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The purpose of my study is to explore the lived experiences, challenges, and opportunities of African American male school leaders leading in rural schools in North Carolina. My study looks at the intersection of identity in which a school leader in a rural community is an African American male. African American males face numerous barriers in education, yet my eight participants overcame obstacles to lead schools and address the unique challenges associated with rural school leadership. Utilizing the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory, my eight participants from five school districts shared their lived experiences of leading as rural school leaders. Equally, my study participants shared their beliefs regarding the underrepresentation of African American boys in the field of education. Utilizing basic qualitative research with elements of phenomenology, I conducted eight 60- to 90-minute semi-structured, open-ended interviews to create these counternarratives of African American males leading in rural schools in North Carolina. The findings from my study revealed opportunities for my participants to discuss how they could build relationships, demonstrate Ethno-Humanist Role Identity practices, display homophily practices, and overcome their encounters with varied forms of racism. Equally, my participants recognized the need for more targeted recruitment of African American boys and an awareness of opportunities associated within the field of education.

YES, RURAL COMMUNITIES DO HAVE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE SCHOOL
LEADERS

by

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Approved by

Dr. Craig Peck
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DEDICATION

To all my fellow single ladies over 40 years old, as the biblical angel Gabriel shared these words with Mary, the mother of Jesus, I share these words with you, “Not one promise from God is empty of power. Nothing is impossible with God.” Luke 1:37 (TPT)

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Chameeka Nichelle Smith 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

Known as pillars, leaders, and role models in their Black communities, African American male principals were prominent members of society pre-*Brown* and for several years after the *Brown versus Board of Education* decision (Tillman, 2004). Tillman (2004) noted that “teaching was a significant profession in the Black community and served as a primary leadership role” (p. 282). Before the *Brown* court case, there were 82,000 Black teachers; however, after the *Brown* court case, 38,000 or more Black educators had lost their positions (Tillman, 2004). As demographics of U.S. public schools student populations become more diverse, the teaching population has continued to lack diversity. According to Wallace and Gagen (2019), 82% of our current public school teachers are White middle-class females. In the book, *The Guide for White Women Who Teach Black Boys*, the Chapter 2 contributor, Julie Landman, wrote a description of the current White female teacher:

They are the majority of adults in a rapidly growing multicultural and multireligious demographic pool of students. They are more likely to be Christian and middle class, given their salaries and longevity. U.S. church membership is one of the most segregated groups. White women, thus, maybe at a disadvantage in teaching a population whose religious background or church services are varied and unfamiliar to her. (Moore et al., 2018, p. 29)

However, less than 20% of the teaching force are teachers of color and African American male teachers only represent 1.9% of public school teachers (Goings & Bianco, 2016; Wallace & Gagen, 2019). Goings and Bianco (2016) reported that by 2022, a vast majority of the student population would be comprised of Black and Brown children. In a nutshell, our children of color will be taught by White middle class valued females. Equally, children of color can attend

schools and not encounter an educator who looks like them. “There is growing concern that the current pool of school teachers and administrators does not mirror the growing racial/ethnic diversity of students” (Moore et al., 2018, p. 47). It is not uncommon for a sixth-grade African American male to go through elementary school and not encounter an African American male or female teacher. In addition, the young boy could easily continue this trajectory of only having White female teachers up until he reaches high school. Lewis (2006) noted, “Today’s students could easily go 12 years in the K-12 educational system without ever seeing an African American, specifically an African American male teacher” (p. 229). In my initial pilot study, when I interviewed an African American male teacher, he shared that the first time he encountered an African American male teacher was in college at a Historically Black College/ University (HBCU). This is concerning, especially given that Goings and Bianco (2016) stated, “the U.S. Census Bureau data predicts that by 2040 people of color will become the majority of United States citizens” (p. 628).

Since the percentage of African American male teachers is small, it leaves an even smaller pool of African American male principals who qualify to lead schools. Taking it a step further, now imagine being an African American male school leader who is leading in a rural school community. The United States Department of Education 2017-2018 school year demographic findings reveal traditional public school principals consist of 78% White, 11% Black, 9% Hispanic and 3% another race/ethnicity (Taie & Goldring, 2019). In the same report, demographic findings reveal traditional public school principals in rural communities consist of 89.7% White, 4.5% Black, 3.1% Hispanic, and 2.7% other, which dispels the myth of rural Americans being exclusively White at the same time it highlights the relative rarity of African American rural school leaders (2019).

In my study, I explored the lived experiences of African American male school leaders in rural schools. In addition, I explored the factors African American male school leaders believed contributed to the underrepresentation of African American males in school leadership roles in K-12 rural schools.

Statement of the Problem

The current discourse around African American male students continues to identify negative barriers and the need to find positive solutions toward this population of students. Equally, the African American male is under attack. Johnson and Bryan (2017) make reference to the physical killings of African American males, through police brutality, and the spirit of murder that exists in the inequitable educational system that continues to plague our boys of color. The education of our children of color did not start off this way. African American males once served as minister-educators for African American children and their communities (Franklin, 1990). Sadly, African American communities experienced the brutal killings of African American male leaders. Leaders such as “Medgar Evers, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, and Malcolm X, prominent Black men who were killed because they were vigilant about and adamant to fight against the physical and mental oppression of people of color” (Johnson & Bryan, 2017, p. 163). Now, young African American males have become victims of a different kind of killing, for being young, male and Black, through the hands of police brutality.

Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old young Black male fell victim to it. Trayvon was walking to a local 7-eleven store to purchase snacks when George Zimmerman, an adult neighborhood watch captain, saw him. Mr. Zimmerman alerted the 911 dispatch operator to the presence of Trayvon and was informed not to follow the young Black male. Mr. Zimmerman agreed to the

request verbally but proceeded to pursue and attack Trayvon. Mr. Zimmerman shot and killed Trayvon Martin on February 26, 2012, in Sanford, Florida (Dancy, 2014; Desai, 2016).

Jordan Davis, a Black male, fell victim to it. Jordan was shot and killed at the age of 16 years old for refusing to turn down his music by officer Michael Dunn on November 12, 2012. Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old Black male, also fell victim to it. Tamir was shot by officer Timothy Loehann in the abdomen on November 22, 2014. The officer mistook Tamir's toy gun for a weapon and that he looked like a 20-year-old African American male and shot him. When Tamir's sister attempted to save her brother, she was restrained by police officers and watched her brother die (Desai, 2016). Michael Brown of Ferguson, Missouri, also fell victim to it, as he was shot six times and killed on August 9, 2014, at the age of 19 years old (Desai, 2016). These African American male tragedies continued with Ramarley Graham, 18, was gunned down on February 2, 2012, by White police officer Richard Haste. Officer Haste, who suspected Mr. Graham of drug possession, forcefully entered Ramarley's home and shot and killed the unarmed male in his bathroom after believing the teenager possessed a weapon (Southall, 2015).

Tragedies continued into adulthood with Botham Jean, 26, who was killed by White police officer Amber Guyger on September 6, 2018. Officer Guyger, who mistakenly entered the wrong apartment, believed Mr. Jean was a burglar in his own apartment, shot and killed Mr. Jean (Thebault & Shammass, 2019). Recently, Ahmaud Arbery, 25, was out on a jog on February 23, 2020. Both Gregory Michael, the former investigator with the district office and his son, Travis McMichael, are being charged in the murder of Mr. Arbery, who they allegedly and fatally shot and killed (Fausset, 2020). Lastly, the tragedy that changed the nation: the murder of Mr. George Floyd by the hands of police officers in Minnesota where his lasting plea was a call to his mother and the constant demand of air before his untimely death.

These unarmed Black young people's lives ended by the hand of adults are examples of narratives being portrayed by institutions, such as the media and police, to show Black male children as little adults, robbing them of being viewed as children (Dancy, 2014; Desai, 2016). In the case of Trayvon Martin, for example, he was displayed by the media as a danger to society and others and his perceived age, gender, and race played a part in his untimely death. Trayvon, and others like him, are victims of structural racism and White privilege that ushers marginalized Black males from school into the criminal justice system (Dancy, 2014; Heitzeg, 2016).

These physical killings are tragic and real examples of the attack on the African American male; the physical bullets of an attack are cause for continued dialogue on how the African American boy is portrayed in media and society. These boys are just examples of young boys who could have had a prosperous career, a family, and become a leader in their sphere of influences instead of victims of police brutality. Equally, these boys are tragic examples of the attack upon the African American boy. These boys were not allowed to become fully grown men, and they represent just one of the numerous barriers designed to attack, prevent, and eliminate the African American male. However, other bullets attack our African American boys and rob them of opportunities to achieve their potential in life. According to Johnson and Bryan (2017), the new spirit of murder exists in our educational system. These bullets are rejection, silencing, and disrespect. The notion of school operating in a colorblind system is negated when schools increasingly suspend more African American males than their counterparts, when African American males experience lower graduation rates, and when school districts enact more referrals of African American males to special education programs than gifted programs (Moore et al., 2018).

There has been an upsurge of attention on the achievement and struggle for boys and men of color in the U.S. The recent flood of attention to police-involved shootings of African Americans and other people of color only exacerbate the need for a focus on this particular population. (Rodriguez & Greer, 2017)

Barriers for African American Males

In addition to police brutality, the killing of African American boys, and the spirit of murder within the educational system, other barriers are preventing African American males from entering into the field of education as a profession. Hatt (2011) noted, “Black boys born in 2001 have a 1 in 3 chance of going to prison” (p. 481). Noguera (2003) identified social environments as having effects on academics and behaviors. Risk variables include parenting responsibilities, substance abuse and exposure, harmful living conditions, health care accessibility, proper nutrition, housing, and poverty.

Other barriers for African American males can include finances, lack of support, and negative perceptions (Bristol & Mentor, 2018; Brockenbrough, 2014; Wallace & Gagen, 2019). In terms of finances, many of our teachers do not earn enough wages to maintain their family responsibilities. For an African American male educator, positioned to provide for their families, the appeal of education can easily be replaced with other careers to meet their financial needs (Wallace & Gagen, 2019). This makes the option of becoming an educator less attractive and viable. Secondly, African American males need supports in terms of role models and assistance in passing the Praxis certification test for licensure. The absence of African American male educators as role model teachers and administrators in public schools limits the amount of exposure African American boys have to encourage them to become educators. Also, if supports are not put in place during undergraduate programs for undecided majors to pass the teacher

licensure test, many candidates will select other majors for their career trajectories. Lastly, and most troubling, are the perceptions and expectations that African American male educators must be disciplinarians first and teachers second (Bristol & Mentor, 2018; Brockenbrough, 2014). This pressure is inflicted on the African American male educator by fellow African American educators, White teachers, or White principals during the hiring process. As Brockenbrough (2014) noted, “five of the Black men in the study felt pressured to control student conduct by performing a very particular construction of Black masculinity in the classroom” (p. 512). The perceived expectation is for African American male educators to assist in disciplinary practices to control learning environments instead of providing culturally relevant teaching practices to educate children of color.

The barriers of police brutality, the spirit of murder within schools, lack of financial and general support, and negative perceptions have led me to want to discover more narratives from African American male educators regarding their experiences in the field of education. However, I want to move deeper and learn how African American males overcome these barriers to become school leaders. Lewis (2006) noted that “Alarming, the data reveal that African American male teachers are on the verge of extinction within the U.S. teaching profession” (p. 224). With so many barriers inclusive of suicide, underemployment, low life expectancy, incarceration, murder, suspensions, expulsions, special education placements, and low postsecondary enrollment, what did successful African American male educators do to become rural school leaders and, in the process, overcome these barriers (Nogerua, 2003)? What did current African American male school leaders do to overcome these barriers and successfully navigate inequitable systems to lead schools in rural communities?

Purpose

The purpose of my study is to explore the lived experiences, challenges, and opportunities of African American male school leaders in rural communities in North Carolina. My goal is to uncover more narratives of African American male school leaders regarding their lived experiences in the field of education in rural communities in North Carolina. Equally, their voices reflect new ways of dismantling systematic structures designed to destroy our African American boys and prevent them from entering the field of education. In addition, I hope to draft recommendations toward dismantling the systematic racial structures in the field of education that prevent African American boys from reaching their potential. I want to discover, from their perspectives, the factors that have contributed to the low percentage of African American male school leaders in rural communities. Lastly, I want to add the voices of African American male school leaders in rural schools to the limited current academic scholarly research.

Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences and perceptions of African American male school leaders in rural K-12 public schools?
2. What factors do participants believe have led to the underrepresentation of African American males in school leadership roles in K-12 rural schools?

Background Context

Rural communities are unique areas within our society, from states with manufacturing plants and forest logging to states with sawmilling and beautiful farmland (Harmon & Weeks, 2002). According to Showalter et al. (2019), inclusive of districts that have rural schools within non-rural classifications, there were more than 9.3 million students who attended rural schools, which represents one in five students in the United States. Numerous instructional strategies that

are now considered evidence-based or research-based were started in rural communities. Examples include “Cooperative learning, multigrade classrooms, intimate links between schools and community, interdisciplinary studies and peer tutoring” (Harmon & Weeks, 2002, p. 2086). Other examples include “block scheduling, the community as the focus of study, older children teaching younger ones, site-based management and close relationships between teachers and students” (p. 2086). Rural community leaders recognized the power of investing in the next generations of students with practical hands-on strategies with real-world applications to support student learning.

North Carolina represents one of eleven states that maintains a large population of rural students and is second in the United States in rural student population (Showalter et al., 2019). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2019), 42.3% of North Carolina Schools during the 2017-2018 school year were located in classified rural areas. Utilizing the National Center of Education Statistics, locale code systems for rural schools include 41 (rural fringe), 42 (rural distant), and 43 (rural remote). In the southern states, African Americans represent one-third or more of the population in rural counties (Harmon & Weeks, 2002). “Rural school districts in Delaware, North Carolina, and Oklahoma are the three most racially diverse in the nation” (Showalter et al., 2019, p. 2). Harmon and Weeks (2002) noted in their article that the demographics of rural Americans living in poverty were 72.9% White, 23.6% African American, 5.4% Hispanic and less than 5% Native American.

Rural School Principals

Hansen (2018) noted, “More than 1 in 5 principals leave their position each year” (p. 41). The United States Department of Education, in its 2017-2018 National Teacher and Principal Survey, reveal demographic information regarding rural, urban (city), and suburban school

leaders (Taie & Goldring, 2019). According to the report, 53.1% of rural school principals were male and 46.9% were female (2019). Preston et al. (2013) found that “Male candidates are more likely to be hired as principals in rural school as compared to female candidates” (p. 6). The United States Department of Education report provided the average salary for school principals, including City of \$103,200, Suburban of 108,600 and Rural of \$85,000 (Taie & Goldring, 2019). In terms of educational levels, Table 1 illustrates the principals’ breakdown (Taie & Goldring, 2019).

Table 1 Educational Levels in the U.S. 2017-2018

United States Department of Education, 2017-2018 National Teacher and Principal Survey (Taie & Goldring, 2019)			
Educational Level	Rural	City	Suburban
Bachelor or less	2.1%	2.1%	1.2%
Masters	61.6%	61.8%	62.7%
Ed.S.	28.0%	23.8%	23.5%
Doctoral	8.3%	12.3%	12.6%

The recruitment and retention of rural principals are challenging due to the increasingly high demands of balancing two worlds, both school and the local community, at the expense of personal sacrifice and personal, professional, and geographical isolation (Hansen, 2018; Preston et al., 2013). Rural principals face challenges including access to high-quality professional development and administration support as well as hiring teachers, availability of teachers across content areas, and content or subject matter experts in all teaching areas (Preston et al., 2013). Harmon and Weeks (2002) noted rural school leaders’ challenges included adequate funding, setting standards, school enrollment size, facilities, diversity and poverty, school improvement capacity, school leadership, and recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers. Marshall and Kritsonis (2006) added obstacles like “inequitable funding, recruiting and retaining highly

qualified teachers, declining enrollment, and school accountability” (p. 89). In addition, rural principals assume numerous roles within their school include teacher of classes, instructional coach, testing coordinator, visionary, change agent and volunteer community member (Preston et al., 2013).

Rural communities are deeply connected to their traditions and values associated with their established rural schools. Therefore, the implementation of change typically is met with resistance, tension, and debate from the community and parents (Preston et al., 2013). Rural principals must value their relationship within their school and their relationships within their community. “Successful rural principals realize that the school is a symbol of the community’s social wealth, economic prosperity and overall identity” (Preston et al., 2013, p. 3). The struggle to balance the school’s needs with the community and parental expectations cause many rural principals to leave (Hansen, 2018). To be a successful principal in a rural community, it is essential to be associated with the school and community (Preston et al., 2013). Due to the tight-knit community bonds associated within rural communities, new rural school leaders experience both high expectations and criticism. Within rural settings, when new principals do not have any initial ties to or connections with the community, it takes the rural community time to accept new leadership from the new principal who is perceived as an outsider. During my pilot study, the participant indicated he attended the high school where he now serves as an assistant principal. His acceptance by his rural community was immediate because of his past history, social connections and cultural affiliations.

Rural leaders can be successful when they can make the curriculum connect with real-world applications within their community (Harmon & Weeks, 2002). Individuals will need to lead their school while also being accessible to their community. In addition, many community

members observe the actions and behaviors of rural school leaders. “Being the principal of a rural school is more than just a job; it is a lifestyle that tends to be closely watched by many community members” (Preston et al., 2013, p. 3). Rural principals, to be successful, must develop a school-community relationship and strive to balance both worlds. In many cases, the rural principal position stands between the needs of the school and the expectations of the parents and community. Preston et al. (2013) summarized the role of rural principals:

Leadership in rural schools is multi-faceted, place-conscious, and relationship-dependent; the need and priorities of students, parents and community members require a leader who is knowledgeable about educational policies yet receptive to the distinctive needs, perceptions and culture of educational stakeholders of that rural community.

Brief Description of Methods

In my study, I employed basic qualitative research with elements of phenomenology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I conducted eight 60- to 90-minute interviews with African American male school leaders in rural communities in North Carolina. Based on my interview protocol instrument (see Appendix A), these semi-structured open-ended and in-depth interviews created counternarrative stories of this populations’ lived experiences leading rural schools. I used purposeful sampling and utilized information on the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction website to identify African American male rural school leaders. Interviews occurred either in person or online using Zoom’s platform for recording, and transcripts were transcribed for data analysis by a third-party vendor.

Based on my analysis of the transcripts from the interviews, I generated six themes that served to answer my two research questions. I employed member checking, rich, thick descriptions, and ongoing reflection on my study with my research reflexivity journal to ensure

trustworthiness. In terms of ethical considerations, informed consent forms were reviewed with participants, and pseudonymized names were used to protect the privacy and confidentiality of my participants. Interview findings are reported in Chapter IV, and my analysis of my study is revealed in Chapter V.

Theoretical Framework

My theoretical framework is Critical Race Theory (CRT). My research examined the current literature on race, African American male educators and present counternarratives to support this minoritized group regarding their lived experiences as educators in K-12 public schools. Critical Race Theory provides insight into the inequalities, inequities, and systematic racial structures that continue to operate within our society (Cook, 2013). Solórzano and Yosso (2002b) define Critical Race Theory in education as “a framework or set of basic insight, perspectives, methods and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom” (p. 24). Critical Race Theory is a construct where both race and racism are examined (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Lynn and Parker (2006) identify Critical Race Theory as “an analytical framework on race and racism in the law and society” (p. 258). Critical Race Theory offers a vehicle to challenge the notion of Whites as superior and people of color as inferior. Equally, Critical Race Theory challenges White supremacy, White privilege, and the systems that ignore these systems at the expense of people of color (DeCuir-Gunby & Walker-DeVose, 2013). It is the framework for examining the impact race and racism has on the field of education, inclusive of higher education (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002a; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b). Cook (2013) noted that in terms of education, a Critical Race Theory lens allows for a systematic process of examining social injustices through the lens of race and racism for people

of color. Overt forms of racism, such as busing, segregated schools and racial sections in restaurants, are obvious and easily identified (Lynn & Parker, 2006) while other forms of racism are more hidden. Racism is defined as “a system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, American Indians and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms and color” (Marable, 1992, as cited in Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b, p. 24). A key factor with Critical Race Theory is to examine how race, racism, and, more specifically, White supremacy play out within the fabric of our American society (Cook, 2013).

History of Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory grew from Critical Legal Studies (CLS), where the focus was on identifying, examining, and addressing race and racism in the field of law (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018). Taylor (1998) noted that during the 1970s, after various landmark cases and Civil Rights victories were won in the 1950s and 1960s, racial reforms stalled in the 1970s. According to Lynn and Parker (2006), “as Critical Race Theory rose to prominence in the early 1990’s education scholars began to use it as a tool for explaining existing inequalities in education” (p. 265). Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Richard Degado, Charles Lawrence, Lani Guinier, Mari Matsuda, Patricia Williams and Kimberlee Crenshaw were key founders of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) which later developed the framework for Critical Race Theory (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Taylor, 1998). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) credited these founders of Critical Legal Studies and are credited for introducing Critical Race Theory to the field of education. Ladson-Billings (2013) recognized Derrick A. Bell as the founding father associated with Critical Race Theory. In addition to these founders, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) stated, “Our work owes an intellectual debt to both Carter G. Woodson

and W. E. B. Dubois, who, although marginalized by the mainstream academic community, used race as a theoretical lens for addressing social inequity” (p. 50).

Critical Race Theory Tenets

Critical Race Theory rests upon five tenets: Whiteness as Property, the Permanence of Racism, Critique of Liberalism, Interest Convergence, and Counternarratives (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Parker et al., 1999; Rodriguez & Greer, 2017).

Whiteness as Property

DeCuir and Dixson (2004) stated that every action conducted in schools can be viewed through the lens of Whiteness. The authors further identify the rights associated with being White (2004). These rights include possession, use, disposition, transfer, use and enjoyment, and exclusion (2004). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) noted, “Legally, Whites can use and enjoy the privilege of Whiteness” (p. 58). This is utilized in education with the enrollment of White students exclusively in Advanced Placement courses, Honors courses, the resegregation of schools, and academic tracking. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) recognized “the access to a high quality, rigorous curriculum has been almost exclusively enjoyed by White students” (p. 28). Critical Race Theory scholars examine the tenant of Whiteness as Property to expose race-based and racist practices and reveal how the social construction of race operates within the field of education.

Permanence of Racism

The permanence of racism is taking an honest, authentic, and realistic look at just how racism has played a powerful role within our society. Actions, school culture, climate and disciplinary practices are embedded in race and racism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). The permanence of racism is embedded in all structures of the American framework and is

considered a normal and acceptable function in our society. Ladson-Billings (2013) stated, “racism is the normal order of things in U.S. Society” (p. 37). This embedded infrastructure appears normal and is rarely challenged in education, employment and housing practices (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Taylor, 1998). Those experiencing forms of oppression typically do not recognize when the oppressor oppresses people of color in various venues (Taylor, 1998). Both the legal and political arenas are saturated with principles of White as superior that it is “almost unrecognizable” (Taylor, 1998, p. 122).

Critique of Liberalism

Ladson-Billings (2013) provides an excellent example of a critique of liberalism. She recalls the varied reactions that emerged during the O.J. Simpson verdict. The mixed responses from White and Black racial groups included excitement from one racial group and disappointment over the loss of life of two victims over a verdict of not guilty. Given both reactions, “CRT scholars guard against essentializing the perspective and experiences of racial groups” (Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 41). Since Whiteness is considered normal, people of color are viewed through the notion of colorblindness or ignoring color (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). When Critical Race Theory scholars speak about a color blinded society, society becomes willing to ignore historical policies and procedures designed to acknowledge color as a means of separation of race. Ideologies of colorblindness rob people of color of access to promotion and other benefits as the dominant groups use this method to become blinded to the inherent social structures designed to promote Whiteness (Taylor, 1998). “The danger of colorblindness is that it allows us to ignore the racial construction of Whiteness and reinforces its privilege and oppressive position” (Taylor, 1998, p. 123). As Rodriguez and Greer (2017) noted, colorblindness is not an effective tool in promoting racial equity. In many cases, instead of

dealing with racism and defining racism directly, Whites assert that it is a dead or nonexistent issue while pointing to individuals of color who have overcome societal obstacles. Examples might include Michelle Obama, Oprah Winfrey, and Tyler Perry. “In our effort to name race as a culprit in the maintenance of these unequal circumstances are often stymied by colleagues and co-workers who hail Obama’s presidency as the end of racism” (Jay, 2009, p. 672).

