middle school assistant principal, she was hesitant to accept the position because it was not what she was expecting and it was outside of her comfort zone. Janet's longevity within one school district provided her with a clear lens on how things have changed over time. By serving in the same district as a teacher and a school leader, Janet has an increased awareness of the changes that she still would like to see take place in her district.

Kenya immediately began her interview by stating she was a wife and mom. She is a mother of two and has lived in North Carolina for approximately a decade. Her family relocated to North Carolina from the northeastern US early in her professional career. Kenya credited that move as an integral part of her leadership journey. Though only one of my participants is a native North Carolinian, Kenya is the only participant who has worked in education outside of North Carolina. She has worked in three school districts and two states. She also has experience working with nonprofit agencies in the community that assist young adults with job placement and getting out of gangs as well as helping them to earn a high school diploma or equivalency. As a special educator, she had teaching experience at the secondary and elementary levels.

Presentation of Data

Theme 1: Positive Schooling and Teacher Experiences Shape the Desire for Leadership Roles

Many factors affect whether a person chooses a career path. It is notable to recognize that two of the four participants did not choose the "traditional" path to education. Anita was undecided when she began school as a college freshman. When starting her college career, Anita

had not yet declared a major and thought she would pursue a degree in the fine arts. Early in her college years, her academic advisor suggested she take an introductory education course; so, she decided she would give the course a try. Once Anita took the introductory educator course, she admitted, she was hooked. Anita shared, "Anything I wanted to do, I could do it in the classroom. In my classroom, we sang, we danced, we made it fun. I felt like an actress every day, and that is what I wanted to be."

Janet began her career in the early grades. She had a student internship in an elementary school setting while she was still a high school student. Janet's high school internship opportunity directly impacted her career decision to become a teacher. She began teaching the same grade as when she was an intern in high school. Janet's short term high school internship placement directly impacted her long-term career path. Janet fondly recalls, "Getting to work with those kindergartens as a high school student helped me to know that is what I wanted to do, kindergarten was my jam, and that is what I taught when I started teaching." Having early exposure to potential career paths, Janet found a career she loved as a high school student and continues in that field to this day.

Unlike Janet, Kenya began her career as a high school inclusion teacher in the special education department. She worked with mostly Science and Social studies content areas. Kenya's early educational experiences were positive. Though Kenya had positive schooling experiences she was very aware of her race even from a young age. She attended schools in the suburban area outside of a large inner city and her school had very few Black students. As an adult, she still remembers the names of her neighbors who moved into her community when she was in elementary school. She shared,

To this day, I remember the names of those two little boys that moved in down the street, because they had Brown skin like me. [I thought] maybe now, I wouldn't be the only Black kid in my class since they are here.

She enjoyed school as a child but was keenly aware that she was one of very few Black children in most of her classes from grade school to college. As a high school student, Kenya knew she wanted to work with children. Kenya explained, "I thought I wanted to be a pediatrician but when I was in high school, we had tracks and I was on the child development track so in 12th grade I spent half my day in an elementary school." Kenya was excited to work with the kindergarten class as a high schooler but knew that she did not want to teach kindergartners for her career. After she graduated, she spent a summer helping a family with a child with special needs. Kenya said, "that summer job solidified that I wanted to be a special education teacher" which is exactly what she did.

Mary came from a family of educators and her family placed great importance on being successful in grade school and beyond. She knew she was expected to get a college degree. In Mary's family, "The conversation was always 'where do you plan to go to college' it was never 'do you plan to go to college.'" Mary was not interested in becoming a teacher because she had first-hand experience with her mother being a teacher and then a school leader. Mary shared, "I saw how much educators had to do and didn't want to mimic that at all."

From Teacher Leader to School Leader

For teachers to have the confidence to leave the classroom to pursue a leadership role, they have likely experienced some level of success within the classroom. Anita acknowledged that her previous school administrators built her confidence based on how they interacted with her. "What I appreciated about them is that they saw me for who I was, and they knew who I

was. I knew how I did things and they let me do my thing." When speaking to Janet about the teacher leadership roles she held, she quickly stated "I don't think anything can *really* prepare you to be an assistant principal, not until you actually do it. Just like being a student teacher is completely different from having your own classroom."

Despite the value of the teacher leadership roles, those roles do not directly correlate to the increased effectiveness as a school leader. All four participants shared that they volunteered for many leadership positions throughout their tenures as classroom teachers. The participants also shared that their principals encouraged them to take on specific teacher leader roles throughout their careers; those roles included grade level/ department chairs, Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) chairs, School improvement team (SIT) representatives, presenters, mentors, along with additional responsibilities. Anita and Mary acknowledged their principals allowed them opportunities to lead at the district level by offering professional development or by representing the schools at various events. Anita said "they [the administrative team] gave me exposure. They gave me opportunities to be like, around, and supporting more adults which I didn't normally do as a teacher." Janet shared that her principal took great confidence in delegating tasks to her because, as she stated, "he knew when he gave it to me, I would get the job done. I know he did not ask everyone to do extra duties."

For Kenya, in addition to her teacher leadership development and leadership opportunities, her move to North Carolina played a large role in her decision to become a school administrator. Kenya shared,

 I feel that by moving and being made uncomfortable, that has led me to step out of my

comfort zone even more. If I would not have moved to North Carolina, I'm not sure I

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would have ever gone into administration. I always knew that I wanted to do big things.

But I was comfortable in my old job.

Mary recalled that her principal allowed her to have several less traditional leadership

roles as a teacher leader. Mary said, "Once I told my principal I was thinking about applying for

Principal Fellows, he put me to work. He started including me in on things and letting me take a

bigger lead for my department." When she was the department chair, the principal allowed her to

have a role in budgetary decisions for her department as well as serving on interview committees

for fellow teachers in her department.

Leaders Make Leaders—Encouragement to Move Forward

All participants except Kenya shared how their principals encouraged them to become

school leaders. Both Anita and Janet's principals spoke with each of them individually and

encouraged them to pursue an advanced degree and an assistant principal position. Kenya's

principal did not initiate the conversation about leadership, but once Kenya expressed an interest,

her principal was very supportive of her decision. Anita's principals and school leaders

encouraged her to pursue school leadership as well. My own experience was similar to Kenya's.

My principal consistently allowed me to have a variety of leadership opportunities within the

school. Though my school's administrative team did not explicitly encourage me towards a

school leadership role, once I expressed my interest, the administrative team was very

supportive.

Each assistant principal shared how one specific person influenced her to pursue a

master's in school administration and eventually pursue a school leadership role, even if it was

not her current principal. Without those one-on-one conversations and encouragement, these

leaders may not have left the classroom. Mary's principal paid for her to take the graduate record

examinations (GRE) exam to get into Graduate School and he set weekly meetings with her to help prepare for the Principal Fellow scholarship interviews. Her principal also reviewed her and applications to graduate universities for her master's program. Mary recalls, "He [her principal] did not have to do that for me, but it made a world of difference. I really could not afford to apply without his help. It really made me feel good to know that he believed in me."

Mary's principal's willingness to pay for her GRE exam is an example of how one conversation is followed up with action and those actions yield positive results. Without the continued encouragement from their respective leaders while they were classroom teachers, these new administrators may have chosen a different path, or stopped along the way when the changes and challenges began to compile. Kenya was the only participant who shared that her school administrator was not a catalyst for her choosing to get a graduate degree and becoming a school leader. However, when she shared with her principal that she planned to go back to graduate school, her principal was very supportive of Kenya's decision. He changed her class schedule to create a larger variety of instructional experiences. As a special educator, she worked with small groups of students. Kenya was dual licensed; her principal knew the value of general education classroom experience for a school leader, so he suggested she become a classroom teacher and he modified her schedule to accommodate her change from special education teacher to resource teacher.

Family Responsibilities and Financing the Advanced Degree

All participants shared that funding the necessary advanced degree was a significant decision that impacted them and their families. The choice to return to graduate school was not a decision they took lightly. Mary and Kenya spoke the most passionately about their decisions to go back to school and how much of an impact enrolling in a graduate program had on their

families. When they started graduate school, both Mary and Kenya had young children. Kenya shared, "deciding to go back to school did not only affect me. My kids changed schools too so they could be closer to me, so going back to school was a big decision for me and my husband." She chose to relocate her children from their neighborhood school and enrolled them in the school where she worked. At this time, she was working in a neighboring school district to where they lived. Kenya recalled, "I tried to get to as many games as possible and take my son to practice when I could, but they also noticed that mom was spending hours in her room on the weekends." Kenya's graduate studies impacted the time they had together as a family because of her increased workload. Kenya acknowledged that her attention would be divided for this short period while she was in school, but it would not last forever.

Mary spoke more specifically about the financial implications of her graduate school decision. When she returned to school, it impacted her family because her husband wanted to return to college as well. Mary expressed,

> I knew it would be hard, but I did not know it would be *that* hard. I hated the feeling of not being able to financially contribute to my household. Remember, I'm coming from corporate America, so I've never not been able to provide. My husband had to pick up the slack in order for me to be able to participate in the internship experience.

Mary and her husband both could not afford to go back to school at the same time, so she went to graduate school first. Mary mentioned, "We could barely afford for me to go to school, there is no way we both could have been in school at the same time." Now that she has completed her degree, he is making plans to return to college as well.

Leaving the Old and Preparing for the New

When thinking about leaving the classroom, the participants shared a variety of mixed emotions. Anita felt content and settled in her classroom contributions; she was prepared for the next challenge of school leadership. When it came time to prepare to move to a school leadership position, Anita was both nervous and excited. Anita said, "a big part of this kind of job is that you leave a piece of yourself in that building every day you walk out. So, when I left the classroom, I knew I had given it my best." After Mary completed her master's program and she returned to the classroom for a year and a half. Despite interviewing for multiple positions, she did not get an assistant principal position right after graduating with her principal's license. Mary reflected,

> I did not want to return to the classroom, but financially, I had no choice. I made sure I was open with my principal and let her know that I was still interviewing. When it was time for me to go, it was time to go.

Mary expected to become an assistant principal immediately after graduation. Since that did not happen, she had to return to the classroom for the continuity in her resume as well as the financial need. While in the classroom, Mary was simultaneously preparing for additional interviews for a school leadership position. She was determined to persevere though the interview and selection processes and ultimately, she was successful.