Interest Convergence

Bell (1980) defines interest convergence as “the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of White” (p. 523). Whites must have a benefit before they are willing to make change in the area of equity. Ladson-Billings (2013) provided a powerful example of interest convergence. A governor in Arizona made a decision to eliminate the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday. After receiving backlash from the professional athletic associations of the NBA and NFL, the governor made the decision to reverse the King holiday decision. Note, the governor’s reversal was due to the potential economic hardship of the state versus the need to honor Dr. King’s federal holiday. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) provided another example of interest convergence. When African American males are recruited for athletic purposes by White universities, the focus is on the male’s high-quality athletic abilities versus having access to high-quality rigorous instruction (2004). Whites were fine with giving up power as long as they do not have to change their current situation. When there is a direct benefit to Whites, racial justice equity will be of interest to both races. Otherwise, the racial status quo will continue to remain unchanged (Ladson-Billings, 2013). “White people will seek racial justice only to the extent that there is something in it for them” (Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 38). Whites only support changes that advance their personal White cause (Rodriguez & Greer, 2017).

Counter Storytelling

Critical Race Theory scholars utilize storytelling as a means to counter the current negative perceptions and stereotypes of individuals of color (Taylor, 1998). Since stories created by the dominant group present their level of superiority, “it is necessary to create stories to counter the dominant narrative” (Cook, 2013, p. 185). The ability to connect with personal stories touches the mind and penetrates the heart of a person (Cook, 2013). Ladson-Billings (2013) defines storytelling as “one of the oldest human art forms” (p. 41). Solórzano and Yosso (2002b) tell us that “Storytelling has a rich and continuing tradition in African American, Chicana/o, and Native American communities” (p. 32). We use the concept of stories to construct social realities based on individual experiences and perspectives (Parker et al., 1999). Ladson-Billings (2013) noted, “Stories or narratives have been shared in every culture as a means of entertainment, education and cultural preservation and to instill moral values” (p. 41). Critical Race Theory allows for storytelling by people of color to counter the existing narratives communicated by the dominant group and present the authentic experiences of people of color by people of color (DeCuir-Gunby & Walker-DeVose, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002a, 2002b).

Counter storytelling challenges the preestablished perception of truth that is viewed by Whites (Taylor, 1998). “Counter storytelling is a means of providing conversation that disrupts the current discourse produced by the dominant group about people of color” (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). It is the ability to offer a venue featuring the voices of people of color, providing a route for communicating their experiences and dismantling stories constructed by those who have not experienced these realities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). DeCuir-Gunby and Walker-DeVose (2013) stated, “Counter storytelling pulls from the rich storytelling tradition in African

American, Chicano and Native American communities and is a tool used in qualitative research to expose, analyze and challenge” the dominant group (p. 252). Counternarratives present validation to both stories, narratives and points of view (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Counter storytelling allows for people of color to share their experiences that goes against the current dialogue of the dominant majority (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

There are three types of counter storytelling: personal narratives, other people’s stories, and composite stories (Cook, 2013; DeCuir-Gunby & Walker-DeVose, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002a, 2002b). Personal stories or narratives are individuals, typically in an autobiography format, sharing their experiences of racism. Other people’s stories or narratives are when an individual is writing the stories of another person’s experience with racism. Typically, this approach occurs through biographies and in the field of education with Critical Race Theory scholars. Composite stories or narratives are a combination of data sources to create the group narrative regarding the experiences of race and racism (DeCuir-Gunby & Walker-DeVose, 2013).

My dissertation focuses on the lived experiences of African American male school leaders leading in rural schools. I wrote my participants’ counternarratives to the current discourse of the African American male. Critical Race Theory aligns with the purpose of my dissertation and the need to add to the literature regarding the African American male in rural schools. Lopez (2003) summarizes this aspect of Critical Race Theory by noting, “we have a duty to know and raise questions about race and racism in society, as well as an ethical responsibility to interrogate systems, organizational frameworks and leadership theories that privilege certain groups and/or perspectives over others” (p. 70).

Researcher Positionality/Role

My interest in this topic stems from working in an alternative diploma program for at-risk students in a rural district in North Carolina. In my last year, our program had 18 African American and Hispanic boys. As I observed my boys that year, I watched their behaviors, communication styles, and mannerisms as well as how they completed their assignments. During this year-long process of observation, I recognized why my boys frequently experienced disciplinary infractions and consequences in this predominantly majority White school district. Due to their race, my boys were easy to see in the halls during class changes, easy to spot in the lunchroom, and easy to observe in the classrooms because there was such a limited number of them. The Assistant Principal responsible for discipline was a tall African American male. My boys would receive three days of In-School-Suspension for sagging pants by this African American male Assistant Principal, while the White male students with similar issues were not even noticed. When I worked under this African American male Assistant Principal as a principal intern, I began to observe why my boys, and boys like them, were being penalized for minor infractions while their White counterparts went unnoticed. African American boys were being sent out of classes several times during the course of the day by White teachers. These young African American boys were being labeled various negative terms for simple infractions, such as coming to class two minutes late. The fear that our society has socially constructed upon our African American boys, plays out in our classrooms and with administrators where African American boys are seen as little adults. However, this African American male Assistant Principal did not have a choice but to provide strong disciplinary actions or risk losing his position. Here is an example of an African American male school leader in a rural community being forced to

implement severe disciplinary practices at the expense of providing a proper education for African American boys.

Moving forward, I think about my 18 Black and Brown boys in that alternative diploma program and having a program available to meet their academic needs and access to graduation. They were accepted in our program for their different learning styles, mannerisms, behavior, and culture. Equally, I think about my principal mentor, the African American male school leader, who dealt with unrealistic expectations from his traditionally White supervisors and School Board members that forced him to negate his own personal background that could have instead helped him serve as a role model and voice of hope for our African American boys.

I believe our current education system is designed to ensure African American boys fail through the use of special education labels, low teacher expectations, and irrelevant curriculum. However, many African American male school leaders endured these circumstances and have earned Bachelors, Masters, and Doctoral degrees and are now working with students in rural schools. As an educator and nonprofit founder, I have worked with African American boys and African American male school leaders for several years. In working with African American male school leaders, they have served as role models for boys. However, they have also served as disciplinarians in certain positions where their physical attributes were of more value than their intellectual abilities, creativity, and cultural connections with the community. My co-workers have been African American male administrators, teachers, social workers, and district leaders. In each case, these males have counseled African American boys and desired to protect this population while also having to correct behavior or incorporate alternative placement settings as a layer of protection from a system that would prefer long term suspension. With these systematic structures in the field of education, why would an African American boy choose a

career in education? Equally, why would they desire to become a school leader in a rural community surrounded by numerous opportunities in urban and suburban communities including higher salaries?

As the African American female and founder/Executive Director of an all-male nonprofit organization, I believe my positionality will have a positive impact on my study. Being a former Assistant Principal and Principal intern in two different rural communities and in working with boys of color, it is important to me that they hear from successful key African American male school leaders within and outside of their community. I further believe that the solution to many of the problems within the African American community stems from a lack of fathers within the home. Strong male leadership influences many areas within a child's life, including a reduction in teen pregnancy, youth incarceration, dropout rates, and drug usage (Kunjufu, 2013). When I reflect upon the rich history of African American male ministers/educators who led schools, taught classes and were advocates with their community, I wonder what happened to these influential voices and visionaries who disappeared after desegregation. My belief remains that once African American males discover their purpose and fulfill their destiny in life, the African American family can be restored, including the positive identities of African American boys. It is my belief that African American male rural school leaders can serve as leaders, visionaries, and role models while developing culturally relevant strategies to educate children of color.

As a self-published author, I reflected upon one African American male minister/educator who changed the world, my pastor. "One man who left his familiar surrounding to explore and established new territory, build a church and recovery center, planted numerous churches, raised leaders, started a school and influenced his community---What beautiful footsteps to follow" (Smith, 2016, p. 26). If this African American minister/educator influenced my life growing up

in a one-parent home, how many more African American male school leaders can have an impact on the lives of students of color?

Significance

Rural principals face unique challenges that greatly differ from both urban and suburban school districts (Parson et al., 2016). “Principals in rural schools were more likely to be male and less likely to represent minority groups” (Harmon, 2003, as cited in Preston et al., 2013, p. 6). In other words, rural principals tend to be White and male. As mentioned earlier, the United States Department of Education report for the 2017-2018 school year, rural principal demographics echoes the notion of White and male (Taie & Goldring, 2019). In terms of demographics, the report indicated that 89.7% were White rural principals, followed by 4.5% Black, 3.1% Hispanic and 2.7% others (Taie & Goldring, 2019). In terms of demographics, the report indicated that 89.7% of rural principals were White, followed by 4.5% Black, 3.1% Hispanic and 2.7% others. In terms of sex for traditional rural principals, the report indicated 53.1% male and 46.9% female.

Nationally, the demographics of schools are shifting to more diverse student populations. However, school leaders’ demographics have not shifted (Hozien, 2016). The African American male teacher represents less than 2% of the teaching force in the United States (Bristol & Mentor, 2018; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Wallace & Gagen, 2019). At the same time, though, a small pool qualified to become school leaders, and there are some African American males in leadership roles in rural communities. Equally, there is a need for more research surrounding the challenges faced by rural school principals in rural communities (Preston et al., 2013). There is a “general lack of research addressing the challenges that principals face in specifically in rural communities” (Preston et al., 2013, p. 1).

My study looks at the intersection of identity in which a school leader in a rural community is an African American male. As mentioned earlier, with so many barriers toward African American males, such as suicide, special education placement, suspensions, expulsion, incarceration and low graduation rates, what did the successful African American male school leader do to overcome these barriers? Solórzano and Yosso (2002a, 2002b) noted that counter storytelling allows the lived experiences of a marginalized group to be communicated, thus challenging the current dominant narratives associated with race and racism. In my study, the lived experiences and voices of these African American males who serve as school leaders in rural communities will contribute to the dearth of literature associated with this intersectionality of identity. It is important to note, that rural communities have a rich historical foundation and a cultural wealth within their local environments. “Although research has verified the impact and current needs of school principals, limited research has targeted the rural principal and his/her unique needs and circumstances” (Preston et al., 2013, p. 1). The pool for qualified African American males to lead schools is limited; equally, the pool of those who lead in rural schools is even more limited. My study explores both the lived experiences of a marginalized group and the unique challenges associated with rural school leadership. Preston and Barnes (2017) stated, “When reviewing this extensive research, it is obvious that a limited number of these studies focus on how school leaders successfully meet student needs in unique geographical context--- namely, rural schools” (p. 6). In conducting semi-structured interviews with African American male rural school leaders, my research centers around communicating their messages of possibilities within the field of education to young African American boys living in rural communities.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter II reviewed existing research related to rural school leaders, African American educators, and African American school leaders in rural communities. In Chapter III, I discussed my methodology for conducting my dissertation project. In Chapter IV, I reviewed my finding from the eight participants in my study. Chapter V discussed the connection with research from Chapter II and my recommendation for further investigation of this intersectionality of rural communities and African American male school leaders.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of my study is to explore the lived experiences, challenges and opportunities of African American male school leaders in rural communities. In this literature review, I identify the challenges currently facing rural principals. Next, I explore the role of the African American educator *Pre-Brown versus Board of Education* decision and after the *Brown* court case. Then, I identify the contemporary barriers facing African American boys inclusive of the War on Drugs, Gun-free School Act of 1994, Zero Tolerance policies and negative perceptions of African American boys. Finally, I explore the current role and discourse of the African American male teacher and African American male principal, including homophily and Ethno-Humanist Role Identity Leadership Practices.

School Principals in Rural Communities

Rural principals face numerous challenges and varied responsibilities that differ from urban and suburban school principals (Parson et al., 2016). Harmon and Schafft (2009) focus on the need for school and community collaboration within rural schools. They noted that there is a relationship that exists in rural communities between the academic success found in rural schools and the economic impact of the rural community population. Equally, there is a tug a war between preparing students academically with the tools needed to be successful with the demands of stabilizing a rural community sense of place. Harmon and Schafft (2009) noted that, there is an unspoken expectation that school leadership preparation programs are preparing school leaders to lead urban school environments versus rural schools. At the same time, the study highlights using the educational leadership policy six standards along with corresponding community development questions to influence job and hiring practices for school leaders who will need to lead both in rural schools within their rural communities. Thus, this creates a

challenge for rural school leaders who must balance these expectations. Rural principals face other challenges including various forms of isolation and loneliness, budgetary issues (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Parson et al., 2016; Wieczork & Manard, 2018), multiple dual roles (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Parson et al., 2016; Preston & Barnes, 2017; Wieczork & Manard, 2018), student enrollment issues (Parson et al., 2016; Preston & Barnes, 2017), teacher recruitment and retention (Preston & Barnes, 2017; Wieczork & Manard, 2018), and diversity in rural schools (Harmon & Schafft, 2006; Public School Forum, 2019; Tuter, 2015).

Isolation and Balancing Community Needs

Various forms of isolation for rural principals include geographic isolation, culture isolation, and personal isolation (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Parson et al., 2016; Wieczork & Manard, 2018). Geographic isolation occurs because of rural school locations, the limited resources, and access associated with being a rural school. Often, the community centers around the school with individuals performing various community-related activities in and around the school (Ashton & Duncan, 2012). Ashton and Duncan (2012) provided a toolkit that navigates the intersection of being a rural school leader and new principal and a pathway toward the skills needed for success and navigating challenges through a new entry plan. Within the article, they discuss the dearth of literature associated between these two intersections. Equally, the article began to navigate the role of new school principals and their rural school settings. It combines the themes of “rural schools and the new principalship together” (Ashton & Duncan, 2012, p. 19).

From a historical perspective in rural communities, “the school served as the focus of community life” (Tieken & Scruggs, 2014, p. 12). School buildings were used for social gatherings, religious functions, and community meetings. According to Harmon and Schafft

(2009), the school provided a location for community connections centered around activities such as “sporting events, theatrical productions, and school board meetings” (p. 5). In addition, rural school facilities serve as “community functions” (Harmon & Schafft, 2009, p. 7). Examples include fundraising events, continuing education opportunities, voting polling precincts and other rural small-town places for gatherings. “Rural schools serve as symbols of community autonomy, vitality, and identity” (Harmon & Schafft, 2009, p. 5).

Preston and Barnes (2017) conducted a literature review regarding the effectiveness of rural school leaders in terms of improving student achievement and wellbeing. Their literature review identified key leadership characteristics and behaviors rural school principals possess to lead the rural school effectively. They found that rural school principals need to be “visible, approachable and accessible” within their rural community (Preston & Barnes, 2017, p. 10). Decisions within the school must include all community stakeholders of the school, along with faculty and staff in the school (Wieczork & Manard, 2018). “Successful leaders need to understand the mentality of a small rural community which includes a willingness to be highly visible, accessible and approachable as well as reach out to members of the community to provide rationale for district action” (Budge, 2006, p. 7). This need for visibility and community engagement creates these feelings of geographic, cultural and personal isolation for rural school principals. In rural schools, principals are addressing the needs of the school and simultaneously the needs of the community within this small social world. “Principals’ work in rural schools is conducted within tight social communities” (Wieczork & Manard, 2018, p. 1). In rural communities, school leadership is defined by your community relationships and context (Preston & Barnes, 2017).

Budgetary Issues

Budgetary issues are another challenge for rural school leaders. Fiscal problems are associated with community factors affecting resource availability. Wieczork and Manard's (2018) study addressed the limited resources associated with the instructional leadership practices of new rural school leaders described their perspectives within rural communities. The study included six rural school principals. It investigated their experiences in becoming rural school principals in the area of instructional leadership, balancing the pressures of their positions as school leaders, and simultaneously maintaining visibility within the rural community. The rural school principals also describe the challenges of maintaining high student expectations through high-quality instructional programming amidst a lack of resources. These principals focused on school-community partnerships while maintaining "positive public relations with their community" (Wieczork & Manard, 2018, p. 8). Due to financial limitations, rural principals within the study worked to "consolidate human and capital resources" (p. 8) to support their schools. Community factors include diversity, low socioeconomic class, job losses, unemployment, school performance and accountability, the closing of local schools, and decline in the population among younger demographics. These negative factors contribute to the challenges of rural school leaders in meeting the budgetary needs of their schools.

Multiple Roles and Responsibilities

A third challenge includes the multiple roles and responsibilities of rural school principals. Instructional leadership is the top priority of all school leaders to increase student achievement. Within rural community schools, with small staff sizes, trust and collaboration can be built and embedded as the staff's focus is on improving student achievement (Preston & Barnes, 2017). Parson et al.'s (2016) qualitative study examined the role of the principal in rural

schools. Eighty-one rural principals from the state of North Dakota participated in the study. Participants served roles such as principal, principal and teacher, principal and superintendent and principal and directors. The findings from the study revealed that rural principals served multiple roles and have numerous responsibilities within their schools and communities. Although these principals valued and recognized the importance of instructional leadership, they struggled with balancing school managerial issues while serving as instructional leaders. The increasing demands and responsibilities of rural principals limit these opportunities to focus on student achievement, accountability, and instructional leadership. Instructional leadership is significant; however, other demands take away from this priority in rural communities. “Early research found principals envisioned themselves as instructional leaders yet spend a majority of the day in general management while teaching for an average of 35.6% of the day” (Parson et al., 2016, p. 77). Speaking of teaching, rural principals’ challenges regarding multiple roles and responsibilities include needing to teach classes (Parson et al., 2016; Preston & Barnes, 2017); managing facilities (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Parson et al., 2016); facilitating professional development (Preston & Barnes, 2017; Wieczork & Manard, 2018); and engaging community (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Wieczork & Manard, 2018).

Other rural school principals’ responsibilities include measurable student outcomes, school performance accountability, lesson plan review, teacher supervision, evaluations, community responsibilities, reporting to various stakeholders, student discipline and practices, and maintaining a positive school brand (Ashton & Duncan, 2012). “Principals from small rural schools describe responsibilities such as bus drivers, teaching classes, directing athletics, filling vending machines, facilities management, activities management and attendance as major job responsibilities” (Parson et al., 2016, p. 75). Principals within rural communities must manage

the challenges of multiple roles. Whereas larger urban districts have individuals specialized in various areas to serve school leaders, rural principals typically perform these numerous roles as their responsibility (Parson et al., 2016). They are juggling multiple responsibilities while remaining connected to the community, leading the school, and keeping their superintendent informed (Ashton & Duncan, 2012). At the same time, they are still required to meet accountability expectations despite having the least amount of human and social capital as urban and suburban school districts (Ashton & Duncan, 2012).

Student Enrollment and Teacher Challenges

Student enrollment and teacher recruitment and retention are also challenges for rural school leaders (Parson et al., 2016; Preston & Barnes, 2017; Wiczork & Manard, 2018). The decline in student enrollment, limited opportunities to recruit new staff, and transient teachers create challenges for rural school principals (Parson et al., 2016; Preston & Barnes, 2017). School leaders in rural communities must exhibit “people-centered leadership” (Preston & Barnes, 2017, p. 8). Due to the secure community connection with schools, the recruitment and retention of teachers, along with nurturing families, must occur for rural school leaders. Rural principals must be specialists in various areas to lead schools due to lack of resources and personnel accessibility (Parson et al., 2016). Wearing numerous hats creates greater responsibilities and requires more highly specialized skill sets to meet the needs of students, new faculty, and staff (including retention) with limited resources (Ashton & Duncan, 2012). “In addition to holding dual roles, rural principals frequently have a wider variety of responsibilities in large part because rural schools infrequently have student enrollment sufficient to justify an assistant principal, administrative support or special education director” (Parson et al., 2016, p.

65). The lack of specialists in rural schools typically increases the obligation of the sole leader in the building, the principal, to fill multiple roles.

Other Challenges for Rural School Principals

Rural communities are unique, with strengths and challenges. According to Budge (2006), strengths include a secure interconnection between school and community and a tightly connected sense of place for community members. Challenges can include geographical isolation, lack of a clear understanding behind the purpose of school, ineffective strategies to keep young people in their community and “oppression as lived experiences” (Budge, 2006, p. 2). Wieczork and Manard (2018) noted that “Rural school communities are characterized by feelings of family bonds, peace, safety and caring that permeates throughout the community” (p. 3). Rural principals face numerous challenges in leading their rural schools. Scholars have identified additional challenges to include student transportation (Preston & Barnes, 2017), low teacher expectations (Wieczork & Manard, 2018), school closures and district consolidation (Parson et al., 2016; Wiecezork & Manard, 2018), and balancing the needs of the community (Wieczork & Manard, 2018). Additionally, other challenges for rural school principals include unrealistic expectations when one school leader replaces another school leader (Ashton & Duncan, 2012). Another challenge is that many community members and teachers will prefer to conduct business as usual to preserve their history and legacy of their community. Historical stability occurs when the school serves as the representation of the community (Ashton & Duncan, 2012). When school consolidation occurs within rural communities, the historical legacy and representation of that community is lost (Ashton & Duncan, 2012).

According to Howley et al. (2014), “during the era of massive consolidation (roughly 1920-1960), states created positions entitled superintendents” (p. 624). School consolidations

and the new role of superintendents in rural communities meant the removal of local citizens and the influences of local school boards within the school environment. Other external factors that affect the ability of school leaders in rural schools to build school community collaborative partnerships include “Rural economic decline, rural out-migration, school consolidation issues and current state and federal education policies that measure school success solely based on student test scores” (Harmon & Schafft, 2009, p. 5). Therefore, rural school leaders must balance the demands of the state and local expectations within their local community. It is “important to understand principals’ challenges to balance multiple job responsibilities within a community that relies heavily on their leadership and status in the rural community” (Wieczork & Manard, 2018, p. 4).

Rural Communities in North Carolina and the Need for African American Educators

In North Carolina, more than 500,000 students attend rural schools making North Carolina the second-largest rural student population within the United States (Public School Forum, 2019). North Carolina has 100 counties within the state with 80 of these counties classified as rural counties (Public School Forum, 2019). Of the 115 districts, which are defined as traditional public schools serving K-12 students, 87 are in rural counties. Lastly, “40% of all NC public school students reside in rural counties in North Carolina” (Public School Forum, 2019, p. 6). As mentioned earlier in Chapter I, the United States Department of Education, in its 2017-2018 National Teacher and Principal survey, noted that rural school principals include 89.7% White, 4.5% Black, 3.1% Hispanic and 2.7% other (Taie & Goldring, 2019).

Given the changing demographics of our student population, there is a need for more diverse teachers and school leaders, yet “the teaching force in NC remains over 80% White and increasingly nonrepresentative of our student population” (Public School Forum, 2019, p. 8).

However, there is “growing evidence that having a same-race and same-gender teacher can serve as a mechanism for improving the schooling outcomes for Black students” (Bristol & Mentor, 2018, p. 219). Bristol and Mentor (2018) conducted a phenomenological study of 27 African American male teachers and their experiences in a school-based setting in a large urban district. The findings from the study revealed African American male teachers were expected to control student discipline primarily followed by performing their teaching responsibilities. Their study points to the fact that these participants were able to reach students due to their ability to build relationships with students versus their gender and race, playing a role in dealing with student discipline. African American boys in North Carolina would benefit from such exposure to African American male educators.

Summary

In conclusion, there are differences between serving as the school leader in a rural school as compared to serving as the school leader in urban and suburban schools. The primary differences are the numerous roles and responsibilities placed upon rural principals along with the extra expectations regarding maintaining positive community relationships. “Leaders of school districts and schools in rural places need a clear vision of a mutually beneficial, collaborative school-community building process” (Harmon & Schafft, 2009, p. 5). Rural school principals need specialized professional development sessions to help them identify and manage these demands while addressing challenges of isolation and loneliness being the sole leader within rural schools. Rural student populations in rural schools are expansive in North Carolina. At the same time, there is a diverse student population located in rural schools. As previously illustrated, the problems of rural school principals are massive; however, the challenges are easily amplified when individuals are African American male rural school leaders. These

challenges date back to the era of the *Brown versus Board of Education* decision and the desegregation of public schools.