Janet became emotional reflecting on her classroom and the feelings that she had when leaving the classroom. It was evident that she loved teaching and she loved the community where she worked. Janet shared her memories about leaving the classroom by saying,

> Oh, my goodness, I'm really leaving! I'm leaving these kids like, I won't get to, you know, build those relationships. When you have students who have siblings you've

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already had, you get to know one child, and then the next, and then their families. I'm leaving those parents and that community too. It was hard. [When you leave a school] you feel like you're letting people down when you leave them, but I knew that in order for me to grow and see if this [administrative role] was something I really wanted to do, I had to try.

Janet's comment speaks to her deep connection with her community and her desire to continue to have positive relationships with the families she served.

Kenya had the most unique experience with regards to transitioning physically from the classroom. Kenya remained in the same school as an assistant principal, so she not only had to transition from one space within the building to another, but she also had to find a way to create a professional persona as an assistant principal alongside people with whom she worked very closely. Kenya prioritized setting professional boundaries with her staff. She described them by stating,

I had to be very honest [with the staff], at a staff meeting I had to say, 'Hey, guys, I'm now in this [AP] role. And it's not that I don't love you, but there are some things that you have to understand now that I am in this role.' I also had a separate conversation with a friend group, and I was being honest with them, like "they're just some things that now that I am your assistant principal we can't do." It was hard to do because I am a very social person. I enjoy the relationships that I have. But I also knew that it was important for me and for them to have clear expectations.

For Kenya, "leaving the old" meant walking down the hall. She still made a point to find ways to professional distance herself and create necessary boundaries so she and her staff could maintain positive working relationships. All participants shared that they had positive grade

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school experiences; this is an unofficial prerequisite for choosing to return to a school as a professional. Without positive schooling experiences along the way, teaching would have been a less desirable profession. Teacher success and teacher leadership opportunities are essential to the success of future school leaders. As African American women, the ability to see small scale successes was essential for helping to cultivate the confidence necessary to step out and venture to larger levels of school responsibility. There were key people, both profession and personal that made the road to the assistant principalship a bit easier. Without their leaders' and families' encouragement and trust the teachers may not have left the classroom. The initial transition from the classroom to prepare for a school leadership role was only the first step in the transition, followed by interviewing, hiring, and onboarding. Theme two explores how the participants experiences each of these obstacles and overcame them.

Theme 2: Obstacles Were Present Early in the Transition Process

As a researcher and interviewer, the questions specific to the school administration interview process were extremely challenging to hear because it seemed so intentional that there were barriers that were created to keep certain candidates out. Mary shared that she interviewed over fifteen times before securing her first assistant principal position.

Anita and Mary shared that the men in their graduate cohorts interviewed significantly fewer times before being selected for positions. Mary stated, "All the guys that graduated with me in May had jobs by the start of the next school year in August." All participants indicated that they could recall that they knew of positions for which they interviewed where it seemed that candidates were chosen before the interviews took place- i.e.., despite the interview process and the fidelity with which it was held, school leaders had a desired candidate in mind and most often

the desired candidate was the one that was chosen despite who else showed up to the interviews. Mary said,

 I went to one interview where the school already had three female administrators. If I knew that ahead of time, I would not have even applied, because I knew there was no way they were going to hire another woman at that school, and I was right. They hired a man; he was a coach at the school already.

Interviewing and Hiring Obstacles

Anita shares that her interview process was challenging, and it took multiple interviews to find her current role. "I went through five different interviews very, very, very arduous and heart wrenching at times. Truly, God led the whole entire thing. And I finally landed at the school I'm at right now." Mary shared, "after a certain number of interviews, you start to realize that you are interviewing the schools, just as they are interviewing you. Will this school be a good fit for me? Will they help me grow?" Making that shift in perspective helped her to not feel as upset when she interviewed for a position and was not chosen as the desired candidate.

Janet described her interviews as "weird" in the sense of how intimidating the interview process was. Janet reflects, "there were six people sitting there around that big conference room table. It was weird, nerve-wracking, and intimidating. We [candidates] did not even know which school we were interviewing for, just for an AP position in the district. Both Janet and Kenya interviewed in school districts where they were currently working as teachers. Kenya explained how formal her interview was and said, "it was like I'd never met these people before, but I had talked to most of them just last week." When they began to describe the interview process their facial expressions were of angst and concern. Janet and Kenya said their interview process felt very impersonal and intentionally intimidating. Despite their best preparation, they were nervous

and unsure if they were the chosen candidates for the positions based off their interview experiences. Janet said, "I had no idea if I got the job, based on the interview. I really didn't know until I got the phone call."

Onboarding and Professional Development

All research participants shared there were parts of their new assistant principal jobs for which they were not yet prepared to lead; only Kenya mentioned budget as an example though that is often touted as an integral managerial piece when transitioning to the school principalship. Kenya said, "my first year I was working on a title one budget and trying to figure out how to spend our money to meet student needs. I was able to help us get computers with that money." However, many people mentioned the need for additional professional development about addressing staff conflict resolution and leading professional learning communities. Mary shared, "so much of my time is spent on testing. I've given the tests before, for my one class but I've never had to organize the testing for the whole school." Three of the four research participants were a part of a principal preparation program either through their school district or through the North Carolina Principal Fellows Program (NCPF) and they all shared how valuable those professional learning opportunities were when they were in their graduate work. Mary recalled, "when I compare the things that happened within Principal Fellows to the other MSA students I see the educational experiences we had, and Principal Fellows definitely prepared me better than the courses alone. The district programs and NCPF provided additional learning opportunities during the graduate work phases of the process that other MSA students did not receive. The Principal Fellows shared how their preparation varied from that of their peers in the traditional program.

All participants expressed that they would have liked more explicit assistant principal training to take place throughout their first school year. There is a gap between what is taught during their curricular work of a graduate program and the actual experiences throughout the early years on the job.

Instructional Leadership vs. Managerial Tasks

When students and staff returned to the school building later during the COVID-19 pandemic all assistant principals shared how little time they had to devote to instructional leadership despite their understanding of the need for instructional leadership and their desire to remain close to the classrooms. Daily disciplinary infractions accounted for majority of their classroom time and responsibilities. For many assistant principals, these responsibilities lie solely with them as opposed to being shared across the administrative team. Mary and Janet, the secondary administrators, both shared that their jobs almost completely revolved around discipline. Mary noted again the intersection of race and gender with discipline referrals.

Spending countless hours addressing discipline infractions limits the amount of time that APs can spend attending professional learning community meetings as well as conducting informal classroom observations. Often for newer administrators, conducting formal observations is a new process for them. Without the opportunity to informally visit classrooms and get a gauge of what classroom instruction looks like, it is harder to gain teachers' trust with the overall observation process which is a large part of an assistant principal's responsibilities.

Mary provided several examples when it seemed to her that students of color, regardless of their grade level assignments, were coming to her with discipline problems. At times, the students of color sought her out and other times, they were encouraged by other administrators or office staff to take their problems or concerns to Mary only. Mary recounted,

It is very disheartening to have students in my assigned grade level come to the office and I see them purposely waiting for my white counterpart. Even though I know that I should be addressing the situation, the counselors also encourage them to wait for the other [White] administrator. On the other hand, *any* Black student in the building I'm expected to be able to solve their problems and connect with them. This has been really hard to deal with, and it is sad. I have made it clear to the people who get to know me that I'm here to work with *all* students.

Mary's race and gender identity impacts which students her staff thinks she is best suited to assist. Mary knows that her skills are not limited to only supporting Black children. Through time and relationship, hopefully, she can convince her staff of that truth as well.

Student Discipline Responsibilities

Janet spoke at length about how surprised she was with the amount of discipline and classroom management issues that she had to deal with our daily basis. She has a master's degree in curriculum and instruction. Janet was very excited to begin her work as an instructional leader in her new role as a middle school assistant principal. She admits, "I really struggled for a chance to be an instructional leader in that building. It was so hard for me to get into classrooms because I was always dealing with discipline." Janet shared that almost daily her day was completely consumed with one discipline infraction after another. She also shared that on the rare occasion when she was able to conduct walkthroughs and give instructional feedback. it was not really received because she was a former elementary teacher and in a middle school setting. Janet recounts, "The middle school teachers quickly reminded me that they were not supposed to have to teach reading because the children should have already come in knowing how to read. They also were not fans of small group instruction." When Janet was able to share instructional

strategies, they were not well received because they were considered "elementary." Mary said, "I felt trapped in that office, between discipline and testing I felt like I never got to visit classrooms." The secondary APs spoke about discipline as a time constraint s far more than the elementary APs.

Impacts of COVID-19

There were countless challenges with working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic, but Anita and Mary were able to find some positive aspects as well. For Anita, transitioning to a new a school during remote learning meant a smoother transition than in a typical school year. Anita shared,

> I met with every single staff member individually and gave them a chance to get to know me and ask me questions. I asked them some questions and I talked about myself and tried to get to know each other as people before all the little ones came in and changed things.

The two newest assistant principals, Anita and Mary, with the least amount of experience pre COVID shared how COVID-19 and working remotely provided them with the opportunity to better connect with staff members and to learn their jobs in a different way. The participants have shared that it has been harder to get to know the families since the parents have had minimal opportunities to come in the school due to health and safety restrictions. Anita stated,

> It was well over a year before I got to meet most of our families. They really did not have a reason to come to the school. I delivered some learning packets but that's all the parent contact I had for a while.

The 2021-2022 school year was the first full year in the building, with no remote learning, for Anita and Mary. They acknowledged the stress, strain and strife that has also

accompanied the prolonged international health epidemic and how it impacts their work and how they show up to work. Anita observed,

> There's just this general fatigue that's mental and emotional and spiritual and physical. It impacts me probably on a daily basis, because I am struggling with wanting to give my all to this role and being completely drained each day. The word 'tired' is not enough to describe the weight and heaviness that I carry around, on top of the regular things in my job, like discipline, and parents, and transportation.

All participants acknowledged the tole the pandemic took on them both professionally and personally. Janet noted,

> As an AP, we are experiencing the pandemic right along with everyone else. This is new and hard for everyone. We want to be able to support the principal, students are returning with more needs and teachers are leaving. This is not like a regular time than any other APs have experienced before.

Ambiguous Responsibilities

COVID-19 also added to the severity of the ambiguous nature of the assistant principalship because there was no longer a thing called, "school as normal." Staff and students returned to schools with new needs and challenges that school leaders had to learn to address. An AP is an extremely important position for the success of a school. The assistant principals took all aspects of the school and their work and expertise, or lack thereof, can impact the entire building. One of my participants shared, "I feel like the assistant principalship is very undervalued. I feel like we are looked at as second-class citizens, but I feel like we could support the principals more if they would let us." This quote speaks to the illusive delineation of responsibilities. Some principals allow their APs to do "everything" while other principals only

delegate the unfavorable tasks. All participants could immediately give an example of when they were called to come and assist a parent, almost always a parent of color. Janet shared "I see our Black families come to the school, and I know how they feel, it has to be uncomfortable to be the only Black family at some of these parent meetings." It seemed that almost all the parent concerns coming from Black families were reserved for the Black assistant principal to address. Kenya acknowledged that, "I'm glad my principal gives me the change to do and see so much, but it really feels like a lot. Whenever I ask other APs if they are doing the same things as me, they almost always say no." Kenya's uncertainty about her role caused her to seek clarity and comparison from other assistant principals in her district and professional network.

Ambiguity Fuels Self-Doubt

The uncertainty of the job responsibilities made the participants unsure of they were doing their new jobs well, because they were not sure what their jobs really were. Often, time can be spent addressing the most immediate needs, but immediacy does not necessarily mean they are the most important tasks. I struggled with self-doubt as a new assistant principal because I received very limited feedback to confirm if I was or was not completing my tasks well. As a secondary math teacher, I felt out of my debt of expertise when I was observing elementary literacy lessons. Anita shared that her classroom teaching experiences were solely in Title One populations and schools that served the majority children of color. The school was she currently works serves over 80% White students. She reflected,

> I needed my internship to let me know that the skills that I had were not specific to Black and Brown children, but I was able to teach and to lead anyone. I did not feel that way before my internship.

Kenya did not mention any self-doubt with regard to her skills, but she did repeatedly mention the uncertainty she had about her role in the building and the degree to which she is expected to take on such a large range of leadership roles. Mary's self-doubt was not explicit and was more specific to her placement, while she feels she is currently in a place where she can learn, she does not plan to stay in this school long term.

Interpersonal Obstacles and Expectations

As a woman, a Black woman, and Black woman in leadership, the participants were keenly aware of the negative perceptions of a few of their colleagues. As a result, the need for continued professional development is that much more imperative. If a Black woman in leadership struggles with something, she anticipates that it will be attributed to her perceived ineptness as opposed to a lack of sufficient and specific training. There is a continued need for professional learning opportunities as well as semi- structured professional development and mentorship given the quantity and variety of tasks new school leaders are expected to master. Janet shared, "we only have two Black teachers in my building when I got there. Every interview we had I tried to work to find candidates of Color, because that is what our children need." Janet knew that the Black teachers were excited that she was now at their school, but she was nervous that the Black staff members thought they expected her to always agree with them and vice versa. Kenya was a teacher in the same building where she became an assistant principal, so she had some unique needs. Kenya reflects, "I had to focus on establishing who I was as a leader to the staff. And that was important to me, because I'd spent so much time with them as a fellow teacher."

Coming from classroom teacher positions, brand new assistant principals likely have not had experience with organizing and executing standardized state testing, school wide parent

communication, serving as an LEA in an IEP meeting, resolving conflicts between adults, and additional tasks that they will likely encounter within their first year on the job. Multiple participants shared that the information they received from their school districts was not sufficient for them to feel prepared and successful. All participants shared how they must reach out to people directly to learn more about their current role and the expectations of their jobs. Anita shared,

> I need to develop myself as a leader right now. I don't know if I have the energy for that. I don't know if that is just because of this [pandemic] season or not, but I can't go home at night and learn new things every day like I did as a teacher.

Anita noted that the demands of learning her job while already being expected to perform at or above standard left little time for her to seek out additional professional development on her own.

All participants spoke of how they created their own support groups and networks to help them cope with the stresses of their job as well as seek the expertise of others to learn how to address the daily challenges and expectations of this new leadership role. Anita says she meets monthly with friends from her graduate school cohort who are other African American women serving in various grade levels and school districts across the state and beyond. Mary found support through her larger network of professional connections such as North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) and other educator specific groups of which she is a member. Mary serves in a leadership role on some of these committees and that allows her a chance to learn from and share her experiences with other women leaders of color across the state. Kenya made a support group of colleagues of Black women who are leaders within her school as well as her community. Kenya acknowledged that, "moving to North Carolina made me learn to

communicate and to build a support system here with so much of my family outside of the state."

She shared that her school district currently does not have many Black women assistant

principals with whom she can forge a connection, so she chose to broaden her circle to other

Black women educators in a variety of leadership roles.

Theme 3: Support Systems are Essential to Overcoming the Obstacles of the Transition

Process

Professional Supports

When asked about networking opportunities with other leaders in her district or potential

principals that could hire her, Anita shared, "networking does not come naturally to me and I

haven't seen it work out for me in that sense. I feel like I have seen it work for other people

because they finesse their way [into rooms and groups] differently, but that's not my story." In

the same vein, Anita shared how her faith and her willingness to participate in Principal Fellows

activities gave her more natural opportunities to meet current school leaders than attempting to

join multiple social organizations or to create a large social media presence to gain recognition.

Anita shared that despite the challenges she had with interviewing and securing the "right fit"

she has finally found the right fit in her current school and administrative team. Anita had

multiple positive examples of how her principal has supported her, challenged her, and

encouraged her in her first year as an AP. Anita stated,

> I just feel like this is where I fit and this is where I belong. This [school] is where I'm
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> supposed to be, even though it wouldn't have been my first choice, and it wouldn't have
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> been my choice to go through what I had gone through. I wouldn't have believed that I
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> was worthy or even good enough to go to a school like this. I have embraced this
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> community and they have really embraced me.

Anita's staff made her feel a part of the community and her principal's support and modeling was a key component in the staff treating her so well. Anita shared, "I'm really good at building relationships but my principal's trust in me made it easier for the staff to trust me too." Anita's experiences are congruent with the findings of researchers such as Jean-Marie et al., (2009) explaining that women of Color are excluded from formal and informal networks that can directly impact their professional mobility. Kenya did not have a formal professional network. She gave herself credit with being a hard worker and being willing to take professional risks. Mary chose to make connections within other professional networks, but not within her school. As one of only female administrator in her building, she knew it was important to look for collaboration and support outside of her building. Mary's experience as a "double outsider" was evident because there were little to no opportunities for her to naturally network with district leaders that would be able to hire her or present new opportunities, had she not intentionally connected through professional networking opportunities. Janet did not participate in any formal networking events. Being in a rural district gave her the chance to connect with district level leadership because of the small knit community. When she switched schools from one AP position to another, it was a change of placement, she did not have to interview for a new position.

Peer Supports

All participants shared how important it was to not only have a supportive group, but to have a supportive group that shared their racial and gender identities. This key detail was important because some of the challenges and experiences they wanted support with were those that were specific to them as African American women assistant principals. There were few formal opportunities to connect with other African American women within their districts, but

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most of the participants were able to find connection with someone who shared their racial and gender identities. Anita said mentioned,

> The younger women in my cohort were meeting monthly, though we haven't done it in a while. We would come together and do whatever, sometimes eat dinner but mostly we talk about whatever is going on in our schools, you know, no judgment.

> Janet did not have any formal meetings with other women of color in her school district. Kenya maintained a strong relationship with one of the assistant principals that previously served her school and that person became a principal. Mary, the networker, found several ways to connect with other leaders, particularly Black women. Mary said, "I read any leadership book I could find, and any book about Black women in leadership or written by Black women leaders."

As a new assistant principal, my school district offered monthly meetings with all assistant principals within the district. These meetings were seen as high priority to attend, and the school principals ensured all the APs attended. The topics of the PD were somewhat repetitive as the years went on, but the camaraderie and the commiseration were priceless. Being able to meet with other assistant principals on a regular basis gave me access to more experienced assistant principals that I felt comfortable asking questions and being vulnerable. There was also an experienced African American AP in my district when I began my role. She made a conscious effort to check on me, invite me to lunch, and send me reminders about the tasks we were supposed to complete. She also helped me to integrate into the smaller, unofficial AP professional learning community (PLC). Once the AP team developed a friendship, we would initiate communication with one another outside of the district scheduled meetings and we became a functional PLC.

Assistant principal allocations are determined by the student population. Most elementary schools have far fewer students than their feeder high schools. As a result, there are fewer elementary assistant principals in each school, if at all. The principal and assistant principal relationship is imperative; it is one of the most important partnerships within the school. If the principal and assistant principle are not on the same page the whole school will suffer examples of this include the two leaders having different expectations for the students and staff as well as having different discipline consequences or different criteria for teacher evaluations. Without a supportive principal the traditional transitional challenges are exacerbated. Leadership styles and level of comfort with an assistant principal also impacts the transition for APs. Mary shared,

> When we are one on one, I speak to my principal as candidly as possible. I always worry about stepping over toes. I don't want to seem disrespectful, but I want to know what he is thinking and how he processes through certain things, so I can learn to 'think like a principal' too.

Having these informative conversations with the principal helps to create consistency across the leadership team and gives Mary the confidence to make tough decisions in the event her principal is off campus or one day when she becomes a principal.

Anita seemed to have the most consistent positive experiences with her principal. There is a sense of collaboration and trust. Anita stated, "Early in my first year, my principal told me, 'I trust your leadership.' That allowed me to be myself, my full self, and embrace all the extraness that comes with me." Another factor is when the principal and assistant principal are both new to the school. They have to find ways to honor the past while creating new systems and procedures.

In my first few years as an assistant principal, my principal and I worked parallel to one another; There were few times when our work intersected. There was minimal expectations of

mentorship or collaboration. She completed her necessary tasks, and I completed mine. I asked for feedback when I got stuck or was unsure how to address a particular situation. We did not have weekly or monthly administrative team meetings. As a result, I began seeking support from leaders within the school and other district leaders. Since I served in the same district as a principal intern, I reached out to other leaders I previously knew from being an intern. I did not want to "bother" my principal; I am sure she assumed that since I did not have any questions I was doing fine. My transition could have been smoother had we both been more explicit in our expectations of one another and communicated more often with one another. Transitions bring about a certain level of uncertainty. Learning how to work closely with a new leader and learning a new role can be stressful. That stress was exacerbated exponentially when schools went to fully remote instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Personal Supports

All of the participants believed their families are an essential part of their support networks. All of these women are married, and they shared that their spouses were huge supporters. Through their entire professional journeys, their families were key supporters. Kenya quickly shared, "there is no way I could have done any of this without my husband. Having most of our family living several states away made us really become a strong support system." Mary shared that she got married while she was pursuing her graduate degree and that added a significant layer of multiple life changes and transitions happening simultaneously Janet said, "I come from a family of educators. Knowing that they were there for me and willing to help me made me think that I could actually do this." Having a family of educators provided a more specific level of support. Janet's relatives were able to give her encouragement as well as insights based on their experiences as educators at the school and district levels.