The Role of the African American Educator Before and After *Brown*

Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka (1954), was a landmark decision in our American history. The Supreme Court unanimously ruled that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. The *Brown* ruling required “adequate education” for all students where race was no longer a factor in determining this equitable access (McCray et al., 2007). Fast forward to the 21st century, when the student demographics of public schools in the United States have become more and more diverse. However, the consequences of the decision, which still exist today, cost the African American community resources, in the name of African American school leaders, and a voice in the educational reform for African American children. In addition, the decision created massive job losses for African American males in the field of education. These losses can be directly connected to the decision to desegregate schools (Pabon, 2016). “The dearth of Black male teachers is not a new trend in the United States and can actually be traced to the school desegregation era” (Pabon, 2016, p. 916). In this section, I describe African American schools and school leaders pre-*Brown* decision and current post-*Brown* era losses and consequences.

Pre-*Brown* Decision

During the pre-*Brown* era, African Americans fought for the right to educate their children since slaves were prohibited from reading or any form of schooling. In his book, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, Anderson (1998) explained that there were African American schools in operation in the south before the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. Some examples of schools included a school in Fortress Monroe, Virginia led by Ms.

Mary Peak in 1861, the Pioneer School of Freedom in New Orleans started in 1861 and a school in Savannah, GA which operated from 1833-1865 (Anderson, 1988). After the Civil War, the Freeman's Bureau was designated to assist the freed slaves with the necessities they required to live after the post-war era (Palmer et al., 2014). One of the components of this decision included education and the establishment of over 4,000 African American schools for the newly freed slaves (Palmer et al., 2014). John W. Alvord, who was the Freeman's Bureau National Superintendent of Schools, was responsible for traveling southern states and documenting the educational practices among ex-slaves (Anderson, 1988). Newly freed slaves taught their own children leadership development and collaboratively collected their resources to support their school with their hired teacher (Tieken & Scruggs, 2014). Newly freed slaves were determined to educate their children; they created schools in the South with the focus on education as liberation (Walker, 2000). Walker's (2000) article provided a counternarrative regarding the negative portrayal of segregated schools and African American teachers and school leaders. She provided a positive look at the conditions of segregated schools and the high-quality instructional practices used to ensure all students were academically successful.

Some rural African American communities required the establishment of plantation schools for their children before they were willing to work as newly hired plantation workers (Tieken & Scruggs, 2014). In addition to plantation schools for their children, rural African American communities established Sabbath schools that focused on educating adults (2014). "The sabbath schools represent yet another remarkable example of ex-slaves seeking, establishing, and supporting their own school" (Anderson, 1988, p. 15). During the evenings and weekends, these literacy-focused schools taught newly freed slaves' basic skills in reading and writing. Superintendent Alvord, according to Anderson (1988), reported estimates of "1512

Sabbath Schools with 6146 teachers and 107,109 pupils” in 1869 (p. 13). “Schooling, for many rural Black communities, meant literacy and literacy meant freedom” (Tieken & Scruggs, 2014, p. 13). Therefore, African American children during this era were taught the “classical curriculum of northern schools”; at the same time, African American adults were learning the basic fundamentals of literacy (Tieken & Scruggs, 2014, p. 13). According to Walker (2000), African Americans focused on the original intention of starting their southern school which was the liberation of the mind versus the improvement of manual labor. Classical training provided “access to liberation they sought through education because it gave them access to the best intellectual traditions” (Walker, 2000, p. 259). When the mandatory curriculum shifted from classical training to industrial curriculum, African Americans continued to teach classical training with the focus on the liberation of the mind. “Although the northern philanthropist mandated industrial education for the county training schools, African Americans refused to accept an industrial curriculum for their schools, continuing to focus instead on classical training” (Walker, 2000, p. 259). With the ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the decision to remain “separate but equal” remained law until 1954 (Palmer et al., 2014, p. 31).

During the pre-*Brown* era, African American educators served their community as advocates, school leaders, fundraisers, role models, nurturers, respected leaders and activists. They also constructed schools (Tillman, 2004). There was a common bond shared by the African American community in that they each experienced forms of segregation and discrimination (Echols, 2006). Many African American males, after college graduation, would return to their communities and serve as educators in the segregated schools (Lewis, 2006). “After graduation, many of these African American male teachers went back to their respective communities to serve the many educational needs of the African American community” (Lewis, 2006, p. 226).

As educators in African American communities, these males also served as “counselors, role models and spiritual leaders,” noting that education was one of a few fields African Americans had access to positions during the pre-*Brown* Era (Lewis, 2006, p. 226). According to Pollard (1997), “From the period immediately after the declaration of an end of slavery to the middle of 20th Century, African Americans played important roles in establishing and running schools for African American children” (p. 354). African American male Minister-Educators played vital roles in leading these schools for African American children.

Minister-Educators

According to Franklin (1990), historians believe that in July of 1794, the first Black Episcopal Church was founded in the United States in Philadelphia. Absalom Jones, a Philadelphian who was the first Black American priest and educator, opened a day school within his church to serve his African American community (Franklin, 1990; Leadership, n.d.). “Jones served as an instructor at the school for many years, even after he became the first African American to be ordained to the Episcopal priesthood in 1804” (Franklin, 1990, p. 40). Reverend Jones joined Richard Allen in founding Bethel church which later became “the mother church for the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church” (Franklin, 1990, p. 40-41). Bethel Church, founded in 1794, later started a day school for their African American community. Academic instruction was available to both children and adults in basic academic skills along with biblical principles (Franklin, 1990; Jackson, 2018). Both Absalom Jones and Richard Allen were minister-educators who used their influence to empower, through education, their African American community (1990). They were “among the first in a long line of Black minister-educators who defined their religious calling to include establishing schools and other education institutions in their churches” (Jackson, 2018, p. 14).

Another African American male minister-educator was Daniel Coker. Minister Daniel Coker, who was a former slave and ordained as a minister by the Methodist church, taught in the African school in Baltimore, Maryland in 1802 (Franklin, 1990). This school was founded by the Sharp Street Methodist Episcopal Church. Minister Coker later became affiliated with the newly formed AME association in 1816, where he continued to serve as a minister-educator. He was the principal and teacher of the African Bethel school in Baltimore, Maryland.

Minister Alexander Twilight, a licensed minister by the Presbyterian church, became the principal of the Orleans County Grammar school in the early 1830s. Leading several schools in Vermont as principal and headmaster, Minister Twilight was recognized as an outstanding educator. He was later elected as the first African American in Vermont to the Vermont Assembly, where he served as their state representative (Franklin, 1990).

Another African American male minister-educator was John Francis Cook, Sr. Minister Cook was born a slave in Washington, DC, and was purchased free by his aunt. He went on to acquire Columbian Institute. Columbian Institute was a tuition-based Black school which he later named Union Seminary (Franklin, 1990). Minister Cook became an ordained Methodist minister and pastored a church. Since he was also the leader of Union Seminary, when asked about utilizing their facilities for a Black Presbyterian gathering, Minister Cook drafted the church's constitution and upon joining the movement, "became the pastor of the 1st colored Presbyterian Church of Washington, D.C." (Franklin, 1990, p. 42).

Jeremiah Buke Saunders, a minister-educator, started his career teaching in all-Black schools in California. His career expanded to include becoming a principal in two key cities in California. From the ministry side, he was ordained as a Methodist minister and pastored an AME Church, "where he was active in organizing several social advancements and religious

organizations” (Franklin, 1990, p. 42). Shifting to politics, because of his character as an educator and minister, he was elected delegate for the Republican party in 1874. However, due to a train accident, he died in 1875 (Franklin, 1990).

Schools and School Leaders

African American communities respected and valued their Black schools and school leaders during the pre-*Brown* era (Echols, 2006; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Lewis, 2006; Tillman, 2004). These African American schools had high teacher expectations, culturally relevant curricula, and positive school climates (Echols, 2006). These leaders both taught and nurtured African American children in their communities (Echols, 2006). African American schools lacked equal financial funding as school boards were all White and principals were Black. Walker (2000) noted that during this era, Whites believed that because “African American education should be a function of the federal government or of private philanthropy and not a local responsibility, Whites refused to allocate appropriate funds for African American education” (p. 259). Therefore, the lack of resources being provided by White school boards to keep Black schools underfunded was because they believed the education of Black children was not their responsibility. However, clear policies and procedures governed the schools and they were supported by their African American community (Echols, 2006). Due to schools being segregated with little involvement from traditional all-White school boards who showed little concern for the quality of education taught to children of color, the principal was able to operate as the primary instructional leader virtually autonomously. He was able to lead his school and make quick changes to meet students’ and community needs (Walker, 2000). In fact, instead of being complacent with the current educational situation, African Americans became resilient and either found or created alternative locations owned by the African American community to

educate their children (Walker, 2000). “African American parents used churches, vacant tenant houses and lodges for schools” (Walker, 2000, p. 259).

African American Teachers

African American teachers, during the pre-*Brown* era, were respected members of their community (Goings & Bianco, 2016; Lewis, 2006). Lewis (2006) cited Hawkins (1994) in that “Approximately 82,000 African American teachers were responsible for the education of the nation’s 2 million African American public school students” (Lewis, 2006, p. 226). They were involved in the lives of students inside and outside of school, forming tight bonding relationships with students and their families. These teachers could join in church activities with students and families, shopped at the same grocery stores, and participated in various community events (Goings & Bianco, 2016). “They were able to develop tight-knit relationships with students that were nurtured by teachers’ insistence on creating a community of learners as a priority” (Goings & Bianco, 2016, p. 642).

African American Principals

Pre-*Brown*, African American principals were equally respected in the African American community and served as valuable members of the community. According to Walker (2000), “The single central figure in the segregated school was the principal” (p. 274). The principal’s role was to stand between the needs of the school and the needs of the community partners, stakeholders and parents regarding their school (Walker, 2000). African American principals served as visionaries, instructional leaders, culturally relevant curriculum facilitators, “school managers, supervisors, professional development coordinators, physical plant engineers, and curriculum coordinators” (Echols, 2006, p. 2). One of their primary responsibilities was to give voice to the experiences of African American children within their schools (Tillman, 2004).

Equally important, the African American male principal's involvement within his community allowed him to provide a voice for the needs of his school (Walker, 2000). As a community connector, advocate, and liaison, the African American principal served as fundraisers, resource collectors, role models, and leaders (Tillman, 2004).

As the principal in segregated schools, resource development played a critical role in securing the needed tools for students' achievement. "The principal served as chief fund-raiser for the school" (Walker, 2000, p. 274). African American principals were perceived as leaders in churches, education and community organizations (Echols, 2006). "His interactions happened in community spaces, such as gas stations, homes and churches, where African American etiquette would always have him recognized and asked to speak" (Walker, 2000, p. 274). He was a highly educated member of his community. According to Walker (2000), "In North Carolina, 93% of the principals held masters degrees in the mid 1960s, a finding that confirms other studies suggesting that the principal was among the most educated African American in the community" (p. 275). In this role as an African American male principal, he showed and demonstrated to teachers how to teach, grow professionally, attend conferences and other professional development and how to communicate with parents (Walker, 2000). He served as a community advocate promoting local organizations designed to strengthen and empower the African American community (Walker, 2000). He was a resource to his community, where he provided counseling advice and financial resources to those in need. He was an active church member, teaching classes and attending funerals during segregation. "Black school principals were honored by the African American community for meritorious services in education, civic and religion affairs" (Echols, 2006, p. 2).

Post-*Brown* Era Losses and Consequences

Whereas the original purpose for African American schools was for liberation from the economic and social control of Whites, the 1954 decision demanded these same Whites to make schools equal (Tieken & Scruggs, 2014). Civil Rights teams painted a deficiency image of the Black schools and Black educators during the *Brown versus Board of Education* court case (Echols, 2006). There were two points of view of segregated schools. The first viewpoint was researchers' descriptions from a dominant White perspective. The second viewpoint was from those who were intimately involved within the schools and their strength-based point of view despite racism, Jim Crow, and obstacles access to funding. Witnesses of the court case advocated for the closing of all-Black schools and the displacement of Black principals with the concept of desegregation (Tillman, 2004). Black teachers were continuously reassured that desegregation of schools would not result in job losses (2004). Some Civil Rights leaders failed to recognize the value and cultural wealth African American educators had concerning their Black students and their communities.