Professional transitions can be scary for anyone. Leaving a role where one has succeeded to go to a place of uncertainty can cause doubt and fear. The interviewing process for these potential school leaders was challenging and discouraging. Most participants witness peers of a different race and or gender hired faster than they were. Repeated rejections negatively impacted their confidence. Once the participants were hired to assistant principals' role, they were challenged with learning what their job expectations were, how to do their jobs, and how to work collaboratively as a part of an administrative team. Race and gender impacted the participants professional lives in many ways.

Theme 4: Intersectionality Impacts Daily Leadership Tasks and Experiences with Colleagues

Reflection on Race and Gender in Early Leadership

The final round of interviews focused on race, gender, and the intersectionality of the two. By this time in the interview process, I had built a rapport with all research participants and I felt that we were able to go deeper into workplace scenarios than I would have been able to do at our first meeting. Each participant had examples of when they were explicitly made aware of their race, gender, or intersecting identities within their workplace. Through my questions and prompting, I was able to allow them to reflect upon how they were treated and or challenged as a result of their race and gender. When asked to reflect, Janet shared,

> I just feel like the Lone Ranger sometimes because you're outcast by both groups of people, white people and by black people. If you speak up and really say what is true the White people don't want to hear it and the other Black people are too afraid to say it, and it is so frustrating.

Race and or gender impacted how a situation was handled or how a conversation went and how the participants chose to engage with others. Kenya, for example, shared the stress and mental turmoil that accompanies being a black woman in leadership. She speaks of the need to censor herself consciously and continuously for the sake of not appearing "angry" all the time. By her own admission, Kenya is naturally a straightforward person, and she takes pride in not mincing words that could be perceived by colleagues as confrontational or difficult. Kenya did reflect and say, "I have to be mindful I have to be intentional in my tone in my body language. Critical feedback is given that sort of some that is viewed as a personal attack to them." Kenya also shared that by continuing to build her personal equity toolbox she could engage in more critical conversations with staff members to explain how race and racialized expressions show up in their workplaces. Kenya's personal knowledge of crucial conversations strategies helped her to challenge colleague's offensive statements in a constructive manner. Kenya felt she was "able to give voice to scenarios that previously she may not have spoken up about. Crucial conversations are not always comfortable, but they are often necessary."

Janet gave an example of consciously navigated school data discussions. She was very mindful of what she shared and how she presented information because staff members commented about how the administration seemed to have a "pro-Black" agenda-meaning that staff members had alluded to her being only concerned with helping Black students as opposed to recognizing that Black students at their school had the most room for academic growth. Janet recalled,

> Our school has made growth and all of our student demographics have shown growth but our African American students were not growing at the same rate as everyone else. So

why would it be a problem for me to tell my staff that? A few people made it seem like

we [the principal and AP] are only worried about the Black kids.

This is one of many examples where participants shared how their race and gender impacts how

staff members relate to them and the expectations that staff members have of them, whether

positive or negative.

Mary had an interesting view on her professional experiences and role within her building. Mary

explained,

They have no problem with you being experienced and knowledgeable as long as it

makes the school look good [at the district level]. The minute you push back and imply

that we aren't doing everything we are supposed to be doing, it becomes a problem.

Mary recognized that her teaching experiences in larger districts gave her exposure to a variety

of professional development that the leaders in the rural district did not have. Her fellow school

leaders were more than willing to allow her to lead presentations for teachers outside her

building, but they were not receptive when Mary mentioned that they were not yet implementing

these same best practices within their classrooms.

Anita recalled an interaction with a family she had in the school office. A family member

came to came to check out a student for early dismissal. Anita said,

When grandma said the little girl's name, I immediately knew who she was, and I told the

receptionist the child's teacher so she could call the class. Grandma then said to me, 'O,

you must be her teacher assistant." Really? I couldn't be the teacher, or the counselor?

And I definitely couldn't be the assistant principal, huh? Of course, I didn't say any of

that to grandma, but I wanted her to know that Black women do not always have to be the

assistants in the class.

Black Woman as the Leader

Half of the participants shared how they feel that their race has been more challenging for their colleagues than their gender. Elementary educators are overwhelmingly women (Weisberg, D. (2020). As a result, a woman in an elementary setting is a part of the majority. Janet shared that when worked alongside African American women principals, she felt better able to speak openly with those leaders than with others. She felt that the African American female principals understood her more and she expressed that the African American principals shared a goal of ensuring that the African American students were successful and scoring at similar rates as their white peers. Kenya recounts her early career experiences in the larger urban school district. She states, "one thing that stuck out to me about that school was the fact that we had Black women as principals, teachers, and leaders all throughout the building. That was powerful to see everyday"

Gender Roles in Leadership

Mary, the only participant with work experience in corporate America made a clear connection about how some aspects of school leadership are expected for women and how other aspects are more expected for men, regardless of race. Mary noted,

> People did not have a problem with me as long as I was planning a party or creating a spirit day -that is what they always expected of me as the only female on the leadership team. When it came time for me to call a school lockdown or to talk about construction and building maintenance people were surprised at how much I knew and did not expect me to be the one [on the administrative team] taking the lead on those type of projects.

In the same way that the new administrators need to be mindful about having a balance of instructional and managerial duties, they could also benefit from a balance of social and safety planning. Typically, assistant principals organize safety drills such as the required tornado and

fire drills but there are other aspects of school safety and maintenance that may fall to the principal or other leaders in the building. Anita's principal is also a woman, so she did not have examples of experiences with gendered leadership expectations.

"Angry Black Woman"

I purposely did not ask any questions specific to being perceived as an "angry Black woman" because I did not want to sway my research towards a negative bend. I did not want to assume, despite what is stated in the literature, (Holley, 2021; Hill Collins, 2000) that all Black women have had negative experiences with colleagues' perceptions of their voice, tone, and perceived "attitudes." Unfortunately, in each interview, the participants thought of instance after instance where they have felt that they were being perceived as an angry black woman Anita spoke of an example of a derogatory comment a colleague made towards her, so derogatory that she would not repeat it during the interview. Anita explained,

> Nowadays everybody got to say something about everything. And you know, sometimes you wish you could just tell people to 'shut up' but I've got to figure out the best way to navigate these battles. I guess it goes back to deciding which hills you are willing to die on. Sometimes I address it and sometimes I don't. I try to look at the bigger picture. Do I question myself? Did I say too much? Did I say too little? I question that all the time.

> When reflecting on how she chose to respond, she was frustrated with herself for not speaking out against the insult, but she knew that she had little to gain by feeding into the notion of being the "angry Black woman." Her colleague may or may not have intended for his remark to be offensive, but it was. In that moment, as a school leader, Anita had to decide if she would respond to this insult from a place of offense, from a place of teaching a teacher a better way, or

not respond at all. Anita mentioned that she did not want to respond in a way that would "confirm his negative assumptions."

It is challenging to navigate each interaction daily. However, the concern is that instead of being seen as the "angry Black woman," Black women can become silenced for fear of negative stereotypes. Anita also shared that she struggled to decide if she was going to address this situation at all because of the frequency with which negative interactions happen. She did not want to spend all her time in her building fighting one microaggression after another. A common consequence of the "angry Black woman" is fatigue. It is exhausting for Black women to have the additional layer of mental turmoil to determine if what they are saying, doing, or wearing will be deemed as offensive by someone. This additional mental toll is on top of a demanding job that impacts many people.

One aspect of the proverbial "angry Black woman" that I was not expecting was when Janet shared how her Black colleagues made her feel like the angry Black woman just as much as her White colleagues. By serving in the same area for her whole career, Janet had insights into the lives of her colleagues in a unique way. She knew many of them on a personal level and over many years.

> I feel that some of our African American assistant principals are not being true to who they are. We grew up together and this is not who you are. You are saying what you think your white constituents want you to say. So, when I say something and admit that things aren't perfect, y'all make me look like the 'Angry Black woman.'

All participants shared a strong sense of purpose, specifically being Black woman assistant principals. They recognized how important it was for them to be educators, school

leaders, and role models for other children of color. Participants said they felt a shared sense of purpose and passion with educating serving and protecting children.

Making a Difference for Families and Children of Color

Three of the four participants have children of their own and they all made a reference to how they think about their students in their schools the same way they think about their own children and the impact that their leadership and guidance has on the lives of these young people. Janet recounted how her personal children fondly remembered their school principals as students. Kenya drew upon her secondary experience when she spoke about her purpose in serving children, particularly children of color. Kenya shared,

> Working in a community setting had reminded me of the many hurtles that Black and
> Brown children can go through in life and what it looks like for the as young adults.
> Know this system was not set up for them to succeed, so I asked myself, 'What can I do
> to help them navigate these challenges?'

For centuries, African American women have cared for other people's children as their own. Mothering is another aspect of the intersectional identity that the participants shared. These school leaders chose to allow their maternal instincts to be evident in their work and make a difference in how they chose to lead as well as how they related to their respective school communities.

Anita recognized that each interaction with a family is an opportunity to make a connection, meet a need, and help to continue to build bridges in the community. Anita said that even nonverbal communication communicates to families their value and the fact that we are all working together to help children. Anita said, "it's about your body language and how you talk to people and making them feel like they are important. You have to show folks that your time is

for them right there in that moment." Mary shared how much the students of color make remarks about her fashion and how she dresses; she mentioned "they really do notice everything, the notice my hair, my shoes, everything. But if that gets them talking to me about something positive, I'm here for it."

Faith and Purpose Aligned

All research participants talked about their faith and how important their faith was to them staying encouraged enough to continue the interview process and as well as their continued day-to-day work as a school leader. Anita reflected,

> Despite how hard the days get God keeps sending his little messengers to let you know that you are doing a good job. A teacher may leave you a nice note or a child may come and hug you and tell you they like being with you.

> Three of the four participants shared how challenging it was to stay encouraged between the interviews. The sense of faith and purpose propelled them to endure the interview process. After multiple rounds of interviews and traveling to different school districts across the state, the candidates shared that they were discouraged and began to second guess the decision to leave the classroom.

The participants shared that their faith helped them to stay connected to their family and help them to find purpose in their work. All women that were interviewed shared how they have been able to make positive impacts for children of color in their current roles. When speaking about children, particularly African American children, almost all of the participants became emotional during our interviews. Anita had to pause for a moment to answer a question because she was overcome with emotion as she was speaking about how important she felt her work was as a school leader and what a difference it made for students. Another commonality these women

had was their ability to think long term about their students' lives. Each administrator gave examples of how their work would impact their students when they became high schoolers as well as adults preparing to lead independent lives. I thought that was noticeable because most of them are elementary school leaders, but they continue to reference the ways in which children and adults of color are treated in the United States and how important it is for them to have explicit instructions on how to navigate a racialized and at times a very divided America.

Sense of Belonging

There is a steep learning curve from leaving the classroom and moving int a leadership role. Despite the best graduate school preparation, there is a need for consistent and specific professional development. During the transition from the classroom to school leadership, Anita admits that she and some of her fellow graduate colleagues continued to meet on a quarterly basis to commiserate over their first experiences as new assistant principals. Anita reflected, "I am the only assistant principal at my school so I don't have a colleague and of course you can't tell your principal everything and you definitely can't tell the teachers everything." Multiple participants recognized that it is essential to have a sense of belonging in their new schools. It is challenging to establish yourself as a leader as well as become a trusted member of the school. In many placed, there is still a very clear division between the teachers and the administrators, somewhat of an "us vs. them" mentality. As a new leader, people may be more guarded when interacting with the new assistant principal. There is also a sense of waiting to build up faith and confidence in the leader. Janet mentioned, "I know my staff like me. I know they appreciate me, but I think it is more about what I can do for them and how I can help out than caring about who I am as a person."

Schools that experience significant turnover are even more reluctant to build relationships with new school administrators because the teachers anticipate that the new administrator will not stay at the school long term. Another challenge to the sense of belonging comes from following a well-beloved leader. If a school has recently lost a beloved leader, it takes longer for the staff to be receptive to the new school leader that is joining the team. The amount of time it takes for new staff members to feel incorporated into the school community varies from one person to another. Kenya had the opposite experience, "there was some conflict around the AP that left before me. Since I was a teacher at the school already, I knew about what happened and most of the teachers were glad to see me in the AP position."

Mary said, "It was really important to have somebody outside of the building and outside of the district that would not look at me crazy if I said 'I'm struggling. This is hard.'" Mary took it upon herself to find a place of belonging and to allow herself to pursue the connection of other like-minded women in the field of education. Mary, the second career educator, recognized what was needed and took the necessary steps to meet that need. Of the four participants, Mary is the only participant who shared that she does not yet feel a true sense of belonging at her current school. The lack of a sense of belonging in her school may contribute to the reason that she is felt such a need to solicit colleagues and belonging in other spaces.

It was approximately my fourth year as an assistant principal when I finally felt a sense of belonging. I felt more confident and competent in my work. By this time, I was able to determine my professional strengths and invest time and energy in learning more about those strengths. I had a better understanding of how to relate to my principal. I knew her strengths and I had a better understanding of her goals. Unfortunately, another key aspect of me developing a sense of belonging was resigning to my place in the proverbial school hierarchy. The fourth year was

when I finally decided that I could not force people to like me, value me, or respect me. I had to choose to focus on the majority of people who respected me and valued me and concentrate my attention on doing my best every day instead of concentrating so much energy on trying to prove to people that I was a good administrator. I also reaffirmed my commitment to spend as much time in classrooms as possible. Choosing to focus on instruction and children's growth gave me the emotional connection and affirmation that I needed to continue in the role.

Anita shared, "it's a powerful place and season that I'm in right now even though this job wears me out mentally, physically, and emotionally. I know I'm also in a very powerful place right now and I would not change it for any other place."

Mary shared, "I feel alone a lot of the times, in my building and in my county." She shared that there were few African American women throughout the district, and even fewer who were assistant principals and she shared that there lacked opportunities to network and build connections with *any* assistant principals in her district.

When asked about the sense of belonging as a new assistant principal, Janet reflected and said, "I've come a long way, I've come through a whole lot and I've survived it all." As we were concluding one of the interviews, I realized that Janet's reflection accurately captured the sentiment of many of the participants. There were ups and downs, highs and lows, but the resounding common theme is survival- they all survived a global pandemic, family challenges, completing an advanced degree, and securing a new position in school leadership. The sense of purpose that is required to continue to press on was evident.

Despite all the challenges of the transitions, the participants were glad that they left the classroom and accepted these leadership roles. Some participants reflected on their own children's futures and all participants were focused on students' futures and outcomes.

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Ultimately, almost all participants found a sense of belonging in their current work and school building. That sense of belong was built through faith, support, and persistence. However, the assistant principal role is transitional in nature. The skills learned during the assistant principal transition will likely be beneficial in the near future. All four women shared that they are anticipating making another professional transition within the next one to five years. Their challenges and successes within this current professional transition can serve as a unique learning opportunity to better prepare them for upcoming professional transitions in the future.

Summary

The findings of the study show the factors that contribute to a successful professional transition within the education field. Participants shared how their classroom experiences and success encouraged them to pursue a new role as a school leader. All classroom experiences and successes do not automatically translate to becoming a successful assistant principal. Continued professional development specific to the needs of new school administrators will help new leaders to have the confidence and competence to stay in their new roles. Despite the challenges of funding a graduate degree, and countless rounds of interviews they were able to secure school leadership positions. Support from family and colleagues helped to combat the challenges and ambiguity of the responsibilities of a new job. A deep connection with the community and the children they served was essential to all school leaders pursuing the transition and staying in their new leadership roles.

Chapter V addresses the research questions and outlines implications for school leaders, district leaders and future researchers as a result of the findings presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER V: REFLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In my first year as an assistant principal, I was not prepared for the transition. I went home from work daily questioning my purpose, my preparation, and my position. After the excitement of a new job wore off, I was confronted with the new level of responsibility and what I perceived as a grave inadequacy on my part. As an assistant principal, I did not want to take my job lightly, and I wanted to make a positive impact. My nerves and self-doubt impacted my daily work on new levels.

Self-doubt was coupled with a hyper-awareness of my race. The lack of confidence and lack of validation created a spiral of over-performance that led to burnout. I attribute the need to constantly keep proving myself to the lack of diverse representation within the school. There were so few Black people in most areas of my leadership work. I was one of the only Black people at the school improvement or parent teacher organization meetings. For countless interviews, I was the only face of color. This was a heavy weight to bear and it created a drive that was beyond my ability to maintain. It was not until the last few years of my assistant principalship that I felt any sense of praise or recognition from my staff and leadership.

After a few years as an assistant principal, I could tell I had to be doing *something* right because newer APs and some district leaders started asking me to help them with special projects. As a new school administrator, I wish I knew that most administrators had an adjustment period before they felt settled and comfortable in their work. I felt inferior, and I felt that my challenges were only specific to me. These personal experiences shaped my decision to conduct this research study.

Another motivating factor for this topic was the lack of research about assistant principals of color, relative to teachers and principals of Color. I chose to focus on assistant principals

because assistant principals are inherently in a transition. I also chose this role because of my personal experiences as an AP. APs are not only transitioning from the classroom, but they are also preparing to transition to another role in the future. For many assistant principals, the AP role is merely a short intermission on the way to the principalship or district-level leadership. Transitions are inevitable, but they are rarely given the attention they deserve. As a new assistant principal, it was very evident to me that there were supports that I needed that would have made my transition easier. I wondered what this transition was like for other African American women. Many times, African American women are relegated to serving in assisting roles, despite their qualifications. Early in my career, I knew I desired to lead beyond the classroom and the assistant principalship felt like the next step. Reaching the AP position required an additional degree and licensure. I received a scholarship that allowed me to leave the classroom and be a full-time graduate student with a full-time principal internship. If I had to fund the degree on my own, it would have been years before I felt financially secure enough to pay for a graduate program.

I wondered if other African American women experienced similar things as I did when leaving the classroom. I also wanted to learn what strategies might be helpful in the transitional phases of their careers that would provide African American women with the level of professional autonomy they desired. My research helped to inform some of the challenges and successes of the transitional process while recognizing that the assistant principalship is one of the most common gateways to additional school and district leadership opportunities.

After determining my desired topic, conducting a literature review, and presenting a research proposal, I began the interview process. I intentionally framed my interview protocol in a way that would elicit honest responses but that was not bent toward negative experiences or

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excluded positive experiences. Throughout the interview process, the four participants provided many stories about their experiences as students, teachers, and school leaders as Black women. Their insights helped to answer the research questions and to inform future research as well as inform practices of school district to better support women leaders during transition.

In addition to including pertinent reflections, this final chapter provides an overview of key findings and a critical analysis of the findings in light of how prior knowledge of theoretical frameworks helped me make sense of the findings. I also provide recommendations for implementation of change and offer ideas for future research. While this study adds to the current body of literature specific to assistant principals, there is still more to learn about the AP role, the AP needs and the unique challenges of employees of color in school leadership.

Summary of Key Findings

Uncertainty within the role was a common challenge for all participants. At times they felt excluded from the "real" work of school leadership and only used more as a Dean of Students to address behavioral concerns and transportation management. Participants felt they were excluded from decision making opportunities and that they did not experience the vastness of the role of the AP. All participants acknowledged their excitement and desire to continue serving in public education, despite the obstacles they faced. They felt a great sense of purpose and fulfillment when working with all children and seeing Students of Color succeed because of their presence. For most participants, there was a personal connection to their desire to work in public education. Anita shared that she thought she could only be successful in schools in high poverty communities. Anita's new role as a school leader at a non-Title One school helped to build her confidence and remind her that she is a capable and effective leader for *all* students.

Like the participants in Griffin and Tackie's (2016) research, the participants shared how their presence in their respective schools positively impacted children of color within their buildings.

When I coded the data, administrative team roles and responsibilities were a significant topic for all participants in both rounds of interviews. According to Cohen and Schechter (2019) the assistant principal is referred to as "the forgotten leader." Cohen and Schechter acknowledge the level of variations within the AP duties from one building to another and the quantity of tasks that APs are responsible for that tangentially relate to student achievement. The AP tasks directly relate to maintaining a safe and orderly school as well as a positive learning environment. The ambiguity of the assistant principalship has been used to ask assistant principals to cover responsibilities that they may yet be prepared to take on. Principals can delegate tasks as they see fit and use a skilled assistant principal to their advantage. Oftentimes, school tasks can be presented to new APs as "learning opportunities" but can be beyond an APs scope of experience.

The assistant principals with more experience noted times when their principals offered them additional, often undesirable, leadership opportunities that they felt they could not refuse because it would be seen as not being a team player. There is a fine line between serving as a supervisor by providing access to professional networks that could lead to promotions and taking advantage of eager young professionals who want to make a good impression on their superiors. These new roles and responsibilities are often touted as preparing the AP for the principalship, though these additional responsibilities rarely result in a principalship for Black women (Winters, 2020). This is further discussed in my recommendations for school principals.