During the pre-*Brown* era, from 1866-1930, African American parents were involved with schools through creating new schools, funding, and providing resources to establish schools, petitioning, boycotting, forming conventions, and filing lawsuits to ensure equitable opportunities for their children (Walker, 2000). According to Walker (2000), many researchers who were not people of color focused on the external perspective of African American schools from a vision of deficiencies. They did not consider the cultural wealth that resided within segregated African American schools. They concentrated on quantitative analysis versus qualitative analysis. "It is unsurprising, then, that their conclusion focused on the easily

observable and measurable inequalities and never question what else may have been present in the school” (Walker, 2000, p. 254).

African American Teachers

In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that it was unconstitutional to segregate schools by race (Palmer et al., 2014). However, regardless of the expectation of immediate results, schools remained segregated for years (Tillman, 2004). Despite the slow changes amid the decision, from “1954-1965, more than 38,000 Black educators were dismissed from their positions” (Tillman, 2004, p. 286). Black teachers’ jobs, economic resources, their access to Black students, and their voices in the Black communities were lost with little efforts made to control the change (Tillman, 2004). Additionally, despite the fact that the purpose of the decision was to create equitable schools that would help in “closing the achievement gaps,” achievement gaps have persisted (Wallace & Gagen, 2019, p. 2).

Desegregation destroyed the Black community. “Many records were destroyed after desegregation, making it difficult to retrieve” documents to support the positive benefits of segregated schools (Walker, 2000, p. 264). From a personal perspective as an African American woman, our children were bused to White schools, our schools were closed, and our educators were dismissed. Black communities lost their influence in schools tremendously during the desegregation era. Desegregation negatively affected Black advocacy, community connections with the school, role models, leaders, culturally relevant curriculum, and caring adults (Tillman, 2004). Overall, “The legal process as a whole was more subtle in assimilating and perpetuating an ideology in which Whiteness was the nimbus of superiority, and Blackness the stigma of inferiority” (Palmer et al., 2014, p. 33).

African American Principals

As mentioned earlier, African American principals served as visionaries, instructional leaders, culturally relevant curriculum facilitators, and community advocates during the pre-*Brown* Era (Echols, 2006; Tillman, 2004). However, after the *Brown* decision, they were perceived as being the problem for African American children as opposed to the cultural wealth-holders these individuals possessed regarding their community (Tillman, 2004). According to Tillman (2004), “90% of the Black high school principals in 13 southern and border states lost their jobs” (p. 293). In North Carolina, Black principals from 1967-1971 were reduced from 620 to 40 (Tillman, 2004). The loss of Black principals resulted in the Black communities losing their voice advocate, leader, and politician, who had a seat at the education table (Tillman, 2004). In addition, the damage resulted in the loss of the spirit of excellence for Black children, the loss of cultural wealth in leadership, and a loss of a committed workforce of educators who specialized in impacting and imparting knowledge to the next generation. Lastly, there was a loss in the invested interest of the next generation of future African American leaders, our African American children (Tillman, 2004).

Summary

Thurgood Marshall, one of the Civil Rights lawyers of the *Brown* case, reflected on the slow progress of the implementation of the decision. After 10 years, he said, “desegregation obviously has not proceeded as fast as we would have liked” despite mass job losses (Tillman, 2004, p. 300). Twenty years later, Thurgood Marshall reflected again on the ruling stating there had been “no substantial progress towards desegregation” despite a substantial decline in Black students majoring in education (Tillman, 2004, p. 300). What was once considered the landmark decision that would change the landscape of America for Black children resulted in a massive

loss of Black schools, Black educators, and Black communities, which contributed to continued educational barriers for African American males.

Contemporary Barriers for African American Male Educators

Frederick Douglass said, “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men” (Robinson, 2019, p. 667). Several barriers contribute to keeping African American males out of education. Several decades after the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) decision and the massive dismissal of African American educators, the ultimate victim has been the African American male. Consequently, other social-emotional issues have arisen since the *Brown* court case. African American children, particularly males, experience self-esteem issues, placement in special education classes with special education labels, tracking, push out, locking out of school, lack of aspirations, and lack of school community involvement and interaction (Tillman, 2004). However, due to Black school closures and the busing of Black children, parents did not have the confidence that the social-emotional needs of their children were being addressed or their children were being prepared for global citizenship (Tillman, 2004).

The African American male faces numerous challenges and barriers to entering the field of education despite the unintentional consequences of the *Brown versus Board of Education* decision. Here I will discuss the negative educational conditions facing African American males, including the ramifications of the War on Drugs designed to incarcerate African American males, the Gun-Free School Act of 1994, Zero tolerance policies and negative perceptions of the African American male.

War on Drugs

The school to prison pipeline entails “a national trend in which children are funneled out of public schools and into juvenile and criminal justice systems” (Dancy, 2014, p. 476). Former

President Nixon was the first to use the term, “War on Drugs,” to bring law and order to the United States and shift to a focus on drugs as a major problem within the country (Alexander, 2010; Hatt, 2011). He also wanted to create a system to control Black people after the Civil Rights Act and the overturning of Jim Crow laws (Alexander, 2010). “He (President Nixon) emphasized that you have to face the fact that the whole problem is really the Blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to” (Hatt, 2011, p. 479). Hatt’s (2011) study provided an insightful analysis of youth ages 18-24 and their educational experiences both within and outside the prison, particularly in the area of drug trafficking. Based on the interviewed youth, the three themes of motivation, opportunity and ability became the focus of the study. Within each theme, interviewed youth revealed the lack of support they received in school and the overwhelming support and validation they received through drug trafficking. Equally, youth revealed the challenges they faced upon release from prison and the temptation to return back to their previous negative lifestyle due to systematic structures that prevent a new way of life. For example, as one participant in the study noted, “Once you get a felony on your record, that can be a lifetime thing” (Hatt, 2011, p. 484).

According to Dr. Tatum (2017), the War on Drugs was code language to target and incarcerate Black and Latino men. Noting that in 1980, forty-one thousand people were incarcerated; however, in 2014, the number is half a million (Tatum, 2017). “More African American adults are under correctional control today—in prison, or jail, on probation or parole—than were enslaved in 1850 a decade before the Civil War began” (Tatum, 2017, p. 14). The new social order was beginning to unfold from slavery to Jim Crow laws to mass incarceration (Alexander, 2010). “More Black men are imprisoned today than at any other moment in our nation’s history” (Tatum, 2017, p. 14).

Former President Reagan was the first to back the War on Drugs with federal funding and an official announcement of the war in 1982 (Alexander, 2010). At that time, “less than 2% of the American public viewed drugs as the most important issue facing the nation” (p. 49). Backed by institutions of power, including “government, media, education, economics, police and military,” the war was on for drugs with the underlying focus of pushing Black males into prison (Sensory & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 44). “More are disenfranchised today than in 1870, the year the 15th amendment was ratified prohibiting laws that explicitly deny the right to vote on the basis of race” (Tatum, 2017, p. 14).

Gun-Free School Act of 1994 and Zero Tolerance Policies

The Gun-Free School Act of 1994 mandated a one-year expulsion from school if a student possessed a firearm on campus or school grounds (Caton, 2012; Hatt, 2011; Robinson, 2019). The act further stated the mandate must be in place for schools to receive federal funding and school personnel were required to report violators to law enforcement (Heitzeg, 2016; Robinson, 2019). In other words, students who had a weapon on campus or school grounds would experience a one-year expulsion and be reported to law enforcement. This erases the line between law enforcement and school officials regarding student behaviors. This act also led to educational policies that focused on school safety with the infamous zero-tolerance policies.

Zero tolerance policies “are defined as disciplinary policies that result in mandatory suspension or expulsion for students who commit offenses that involve weapons, violence or drugs” (Cramer et al., 2014, p. 463). These policies require schools to discipline students equally regardless of circumstances. Zero-tolerance policies were originally designed to decrease school shootings by White males; however, these policies have increased the number of Black males being pushed out of school (Bryan, 2017). Bryan (2017), within his conceptual paper, focused on

students majoring in education during their clinical observations and their observable negative behaviors toward non-White students in an elementary school. The focus of the paper was to identify the subconscious perspectives White teachers have towards African American males and how these perspectives contribute to the school to prison pipeline. Equally, the paper reviewed how White teachers' negative opinions of African American males can be transferred to White children who continue to respond negatively to African American boys. Zero tolerance policies with subsequent consequences have now included minor behavior infractions, which in times past required school leader in-house discipline. However, minor infractions under Zero Tolerance resulted in "suspensions, expulsions and arrest" (Dancy, 2014, pp. 476–477). Dancy's (2014) article highlights African American boys' negative experiences in our current educational system that is designed to either push them out of school or lock them out of school, thus supporting the school to prison pipeline. There is a dual message being placed upon Black males. This duality exists when they are celebrated for their athletic and musical abilities while simultaneously berated through stereotypes, police brutality, racial microaggressions, and negative media portrayals.

African American youth were three times more likely to be suspended than Caucasian students due to zero-tolerance policies (Robinson, 2019). Robinson's (2019) study focused on alternatives to punitive punishment for African American males by interviewing school leaders and educators. The focus was on how current policies are implemented against African American males, thus pushing them to the school to prison pipeline. Positive solutions are being addressed to ensure the academic progress of this student population through initiatives that focus on correcting poor decisions versus suspensions and expulsions. Three employees were interviewed, where their perspectives of working with African American males in urbanized schools were

examined. The findings revealed the need to implement more restorative justice practices and policies to ensure African American males are not victims of the school to prison pipeline through zero-tolerance policies. The implementation of restorative justice practices ensures the dismantling of the pipeline, thus ensuring equitable practices across public schools in the United States.

The original Gun-Free School Act of 1994 disciplined students for weapon possessions. The zero-tolerance policies expanded expulsions from weapons to include the following: “drugs and alcohol, fighting, gang membership, threats and/or swearing” (Hatt, 2011, p. 478). Many of the consequences given to students, especially Black males, are at the judgment of the given administrator, including suspension and expulsion practices for minor behaviors (Caton, 2012). Caton’s (2012) qualitative study examined the effects of zero-tolerance policies on the education experiences of ten African American boys who dropped out of high school; the researcher used Critical Race Theory and its counter storytelling tenet as his conceptual framework. The participants were interviewed and recorded discussing their lived experiences in the education system. This qualitative study yielded four themes associated with the experiences of the participants. The themes centered around safety, relationships, learning, & outcomes.

Minor infractions, because of zero-tolerance policies, are becoming criminal acts with major consequences for African American males. Tardiness & dress code violations, such as sagging pants, are being defined as criminal acts with corresponding consequences against African American boys (Bryan, 2017). What is also important to note is that zero-tolerance policies have not improved student behavior or school safety but continue to place Black boys in the school to prison pipeline (Robinson, 2019). “What is most disturbing is the school to prison pipeline appears to have become more valuable to the dominant social order than the

development of the minds and talents of all its citizens” (Caton, 2012, p. 1074). Whereas White males are viewed through the lens of a professional doctor diagnosis of development, African American males are viewed through a punishment lens, inclusive of prison and death (Heitzeg, 2016).

Negative Perceptions of the African American Male

Racism is still alive and well and in full operation in urban schools in the United States (Milner & Lomotey, 2014). Due to systematic inequalities that denied African American students access to high-quality education, racism is the cornerstone of this systematic injustice. Mansfield et al. (2018) identified four types of racism that exist in our current society. Individual racism focuses on personal attacks performed on a minoritized group by Whites. Examples of individual racism can include lynching and the actions of White supremacy groups. Cultural racism views White people as the norm regarding beliefs and values and any other group as inferior to the standard identified norm, Whiteness. This racism is typically seen in classroom practices among White female teachers who view and handle behaviors differently from how their behaviors are handled in the homes of their minoritized students. Institutionalized racism pertains to the various powers that continue to evoke systemic policies and procedures to advance Whiteness and continue inequalities for people of color. Lastly, collective racism is when fundamental rights and privileges are denied to underrepresented groups (Mansfield et al., 2018).