The assistant principalship is a challenging role in any school. There is a great level of ambiguity, a high level of needs, and a steep learning curve from leaving the classroom to transitioning to school leadership. These experiences are exacerbated for women of color when

they are not always set up for success. Often when women of Color are chosen to lead, it is during a challenging time, at a demanding school, or during a transition from one leader to the next (Peters, 2012). As a result, women of Color are not always set up for success as leaders.

There are some needs that are universal for new assistant principals. There are other needs that are unique to African American women; both sets of needs must be addressed for African American women to be successful in their new roles. The responsibilities can be nebulous, and the job can be very isolating (Armstrong, 2009). Leaving from a classroom role where teachers make up 90% of the staff in school to go to an assistant principal role where that person is likely the only one with their job title in that building is it significant shift.

Assistant principals are simultaneously learning their current job while preparing for their next role. All four of my participants said that they were preparing for their next professional transition after an average of three years in the AP role. Knowing that all participants are already planning their next steps highlights the imperative of building in the necessary support and ensuring that the transition process is as smooth as possible for the women who choose to make future career transitions.

The Importance of Teacher-Leader Roles

Participants shared that seeing themselves as teacher leaders was an essential part of encouraging them to move forward in school leadership. They also shared how one or two supervisors and mentors were central to providing leadership opportunities and identifying leadership skills the participants did not recognize they possessed. Research continues to show that African American teachers are often dismissed and not seen as capable as their peers (Griffin & Tackie, 2016). Through serving as teacher leaders, the participants gained confidence in their leadership abilities. For Janet, rearranging the carpool traffic flow was a key indicator

that she was able to create and implement systems that positively impacted the school. Having school leaders create or extend leadership opportunities to these Black women allowed their peers to see them as capable, competent, and committed to having a successful school community. Mary's principal allowed her to serve on multiple interview panels which helped her to develop skills in human resources as well as helping her to speak up in decision making processes after she became an assistant principal.

Some teachers begin their careers and plan to stay in the classroom long term. Other teachers began their careers with an end goal of leadership in one capacity or another. School leaders and supervisors play a direct role in continuing to fortify leadership pipelines with the qualified and caring leaders that all children deserve. The choice to leave the classroom and become a school administrator is not one that any of the participants took lightly. Each participant expressed how she made sure to solicit the support of her family before making such a significant professional move.

Obstacles During the Transition Process

Unfortunately, all participants experienced obstacles along their path to their first assistant principal position. Educational debt is a significant deciding factor in returning to school and getting an advanced degree (Fiddiman, 2020). Early on, the participants had to determine how to fund the advanced degree as well as complete all internship and licensure requirements. Half of the participants were recipients of a state scholarship program that allowed them to have a full year, full time internship. While the internship was extremely beneficial for hands-on learning, the internship commitment did not allow them to work though they did receive a stipend. Funding the advanced degree played a large role in when and if these

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participants chose to attend graduate school. The choice of going back to school impacted each family financially.

After the participants completed all their academic requirements for their principal licenses, the next step was to find an assistant principal job. The participants shared how the interview process was daunting, overly formal, and very discouraging. Despite having the credentials and the experience necessary to perform the AP tasks, there was a certain air of performance and ambiguity that accompanied the interview process. Even when the women were established teachers within their districts, they still experienced multiple rounds of interviews. One participant shared that she interviewed fifteen times, over almost two years, before she became an assistant principal. After several rounds of interviews and months of waiting, all participants secured a position.

Once the participants secured their first assistant principalship, they recognized a gap between what they expected their job to be like and what they experienced. As recent classroom teachers, they knew the value of being in the classroom and supporting instructional decisions and academic growth for students. Sadly, their early days were filled with managing discipline infractions instead of supporting instruction. It was rare that the participants could spend time in classrooms, except for their required formal classroom observations. Unclear job expectations and outcomes make it more challenging to know which tasks deserved greater priority.

In addition to having a significant amount of their time filled with discipline infractions, the participants did not feel prepared for other aspects of their role such as leading special education meetings, resolving staff conflicts, and addressing parent concerns. Targeted professional development is needed for all assistant principals and especially new assistant principals. New APs would benefit from clarity on the school and district expects of them.

Intersecting Racial and Gender Identities

Day-to-day interactions with teachers, other leaders, and the administrative team reminded the participants of their racial and gender identities and how the intersection of those two identities impact how people view them and their leadership. Some African American colleagues expected that they would always agree with the African American assistant principal, because they shared the same race and that the AP would always side with them. Other colleagues felt that the African American assistant principals were able to solve all problems for all children of color simply because they shared the same race. Participants also experienced leaders in district positions who were dismissive of the African American assistant principal's contributions because of their race and/or gender. Participants felt ignored or that they were only recognized when it made their school seem attractive to district leadership. One participant experienced her staff members' accusations that the AP did not have the best interest of all students at heart, only students of Color. All of the participants' interactions were shaped by how they showed up to their schools, as African American women in leadership. While none of my participants spoke of having their authority questioned by staff, or staff being dismissive of their directives, that is also a challenge that African American women in leadership face. When examining the responses of the participants through an intersectional lens, four common racial tropes were present.

A Deeper Analysis of Findings

Throughout the research process, I spent a lot of time reflecting and jotting notes in my notebook. Most exciting to me were the "aha" moments when participants' comments would remind me of theoretical frameworks that I had learned about during my graduate studies. For example, there were many times that Derrick Bell's (1980) work on critical race theory (CRT)

came to mind as well as the works of prominent Black feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins (2002). Since my research objective was to discover and describe, I did not enter the research setting with a critical theoretical framework in hand. Rather, I embraced an emergent design that qualitative research is known for. But, while making sense of all I have learned, I now draw upon my prior knowledge and examine the findings in light of critical frameworks that came to mind so often during the research process.

Insights from Critical Race Theory

Recently, critical race theory has become a buzzword in the education sector. Many have used the term critical race theory to attempt to ban books, adjust curriculum, and make other complaints about how race, racism, and history are taught within schools. Critical race theory (CRT) is not a curriculum or a course of study, nor it is a new concept (Sawchuk, 2021). Most broadly, "the critical race theory movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 2). Critical race theory has roots in the legal system and began in the 1970s. Lawyers and legal scholars saw a need to continue to work to continue to progress made during the civil rights movement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

The major components or tenets of CRT that I was reminded of during this study include: (1) the notion that racism is so common most people do not notice it; (2) the idea that those in power will allow minoritized people to have additional rights so long as they do not impinge upon white privilege (interest convergence); (3) the social construction of race, or how those in power decide what skin tone denotes about a person; (4) the importance of counter-storytelling; that is, ensuring the voices of those impacted by racism are heard (as interpreted by Delgado &

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Stefancic, 2017). Taken together, Harris (1993), a contemporary of Derrick Bell, wrote about how whiteness, as an identity, is a form of property that holds value.

Whiteness as Property

Whiteness is the idea that White supremacy is so embedded in the American culture that it is rarely seen without explicit exposure and targeted attention. Whiteness is so commonplace that it is rarely questioned. Whiteness, and the power that accompanies it, is also something to be protected in the same sense that physical property is protected (Delgado, 2009). Mansfield (2015) draws upon Harris's (1993) definition of whiteness as property to better conceptualize what whiteness can produce and how it is used in schools; for example, the privilege of advanced coursework and entry into gifted programs. According to Mansfield (2015) one aspect of whiteness is the ability to use whiteness as a form of collateral; "It is something that can both be experienced and deployed as a resource. (Mansfield, 2015, p. 3)

In schools across America, it is rarely questioned why most of the classroom teachers are White. University enrollments for teacher education programs are overwhelmingly populated with over 70% white female students (TNTP, 2020). Choosing to focus my research on solely African American participants and their stories was very intentional and counter to much long-term research that is conducted on education. As a Black woman speaking with other Black women, I believe I gained true insights and reflections and perspectives from what they experienced. The research participants were able to share their experiences in a conversational manner. I was able to make connections based on some of my similar professional experiences as the participants.

Mary spoke significantly about the racial composition of interview teams and the schools' current administrative teams. She felt that schools were not as open to having multiple

Black leaders as they were to having multiple White leaders. Mary felt that the racial composition of the existing administrative team negatively impacted her chances to secure an assistant principalship at certain schools. Conversely, having an administrative team with all White leaders is not questioned. Finding a school administrative team with all Black administrators is far less likely, unless the school's population is almost all Black students.

Applying a critical race theory lens causes one to question why whiteness is so pervasive and so often accepted as the norm. I offered a platform for my participants' voices to be heard and accepted at face value. The participants did not have to explain away or rationalize what they felt and experienced. They did not have to placate me or others. They trusted that their anonymity I offered through this research process would allow them to speak freely and provide a springboard for other women of color who are entering school leadership roles.

Interest Convergence

Interest convergence speaks to People of Color and other oppressed groups being offered opportunities if and only if that opportunity is of equal or greater benefit to their White counterparts. From my research, Anita's school had never had an African American leader in the school's over one-hundred-year history. Anita possesses all the necessary skills, experiences, and dispositions to deserve this role. However, the national racial unrest and local voting constituents could have impacted district leaders' urgency to hire a more diverse leadership staff at this current juncture in time.

Interest convergence was also present when Mary's colleagues chose to only allow her to address problems with African American students as opposed to all students within her assigned grade level. Multiple participants shared how their principals were more than willing to allow them to take the lead when communicating with parents of Color but with any other type of

communication the principal made a clear distinction between the roles of the AP and the principal. In most other school-wide communications, the principals chose to take the lead.

Counter-Storytelling

A key function of counter-storytelling is to demonstrate that seeing the same events from multiple perspective adds to the richness of any story. When people of Color share their stories, it highlights that race and other factors impact how people experience life. Counter storytelling also highlights that the White experience is not the universal experience (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Factors such as racism and oppression cause silencing of minoritized groups. Counter storytelling allows people of minoritized groups to provide first-hand accounts of their lives.

I am not telling a story about all Black women; I'm telling the story of four specific Black women school leaders. Each participant self identifies as a Black woman, and they also almost all identified as a mother and wife. Women often recognize how family demands and commitments shape leadership choices and career moves. Being a mom and wife directly connect with their current work and potential future leadership opportunities. What someone else, maybe a male supervisor, would deem as not being ambitious enough is really a woman saying she is not willing to uproot her family to advance her career. For example, if accepting a principal's position required the participants to move to another school district or region of the state or country, having a family would directly impact the decision to accept the new position and relocation.