Racism continues to rob Black boys of opportunities within our educational system. Discrimination typically occurs, in our society, based upon a person’s perceived racial identity (Milner & Lomotey, 2014). Wallace and Gagen (2019) noted that “students of color and students of lower socioeconomic status continue to struggle academically due to the impact of negative perceptions, racism, and oppression” (p. 2). Institutions of power, including “government, media,

education, economics, police, and military,” continue to see young Black boys as criminalized men (Sensory & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 44). The death of Trayvon Martin was a painful reminder that Black lives, particularly Black boys’ lives, don’t matter (Tatum, 2017). These labels rob Black males of their identity, values, and self-worth. Half of African American boys drop out of high school and are likely to be labeled failures, at-risk, or behavior problems that contribute to the system of incarceration (Robinson, 2019). “Black boys who have been sorted, contained, and then pushed out of school become Black men – men who have been well primed neither for college, career nor full participation in our democracy but instead for punitive institutionalization” (Robinson, 2019, p. 670).

African American boys were being labeled as “in crisis or endangered” and defined as a national crisis, where African American men would be the solution (Brown, 2012, p. 305). The same African American men who were dismissed from the field of education and that were defined as problems as boys were nationally being called upon as solutions (Brown, 2012). Though African American male teachers make up less than 2% of the teaching force in the United States, their recruitment and retention have gained national attention with the focus on addressing the needs of the African American boy (Bristol & Mentor, 2018; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Wallace & Gagen, 2019). “In 2000, a mere quarter of the 1.9 million Black men between 18 and 24 attended college (33.8%)” (Ladson Billings, 2011, p. 7). Ladson Billings’s (2011) article identified the plight of African American boys in school, where their childhood experiences are erased through manhood perceptions. The article identifies society and school systems’ negative treatment of African American boys and how these systems fail to develop and challenge their young minds socially, emotionally and academically. She noted that there is an underlying acceptance of African American boys with special talents, music and athletic, that are

acceptable to mainstream society. However, academic advancements are not appreciated, celebrated and in many ways, are considered unacceptable and inaccessible. Equally notable, the small percentage of African American male teachers consequently means a small pool of qualified African American males prepared to be assistant principals and principals. This pool becomes even smaller when African American males consider serving as school leaders in rural schools. As Hozien (2016) noted, “The pool from which to select African American males as school administrators is further diminished” (p. 2).

Summary

Numerous negative educational conditions such as policies, acts and laws continue to rob our African American boys from being adequately prepared to become educators, including racism, access to a high-quality education and negative perceptions. The new solution is to recruit and retain more African American male educators to serve and become role models for African American boys. This need is significant given that African American male educators continue to be underrepresented in the field of education. However, as Goings and Bianco (2016) found in their study, “Because of teachers holding low expectations for Black males, and experiences of racism, racial microaggressions and stereotyping in the classroom, the young men could not envision themselves as teachers” (p. 641).

Need for More African American Male Teachers

The need for more African American male educators has been a problem for more than 60 years (Brown, 2012). Researchers emphasize that when children are taught by the same race and gender of their teachers, academic improvement occurs (Bristol & Mentor, 2018). Since Former President Obama’s election, their continues to be discussions centered on the importance of African American male educators in schools serving as role models and surrogate father

figures to African American boys (Brown, 2012). As the demographics of our classrooms are shifting to more Black and Brown children, our teaching force has been quite slow in making this shift. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, “by 2040, people of color will be the majority of the United States citizens” (Goings & Bianco, 2016, p. 628). 82% of the current teaching force in the United States are White middle-class women, while 18% of teachers are made up of African Americans, Native Americans, and the Hispanic population (Wallace & Gagen, 2019). What is even more disturbing, as mentioned earlier, is that African American male teachers make up less than 2% of the teaching force in the United States (Bristol & Mentor, 2018; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Wallace & Gagen, 2019). Though there is a significant shift in public school demographics with more and more children of color, many children may not ever get the opportunity to be educated by an African American male teacher.

This section will focus on the current discourse around the underlying purpose of African American male teacher recruitment, the underlying expectations of the African American male teacher, barriers associated with the National Teacher Examination, and the need for a diverse teaching force.

The Underlying Purpose of African American Male Recruitment

The current discourse around the need for African American male teachers is focused on being a role model and surrogate father. Recruitment efforts focus on recruiting African American male teachers to serve in these roles for African American boys. The assumption is that because a person is an African American male teacher, they can work with African American boys in the role of being a role model and surrogate father versus an educator (Bristol & Mentor, 2018). Pabon’s (2016) study examined the personal experiences of four African American male teachers working in urban schools and the lessons they learned from their

teaching and recruitment. The findings revealed that those African American males had been positioned as Black Superman, a system that continues to be in place in schools to push them out of the field of education. This schooling-out process, according to the study, is revealed in these male preparation programs for teaching and the pressure to conform to traditional standardized methods of teaching from the White group.

African American male educators have been identified in the literature where their role is to “secure, administer and govern the unruly Black boy in schools” (Brown, 2012, p. 229). Therefore, the premise is for African American male teachers to handle the African American boy before they step a foot inside the classroom as a classroom teacher (Brown, 2012). This phenomenon is called Pedagogical Kind. Pedagogical Kind is defined as “a type of educator whose subjectivities, pedagogies and expectations have been set in place prior to entering the classroom” (Brown, 2012, p. 299). If the African American male teacher were not there to work with African American boys, there would be no reason for them to be in education (Brown, 2012). The message is that African American male teachers are in schools for African American boys; otherwise, their presence becomes useless (Brown, 2012).

The Underlying Expectation of the African American Male Educator

In 2010, a campaign arose called “5 by 2015,” where the then Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, identified a goal of increasing the teaching force in the United States with African American male teachers by 2015 (Brown, 2012). However, these recruitment strategies centered around African American male teachers becoming primary disciplinarians first towards African American boys, followed by teachers (Bristol & Mentor, 2018). This is the underlying expectation for Black male educators that other populations who enter the teaching field do not have placed upon them. African American male teachers are typically placed in dual roles of

teacher and disciplinarian as they maintain order and discipline in schools. This system of keeping regulations and controls is known as the universal carceral apparatus (Bristol & Mentor, 2018). The universal carceral apparatus, similar to images of mini-prisons for children of color, is “organized as extensions of prisons for historically marginalized children of color” (Bristol & Mentor, 2018, p. 219-220). Similar to jail, these schools have surveillance equipment, metal detectors, and monitoring devices to observe the behaviors of students (Bristol & Mentor, 2018). African American male teachers become gatekeepers or correctional officers to African American boys in schools. Since African American male teachers have been defined as the sole social agent of change in schools for African American boys, their role as disciplinarian within schools matched the current discourse among researchers and policymakers (Brown, 2012).

Relatedly, while Wallace and Gagen (2019) address the barriers and the need for recruitment and support for African American male teachers, Brown (2012) and Bristol and Mentor (2018) focus on the realities of the positioning of African American male teachers in schools. According to Brown (2012), because African American boys are labeled with such negative, derogatory terms, the savior for them is the African American male teacher. Therefore, the focus is on gender and race connections as opposed to intelligence and the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogical practices.

In the study by Bristol and Mentor (2018), African American male teachers discussed their after school duty positions as being placed in the front of the school building by the school administrator. Utilizing the concept of the universal carceral apparatus, these men were responsible for securing the premises upon the dismissal of students. Two additional participants in this study described their classroom as “unofficial time out rooms,” with the unwritten expectation that they could handle disciplinary problems (Bristol & Mentor, 2018, p. 227).

National Teacher Examination

The National Teacher Examination (NTE) has been a barrier for African American teachers, particularly African American male teachers (Lewis, 2006; Tillman, 2004; Wallace & Gagen, 2019). Wallace and Gagen's (2019) study focused on examining obstacles of African American male educators who were completing a teaching program at an HBCU along with their perceptions of HBCU enrollment. According to Wallace and Gagen (2019), "the initial licensure examination has been identified as one of the greatest barriers for teacher preparation program entry and completion" (p. 15). Between 1984-1989, as a part of the displacement of Black teachers, the teacher's certification requirement was introduced and implemented as a part of becoming a certified teacher (Tillman, 2004). Displacing 21,515 Black teachers, the examination became the gatekeeper for individuals pursuing education (Tillman, 2004). The Praxis I test focuses on reading, writing, and math, while Praxis II focuses on knowledge and application of educational theory and practice (Goings & Bianco, 2016). In other words, these examinations require high rigorous skill development in the areas of critical reading, writing, math, critical thinking, and application.

According to Echols (2006), "The U.S. Census Bureau statistics reveal that 42% of all African American boys have failed a grade at least once by the time they reach high school" (p. 2). Failing a grade before getting to high school increases the likelihood of African American boys not graduating from high school. Hatt (2011) noted, "Without a high school diploma, these youth are far more likely to end up unemployed, in prison and living in poverty" (p. 478). In addition, because African American boys' suspension rates are higher than those of White boys, the academic skills needed for college success are limited (Goings & Bianco, 2016). According to Goings and Bianco (2016), 59% of African American males graduated in the 2011-2012

school year. High suspension rates led to low graduation rates and resulted in African American boys being unprepared for four-year colleges and universities. Wald and Losen (2003), in a brief article, provide an introduction to the disparities that existed among children of color and White children regarding school discipline practices. Many children of color are placed in educational environments that have not prepared them for global citizenship. Unqualified teacher's lack of resources and unfair discipline and suspension practices only prepare students for the school to prison pipeline versus the school to high school graduation highway. In their article, Wald and Losen (2003) noted, "According to the Justice Policy Institute, there were almost a third more African American men in prison and jail (791,000) than in universities or college (603,000) at the end of the 20th century" (pp. 11–12). As Rodriguez and Greer (2017) explained in their counternarrative article about their first-person experiences of being men of color who are Doctors of Education:

Unfortunately, academic performance in the classroom was not emphasized by anyone at school. As long as I got to class, sat down, shut up, did my work and didn't cause any fuss in the classroom, I would be marked present and would sail through another day without any concern for real or meaningful learning. (Rodriguez & Greer, 2017)

Sadly, being a good student in school for African American males does not translate into being an educated student, or having the skills needed to pass the National Teacher Examination.

Since NTE is based on academic preparation and African American males have a higher dropout rate than White males, African American males are less likely to pass the examination (Hozien, 2016). Representing less than 2% of the teaching force, African American male teachers start as African American boys. African American boys who dropout are not eligible for higher education enrollment, not qualified to teach, and therefore unable to lead schools as

assistant principals and principals (Hozien, 2016). If your high school experiences were not academically intense due to lack of access to Advanced Placement classes, Honors courses or a college readiness curriculum, it becomes difficult to enter college and have access to passing the Teacher Examination (Wallace & Gagen, 2019). This is a “failure of the education system to adequately prepare them for collegiate studies” (Goings & Bianco, 2016, p. 630).

African American males who do graduate from high school face additional barriers connected to the National Teacher Examination. Goings and Bianco (2016) conducted a study that explored the perspectives that 11th- and 12th-grade African American males had on entering the field of education. The study consisted of 22 African American males who were a part of a college preparatory program to consider becoming teachers. The findings of the study revealed that students experienced low expectations, issues with stereotypes, and dealing with racial microaggressions. Goings and Bianco (2016) noted, “41% of Black males begin their collegiate careers in community colleges” (p. 630). However, African American males are less likely to complete their studies at community colleges when compared to their counterparts (Goings & Bianco, 2016). Of the 2 million African Americans enrolled in college, one-third are African American males (Wallace & Gagen, 2019). African American men are attending college but not graduating with degrees, thus unable to obtain a teaching license (Wallace & Gagen, 2019). These higher education barriers and lack of academic skills, under prepare African American males, to become teachers and successfully pass the National Teacher Examination. Hozien (2016) noted another reality for African American males: “once minority group members have their credential, they face discrimination in employment practices, culturally discontinuous school climates and taboos about raising issues of racism, lack of promotion and failure of others to recognize their leadership skills” (p. 2).