Each interview round was filled with emotion and conviction. A sense of divine purpose was evident as participants spoke about their daily work with students. The participants rarely spoke of themselves as individuals but always in conjunction with their communities and families. The participants spoke freely about how their decisions impacted others --for better or

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for worse. These leaders acknowledged that the professional transition was hard on them, but their families also bore a portion of that burden. Janet said that she would not accept a principal position until her children were off in college. She recognized the value of being close to home with them and the finite number of years that they would be in her home. When reflecting on the interviews, one word that continues to come to mind is strength. Women of color in particularly black women have been touted for their strength.

While acknowledging their strength, participants also spoke of their times of weakness and how rare, but important, it was to have a safe space to be weak and vulnerable. They spoke of how their families, and especially their spouses, allowed them the comfort of being scared, nervous, unsure, and shy. After the participants left the security of their homes and returned to their worksites, they knew that vulnerability and fear were not often expected or accepted. After my first interview and hearing how much each person gave to their role, I made a point to add a question about self-care to the interview protocol. The participants shared portions of their self-care strategies and how essential it is for them to truly take care of themselves and the people they love. They shared how distancing themselves from work is often challenging because they recognize the vastness of their roles but they know that having professional boundaries provides for more balance. Balance includes creating time with their families and friends. This balance increases their longevity in their careers (Short, 2010).

Insights from Black Feminist Theory

By considering a Black feminist approach, (Collins, 2002) I juxtapose negative stereotypical tropes with the experiences of my participants to show the prevalence of how common the following tropes continue to be in the experiences of Black women in leadership.

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Angry Black Woman

"The 'angry Black woman' mythology presumes all black women to be irate irrational hostile and negative despite the circumstances the stereotype is well known in informal settings but has a lack of representation and professional literature" (Ashley, 2014, p. 28). The perception of the angry Black woman was ever present in how the participants chose to respond to colleagues, chose to address staff, and chose to engage with members of the community. Each decision and almost every word of their mouth was filtered through a lens of "how will this be perceived … coming from *me*," implying that the same directive or the same corrective conversation could be led by a White man, or a White woman and the staff member would respond differently. The participants second-guessed how their responses would be interpreted by their colleagues. They did not respond to many microaggressions from their colleagues. The participants were concerned that onlookers would dismiss the derogatory comments and only focus on the AP's reaction to what was said.

Strong Black Woman

African American woman's strength has been weaponized against them; this is not isolated to education. In professional settings, the "strong Black woman" is seen as so strong that she does not need help or support. She is capable of solving large quantities of problems with minimal accolades, minimal time, and minimal resources. She should not complain but should use her creativity to make things happen that other people would not attempt to resolve. A contemporary image of this caricature is evident in Kerry Washington's character, Olivia Pope, in the television show *Scandal.* The Olivia Pope character could solve any problem, for anyone-- day or night. Participants felt pressure to exude Olivia Pope-like characteristics when given task

that exceeded their abilities or training. However, they did not want to seem weak or incompetent, so they accepted tasks for which they were not set up for success.

The Help

Another trope that was underlying within this research was "the help." This trope was more challenging to tease out because, by title, assistant principals should be assisting. The role of the assistant principal serves to work alongside the principal in a collaborative manner. The jobs of the AP and principal differ, but there is a component of discrimination that can be present within the AP role for African American women. APs are trained and capable to do more than address discipline infractions and organize transportation needs for students. The desire to serve in a variety of roles is not intended to dismiss the required tasks of the assistant principal. The AP position should be preparing women for the principalship or whatever their next professional role may be. Kenya's principal continuously gave her tasks that he did not want to do. Janet's principal continued to let her take the lead on parent communication whenever it was a Black family.

As a new AP, the desire to be visible and be helpful is paramount. It does not take long to serving in a school to recognize that school leadership can be overwhelming. The needs often exceed the hours in a day. A few years into my AP experience, a friend asked, "are you making copies or making decisions." To this day, that simple phrase has stuck with me. This phrase served as an internal reset to help evaluate if the tasks I was giving my time to were positioning me more as a helper or as a leader? Copies are necessary, and APs are not exempt from some clerical duties. Nevertheless, if the time spent at the printer takes the new AP out of the meeting to make schoolwide decisions and learn from the principal, then that task needs to be delegated

to others. There is nothing wrong with wiping lunch tables in the cafeteria when short staffed, but cleaning lunch tables is not a prerequisite for the principalship.

Black Fatigue in a Post- 2020 Era

During the time of COVID-19 gathering restrictions and stay at home orders the world witnessed multiple Black men and women were killed at the hands of police officers (Winters, 2020). These frequent and repeated events in such proximity to one another created a very intense sense of civil unrest and frustration with the status quo. As a result, there were national protests and international protests for weeks. Since George Floyd's murder, there has been a national presence of new statements and commitments about diversity, equity, inclusion and solitary in many spaces, from corporate America to everyday retailers. Companies also created diversity teams of problem solvers, task forces, and think tanks in order to attempt to create more equitable workplaces and experiences for employees of color. To date, these teams have not yet yielded substantial and meaningful changes for People of Color (Winters, 2020).

Unfortunately creating a diversity-equity team does not automatically enhance diversity or equity. Living through the trauma of witnessing People of Color killed on a frequent basis inexplicably and inescapably impacts the psyche and capacity of people of color to continuously navigate this world in a blind confidence for change (Winters, 2020). Unfortunately to date despite the consistent efforts and civil rights movements and political organizing systemic racism is still deeply rooted in America. In the same way, systems of oppression are present that directly impact women and people of color negatively. While these topics may seem tangentially related to the role of an assistant principal transitioning into leadership it's imperative to be reminded that leaders cannot separate themselves from the larger society as schools are microcosms of their respective environments.

Though many of the previously mentioned tropes have roots in historical times of African enslavement, the caricatures have become widely accepted as over-simplified images of who African American women are and what roles they are intended to fulfill in society. Navigating around these tropes in a corporate setting continues to add to black fatigue. For African American women the consciousness and decisiveness it takes to avoid actions that would be considered stereotypical is a daily decision on how to respond and how to avoid responding. For example, connecting the idea of whiteness as property-- if a White employee chooses to hold a certain opinion different from the rest of the team, they are not referred to as angry; they are simply considered assertive or confident in their work. If and when a Black woman asserts an idea that is different than the team's perspective, she is considered angry and difficult to work with.

After the discussion on the four tropes that were evident in the researching findings, each of these experiences is compounded to show how African Americans deal with Black fatigue on a frequent basis. Winters (2020) defines Black fatigue as "repeated variations of stress that result in extreme exhaustion and cause mental physical and spiritual maladies that are passed down from generation to generation. It is deeply embedded fatigue that takes an ordinate amount of energy to overcome" (Winter, 2020, p. 33). In order to create sustainable changes and eliminate barriers for Women of Color to access school leadership roles, there need to be systemic changes to address the structural racism that continues to plague the country well over a century after the ending of slavery.

Recommendations

It has been said that "Knowledge is not power; it is only potential. Applying that knowledge is power" (quotesfancy.com). Considering the research findings, I seek to make the following recommendations for school and district leaders.

Mindful Mentorship

Beginning teachers receive a mentor through a state-funded program. New assistant principals should also receive a mentor, in one capacity or another. The mentor can serve in a different school size or different district role. They do not have to be a current sitting principal, but they must have had assistant principal experience at some point in their career. The mentor and mentee must have a mutual and trusting relationship. Mandating compliance through a certain number of meetings is not necessary. Creating the opportunity to network and troubleshoot problems will be imperative for the new AP. If possible, the shared gender and or race of the mentor and mentee would be an added benefit. Racial or gender affinity groups throughout the district can also serve as an opportunity for informal networking and decrease the feeling of isolation in the profession.

For the AP, the immediate supervisor should not be their only source of mentorship. New school leaders want to seem competent to their bosses. Even though a question may be small, the new AP can feel intimidated or embarrassed to ask her principal certain questions for fear of being seen as incompetent. Additionally, Women of Color can feel excess scrutiny and the pressure to be seen as twice as good as everyone else which may make them more reluctant to openly ask for help. The principal or an interaction with the principal may also be what the AP seeks to discuss. Therefore, it is essential that new assistant principals have other trusted leaders in whom they can confide, outside of only their school principal.

Principals Must Choose to Mentor

Clear expectations for principals who are leading assistant principals is critical. I relate this to student teachers and classroom teachers who are supervising them. A classroom teacher can be excellent at instruction, classroom management, and curricular decisions. Unfortunately, having lots of professional strengths does not automatically equate to knowing how to teach what they know to someone else. The same is true for the principalship; a principal can be an amazing school leader but not necessarily a great mentor. Being able to successfully complete administrative tasks is not the same as being able to train someone else to lead a school well. Coaching training or professional development may be beneficial for teachers and principals to be reminded of how to provide direction for colleagues. There is a great deal of work that goes into successfully leading a school.

Frequent Feedback

One aspect of coaching is providing feedback. Most administrative teams meet frequently whether weekly, monthly, or informally to discuss tasks and address any pressing school needs. However, it is far more infrequent for a principal and assistant principal to meet and evaluate if the principal may provide feedback around specific tasks that the AP was in charge of or how a project was run. They will likely not provide feedback around the leadership aspects and cultivating a larger leadership skill set.

In North Carolina, new teachers have four formal observations throughout the year and countless walk-through or classroom visits where they receive some form of feedback from their administrators. For the assistant principals, they only have required feedback in the middle of the year professional development plan review and the end of the year evaluation and personal development plan review. Meaningful and intentional feedback is not dependent upon a specific

rubric, but it has to be planned and allow for both parties to share honestly with one another. These feedback rounds do not need to be necessarily documented in a rubric or for others to see but it should be embedded into the calendar for the school leaders to perform often. School days and school years are extremely busy. Without time to intentionally pause and reflect frequently on how things are going, the AP/ Principal relationship could fall into habits of communication that are not always positive. Some leaders think feedback is always corrective, but it does not have to be. Feedback can and should also speak to what is working well so the AP knows to continue what they are doing.

Limitation and Recommendations for Future Research

One limitation was the focus of my study was specific to a set group of people. I chose parameters based on race, gender, and professional status as the basis for my research, which excluded all other participants. Another limitation is the small sample size from the study. However, the four participants were able to provide rich data that successfully answered the research questions.

One consideration for future research is to consider the intersection of race, gender and age in school leadership. Research has shown that women of color are assistant principals longer than White males (Goldring et al., 2021). Classroom experiences are beneficial for leadership but there is no exact level of experience to prepare someone for the next job. Graduate programs of education in North Carolina required that teachers serve three years or more in the classroom before being admitted to a Master's of School Administration program.

Gender and Leadership

What are the experiences for Black men who are transitioning to the assistant principalship? Black males are a minority in classroom teacher roles, especially at the elementary

level. It would be valuable to know of the few Black men in the teaching field, how many of them pursued leadership positions and at which point in their career.

Mentorship and Sponsorship's Impact on Career Mobility

Another consideration for future research would be to compare the career paths of assistant principals who have had mentors against APs who did not have mentors. The mentor is a key piece to feeling more supported and prepared for the current role. Mentorship, coupled with sponsorship, is a strategic way for employees to see continue to move forward in their careers. Hewlett (2013) explains that a professional sponsor is a member of senior leadership who believes in the potential of their protégé and is willing to speak up for their potential career advancement opportunities. The sponsor has enough social and political capital so that the protégé can take professional risks with the backing of the sponsor. Future research could examine how quickly and successfully APs with mentors or sponsors transitioned to the principalship. As much as I have learned from these research participants, I also wonder about the women who do not yet have the support or resources to leave the classroom and how to best aid them in reaching their career goals.

The Impact of Assistant Principals on Student Outcomes

The assistant principalship is a vital role in schools. Not all schools have assistant principals and the quantities of assistant principals allotted per school varies across the country. Additional research is needed to share the impacts of what assistant principals do on a daily basis and how their work impacts student achievement and school culture. Many assistant principals share a large role in addressing student discipline issues, their responses to student discipline impacts if students have in school or out of school suspensions which decrease access to instructional time. Lack of access to instructional time can decrease student achievement.

Assistant principals are excellent supports for staff members in the school both instructionally and emotionally. APs may have more flexible schedules than school principals. The additional flexibility for APs can allow for increased time to foster connections and provide instructional feedback. The presence of the AP can deescalate potentially negative activities as well as provide an additional trusted adult with whom students could connect.

Final Thoughts

My initial desire to begin this research and dissertation was to figure out how to help this transition could be smoother for those who come after me and offer suggestions to school and if your leaders I can help African American women be successful in their new leadership roles. Listening to everyone's story really made me reflect yet again on the importance of community and sharing our stories with one another. All the participants shared how they had someone in the corner. While it may not have been a professional colleague it could have been a spouse or one close friend.

This research study allowed me to see the similarities of multiple women's professional journeys and provided insights for how to make the journey from the classroom to school leadership smoother for others. I was humbled and grateful that they were all willing to offer their time to me in such a generous way. This process also reminded me that black women can and will show up for one another! None of my participants benefited from being in the study, but they were eager to help and share their life experiences. There was an immediate sense of community and comradery between me and each participant. There was a very synergistic heart behind their responses and their commitment to public education.

In my current role as a school leader, this research process has made me more intentional about how I give support and seek support from other leaders of Color. This solidified the

amount of emotional and mental fatigue that people of color are experiencing and navigating through each day of their lives, especially in professional settings.

I believe these four research participants provided excellent data to understand their experiences as new school administrators. These participants answered the questions "What are the experiences of Black women educators who transition to school level leadership" and "How do Black women educators experience their race and gender identities in their leadership roles." Through their counternarrative about their journeys, I learned that more supports are needed to ease the transition for Black women and as well as other ethnic groups.

The study confirms that many Black successfully made the transition from the classroom to the assistant principalship. Teacher leadership helped to prepare these school leaders to lead at a larger, more public, and more scrutinized level. Frequently their race and gender impacted how their colleagues interacted with them and the expectations that their colleagues had of them. These assistant principals overcame many obstacles during their transition, such as funding their degree, interviewing for and extended amount of time and struggling to find a sense of belonging in their new schools and leadership roles. None of their passages to leadership were without obstacles. Repeatedly, I recognized examples of their resiliency, determination, and willingness to overcome obstacles. At this stage in my career, I seek ways to eliminate the obstacles instead of solely teaching others to overcome them. I am grateful for the privilege to share these women's personal stories with the hopes of clearer a straighter path for all who follow. I wholeheartedly share Anita's sentiments, "I am grateful for my journey. It has been a hard journey, but I am still grateful. I hope that by me traveling this way, I can help someone else along the way."

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CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT
THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

Project Title: Black women's experiences of the transition to the assistant principalship

Principal Investigator: Christina Richardson
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Carl Lashley

Participant's Name: _____

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to be a part of a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, at any part of the process and for any reason without penalty. Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge and potentially help people in the future.

There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

What is the study about?
This is a research project. Your participation is voluntary. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of early career assistant principal's' transitions to school leadership.

My goal is to understand what experiences Black women assistant principals have had in their professional and personal lives that have prepared them for the transition into their new leadership roles.

Why are you asking me?
You have been selected as a study participant because you meet all the following criteria:
1. African American
2. Female
3. Currently serve as a K-12 assistant principal
4. Currently have 2-4 years in the assistant principal role
What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

As a study participant, you will participate in a minimum of three (3) 60 – 90-minute interview sessions. Additionally, there may be the need for intermittent follow-up questions, which may take place via telephone, email, or video conferencing tools. As a participant, you are expected to answer each question honestly and to the best of your ability.

Is there any audio/video recording?
Yes, audio and video recording are a part of this research process. To best facilitate transcription of participants' responses, all interview sessions, as well as debriefing sessions, will be audio recorded. Because your voice and image will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears or sees the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed, although the researcher will try to limit access to the recording as described below.

What are the risks to me?
The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Christina Richardson, Principal Investigator who may be reached at (910) 584-3710 and clricha4@uncg.edu. You may also contact Dr. Carl Lashley, faculty advisor, at (336)549 - 9163 and c_lashle@uncg.edu.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

Are there any benefits to me as a result of me taking part in this research?
Your participation is this study may inspire new ideas for how school and district leaders support and foster leadership opportunities for educators.
There are no direct benefits to participants in this study.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?
There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?
All participant information will be kept confidential. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Data collected will be stored electronically and use password protected and encrypted electronic filing such as Box. Pseudonyms will be used in place of your actual name, school's name and school districts name when the data is disseminated, and research findings are published. Research materials will be stored up to five years after the completion of the study.

What if I want to leave the study?
You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data that has been collected be destroyed, unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The

investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be for a variety of reasons, including that participants have failed to follow instructions or the entire study has been stopped.

What about new information/changes in the study?
If significant new information relating to the study becomes available that may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:
By participating in the interviews, you are agreeing that you have read this consent form, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing to consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered.

By participating in the interviews, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate in this study described to you by Christina Richardson, Principal Investigator.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Round 1: Background, teaching experiences and career and leadership journey

<u>**Professional and Personal Background**</u>
- Please tell me about yourself and your career in education.
    - Responses should include …
        - years of experience in education, the number of districts, and all previous professional positions
- What made you decide to become an educator?
    - Was your family supportive of this decision?
    - How did your K-12 schooling experiences shape your perception of educators and the career of an educator?
- What teacher roles helped to prepare you for your current AP role? What did you do as a teacher that gave you leadership experience(s)
- As a teacher, what opportunities did your school leaders present for your teacher advancement? How were they presented? To whom were they presented?
- Tell me about your leadership journey and what led you to become a school leader?
- How did funding your advanced degree impact your decision to complete the degree program and get an administrative license?
- Did someone encourage you to go through the process for a new degree/certification?
- Have you worked with leaders who share your race and/or gender? Were those favorable or unfavorable experiences?
    1. Can you say more?

<u>**Transition to Current Role/ Interview process**</u>
- Tell me about that job search and interview process. (They may answer several of the following questions when they start.)
- How many interviews/schools? How long was the process? How did you hear about them?
- How did you prepare for the interviews? Did anyone help you prepare?
- What made this interview/ process for your current school different than other interviews/ processes?
    - Did you feel welcomed at the interview table?
- For your current position, what was your interview like?
- Did you have a mentor during your transitions?
- Were you aware of networking opportunities? How do you think your race and gender impacted exposure to networking opportunities or opportunities in general?
    - how was that different from what your peers experienced?
- What effects do you believe your race and/ or gender had on your career path?

<u>**Current AP Role**</u>
- How did you arrive at your current position? (probably answered above)
    - How did you hear about the job?
- Describe your current role/ school demographics/makeup of your admin team. If there were such a thing, what does a typical day look like?

- Did admin salary vs. teacher salary impact your decision to become a school leader? If so, how?

As we conclude this round's interview about your schooling and teaching experiences, what are some things you wish you knew during this time that would have made the transition easier for you?

Round 2: Current AP experiences and Intersectional Identities

Is there anything you would like to share that has come to mind since our last conversation?

Early days in your current job:
- Did you feel comfortable? Welcomed? Included? School community/ parents?
- Can you describe your first year of the job?
    - How did it compare to what you expected your first year to be like?
- What were the joys? Challenges?
- **How do you feel about your monetary compensation for your current role in relation to the duties you perform?**
- Are there challenges that come to mind that you feel you faced in coming to this leadership role?
    - what role did your race/ gender play in those challenges?
- What obstacles did you encounter? How did you feel at that time? How did you overcome them?
- As we conclude this round's interview about your career path and interviewing experiences, what are some things you wish you knew during this time that would have made the transition easier for you?
- **How has your racial and gender identity affected your experiences as a school leader within your building?**
- **How has your racial and gender identity affected your experiences as a school leader within your school's community (micropolitical)?**
    - This could include interactions with students, staff, parents, and the community
        - Ex. would be relationships with people you work with, was your racial and gender identity an asset or challenge in cultivating those relationships?
- How has the COVID- 19 pandemic affected your role as a school leader?
- Can you speak to the challenges/ opportunities of being "a leader" vs. "the leader"
- What is your school's admin team like? How Many people? Ethnic/ racial composition, etc.
    - How has working with this particular team impacted your transition to school leadership?
- What have you learned during this transition process that may be beneficial for another professional transition? Do you anticipate another professional transition?
- Can you speak to your role for equity and social justice?
    - Is there a large expectation for you to be the "social justice leader"

- Have you experienced the "superwoman complex" or the need to be all things to all people? How do you navigate that?
- How do you continue to grow professionally in your new role?
- Self-care strategies? Suggestions? Struggles?
- What suggestions do you have for other African American women transitioning from the classroom to an assistant principal position?
- What suggestions do you have for school principals to support AA women transitioning from the classroom to an assistant principal position?
- What suggestions do you have for district leaders to support AA women transitioning from the classroom to an assistant principal position?