Diversification of the Teaching Force

To counter these negative perceptions of African American male teachers, schools must create a diverse teaching force (Bristol & Mentor, 2018; Wallace & Gagen, 2019). Diverse educators bring a wealth of knowledge, structure, concepts, culture, ethnicity, and community into the classroom to educate and teach our children of color (Wallace & Gagen, 2019). “Teacher diversity initiatives could be bolstered with a clearer understanding of how educators of color perceive their school-based experiences” (Bristol & Mentor, 2018, p. 219). A diverse teaching population can help dismantle the negative imagery, stereotypes, and socially constructed perceptions of African American men and African American male educators, thus creating counternarratives of positive experiences for students (Wallace & Gagen, 2019). It is not enough to recruit these men; school leaders must also provide differentiated supports to African American male educators by redefining their role in schools. As Black male teachers are in the classroom, their “intellectual, scholarly, math and artistic knowledge and capacities” are far more valuable than merely a Black body in the school to discipline African American boys (Wallace & Gagen, 2019, p. 312).

Summary

There is a need for more African American male teachers to work with African American boys. Though singularly portrayed as disciplinarians by current and previous scholars, politicians, and policymakers, African American male educators can utilize their skills to create learning environments for all students to be academically successful. It becomes critical to prepare African American males interested in teaching early through placement in Advanced Placement and Honors classes. These classes give students academic voices to express themselves, developing critical thinking skills and advanced writing abilities, mathematical skills

needed to pass the National Teacher Examination successfully. Well prepared African American male teachers can move forward in their careers and serve as African American male assistant principals and principals. As noted earlier, the current teaching force statistic is bleak, therefore, contributing to an equally limited pool of qualified African American males to become school leaders.

African American Male Principals

Key professional leaders within the African American communities provided leadership, mission and vision to their African American communities at various levels. These influencers included “African American ministers, journalists, lawyers, business owners, educators, and other professionals” who provided leadership to their community (Franklin, 1990, p. 39). The biggest influencers within the African American community were educators (Franklin, 1990). “Many ministers, journalists, lawyers, and successful business persons at one time or another, served as teachers in local public and private schools” (p. 40). These individuals demonstrated the African American currency of knowledge located in the African American community (Franklin, 1990). While considerable attention regarding African American leaders centered around well-known recognized scholars such as W. E. B. Dubois, Booker T. Washington, Dr. King, or Malcolm X, African American educators have gone less noticed regarding their influence within African American communities (Franklin, 1990).

This section will review the nature of African American educational leadership, including concepts of homophily, Ethno-Humanist role identity leadership practices, and leadership characteristics of African American principals.

Homophily

African American principals typically identify with the culture and experiences of their African American students; therefore, they serve as positive role models for African American children in their schools (Milner & Lomotey, 2014). This shared connection of culture and experiences between African American children and African American principals has been termed homophily (Milner & Lomotey, 2014). Homophily is “the proclivity of people to fraternize and connect with like others” (Milner & Lomotey, 2014, p. 326). There is a sense of connection as an instant understanding of the unwritten rules of association based on culture and race (Lomotey, 1989). “When two African Americans interact or communicate their shared beliefs and values suggest that homophily occurs, bringing about great information usage, attitudes formation, attitude change and behavior change” (p. 3). There are language, identity, customs, traditions, and value systems shared among African American students and African American principals in urban schools (Milner & Lomotey, 2014). According to Lomotey (1993), “homophily---the notion that people with homogeneous beliefs, values and cultural attributes tend to interact and communicate more effectively with each other” (p. 396).

Ethno Humanist Role Identity

African American principals, according to Lomotey (1993), serve dual roles as a Bureaucrat/Administrator and as Ethno-Humanist Role Identity. The four qualities of the Bureaucrat/Administrator displayed by principals include goal development, contagious energy, effective communication and “managing instruction, which incorporates teachers supervision, curriculum development and achievement evaluation” (Lomotey, 1993, p. 396). Traditional ways of running schools lend themselves to meeting the needs of society by performing the essential functions of school leadership for student success (Lomotey, 1993). The qualities exhibited by

the role identity of Bureaucrat/Administrator helps African American students navigate through the current systems in education (Lomotey, 1993). As Lomotey (1993) noted, in the Bureaucrat/Administrator Role Identity, “Principals are merely committed to facilitating the movement of their students from grade to grade” (p. 397), thus meeting the expectations of the current society.

Over 25 years ago, Dr. Lomotey created the term Ethno-Humanist Role Identity to describe the shared qualities of African American principals (Milner & Lomotey, 2014). Ethno-Humanist role identity “encompasses commitment to the education of all students; confidence in the ability of all students to do well; and compassion for and understanding of all students and the communities in which they live” (Lomotey, 1989, p. 131). African American principals who represent the Ethno-Humanist Role Identity are concerned about the progress of annual student promotions along with their ultimate impact on society, particularly in their African American community (Lomotey, 1993). Equally, principals are concerned with the life outcomes of students beyond schooling environments and school completion (Lomotey, 1993). Lomotey (1993) stated regarding Ethno-Humanist Role Identity:

In this role, principals identify with African American students as a member of their culture. They argue that academic success is not enough. What is needed, these principals contend, is an education about one’s culture, about life and about where these African American students fit in the society and in the world. In essence, these leaders encourage African American students to look at the world through an African-centered set of lenses that provides them with vision that is more focused, has a wider periphery and more depth.

African American principals who exhibit Ethno-Humanist Role Identity can help African American students attack and dismantle their disfranchisement (Milner & Lomotey, 2014). Disenfranchisement exists in how African American males are denied access to high-quality education due to systematic inequalities and historic racism in urban schools for children of color (Milner & Lomotey, 2014). Working from the framework of Ethno- Humanist Role Identity, African American principals can strive to ensure positive cultural environments and culturally relevant instructional materials for their African American student population (Milner & Lomotey, 2014). Unfortunately, and at the expense of African American students from urban schools, White principals may only ascribe to the singular principal role identity of Bureaucrat/Administrator. This singular focus results in a lack of education where African American children are not having a sense of purpose or understanding of the relationship between school and life (Lomotey, 1993).

African American Principals and Student Achievement

Principals play critical roles in leading systems within schools (Lomotey, 1993). African American principals lead like their ancestors did in *pre-Brown*, where they supported their community by serving their African American children through activities at school and in making decisions (Lomotey, 1989). As Wilkerson and Peck (2018) noted, African American male principals have a strong community focus and commitment to the needs of all children but especially African American children. They maintain this commitment despite the “lasting struggle with and against dominant White societal norms” (p. 3). According to Pollard (1997), African American principals are typically designated to fix problems in schools that are highly populated by African American students (Milner & Lomotey, 2014). Wilkerson and Peck (2018) stated, “African American male principals are usually assigned to schools that are low

performing academically, serve high minority students populations and maintain large numbers of inexperienced teachers” (pp. 17–18). Researchers noted that there is an increase in student achievement when African American children are taught by African American teachers and led by African American principals (Milner & Lomotey, 2014). As Lomotey (1993) noted, “there is evidence to suggest that principal leadership is significant in bringing about greater success in school for African American students” (p. 396).

Principals will need to create these positive learning environments where African American students feel valued and appreciated while also connecting school learning with future life experiences (Lomotey, 1993). Pollard (1997) noted, “the limited amount of research on African American school principals seem to fall into two categories” (pp. 356–357). The first category includes the problems African American principals face by the conflict between the school district demands, community needs and parental requests regarding their children (Pollard, 1997). These “conflicting pressures” create feelings of “isolation and marginalization” (pp. 356–357). African American principals have to balance the demands of schools while simultaneously meeting the needs of their community (Wilkerson & Peck, 2018). The second category, according to Pollard (1997), is the thriving African American principals who serve as influentially strong school leaders and also serve as community advocates.

The role of the principal directly affects the academic outcomes of students. Current policies and various education reforms have not had a positive outcome on the lives of African American students (Milner & Lomotey, 2014). “The leadership of the principal affects the behavior of the teachers which subsequently affects the achievement of students” (Lomotey, 1989, p. 145). It becomes the principal’s responsibility to guide the work of dismantling disenfranchisement of African American children by creating culturally responsive learning

environments for them (Milner & Lomotey, 2014). However, African American principals find themselves between leading a majority White faculty alongside recognizing the needs of African American children (Pollard, 1997). According to Lomotey (1989), “principal leadership reflecting friendship, trust, respect and warmth in relations with teachers has been associated with improved academic achievement” (p. 1). Principals will need to create an equitable balance between the concepts of schooling for societal goals and education for cultural goals (Lomotey, 1993). In other words, principals will need to create a balance of serving African American children through both a Bureaucrat/Administrator perspective and an Ethno-Humanist Role Identity perspective. As Pollard (1997) noted, more research is needed on African American principals and their leadership styles and experiences. Overall, the role of the principal is “to serve children” (Lomotey, 1993, p. 134). Hozien (2016) noted, “African American principals have acknowledged that race and gender play a part in shaping their role as administrators and their own views of their mission” (p. 2).

Summary

African American principals continue to balance the needs of their school while also influencing their communities. Through shared language, identity, customs, traditions, and a shared value system, the need of students are being addressed, thus an increase in student achievement. As African American principals create learning culturally relevant environments, their schools transform from schooling experiences to meet societal goals to institutions of education to meet cultural goals. With concepts of homophily and Ethno-Humanist Role Identity leadership practices present by African American males school leaders, the current achievement gaps among African American students can be dismantled as the values of education can become as vital as it was during the pre-*Brown* era in our society by African American leaders.

Conclusion

Rural school leaders face numerous challenges and have varying levels of multiple responsibilities that simply differ from urban and suburban school leaders. In some cases, they are the school principal while teaching a class; in other cases, they are driving buses, athletic directors and community connectors. These multiple roles equally created feelings of isolation and loneliness as they must always be “visible, approachable and accessible” within their rural community (Preston & Barnes, 2017, p. 10). Now imagine being an African American male school leader with these identified challenges in addition to race and gender issues. This literature review examined schooling experiences for African American children before and after the *Brown versus Board of Education* decision and the role of the African American teacher and the African American principal. Thurgood Marshall noted, 20 years after the decision, “no substantial progress toward desegregation” (Tillman, 2004, p. 300). What was seen as a landmark decision and turning point in the field of education, has resulted in numerous losses for the African American community but particularly African American males. Next, the literature review focused on barriers for African American males accessing the field of education from the War on Drugs, Gun-Free School Act of 1994 and negative perceptions of the African American male. The barriers limited the pool of qualified African American boys to enter the field of education and prepared to teach in classrooms and lead schools. The review then examines the role of the African American male teacher with expectations to provide disciplinary practices toward the African American boy. Equally, a barrier is the National Teacher Examination and the disproportionate number of African American males who have not been adequately prepared to pass this examination. Finally, the review discusses the role of the African American principal and their unique cultural leadership characteristics toward school success in increasing

achievement of African American children. It is important to note when African American children feel valued and appreciated and are provided a curriculum that is culturally relevant to their daily lives taught by African American individuals, academic performance increases. My research is intended to acknowledge the voices of these African American male school leaders who continue to stand on the shoulders of great African American leaders. These leaders have gone before them as they face the numerous challenges of being an African American male educator in rural communities leading students of color in the 21st century.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

As the demographics of the United States public school student populations become more diverse, the teaching and school leadership populations have continued to lack diversity. As mentioned in Chapter II, according to Wallace and Gagen (2019), 82% of our current public school teachers are White middle-class women. Goings and Bianco (2016) reported that by 2022, a vast majority of the student population would be comprised of Black and Brown children. In a nutshell, with a large portion of teachers being White women, our classrooms and our African American boys are being trained by educators who do not reflect their culture, values, ethnicity, or gender. Hill et al. (2016) reported that there had been a slight increase in the number of Black principals (inclusive of males and females) from 1987 to 1988 (at 8.5%) to 2011 to 2012 (at 10.1%) for public schools. However, though in decline, 86.6% of public school principals in 1987-88 were White; in 2011-2012, that figure was 80.3% inclusive in both cases of males and females (Hill et al., 2016). The less than 2% of the teaching force that represents African American male teachers are then eligible to become Assistant Principals and Principals in schools. Rural communities and rural school leaders have unique challenges as community input, and parental involvement are extremely important in the execution of leadership as a rural school leader. These challenges can have an impact on African American male school leaders in rural schools.

The purpose of my study is to explore the lived experiences, challenges, and opportunities of African American male school leaders in rural communities in North Carolina. My goal is to uncover more narratives of African American male school leaders regarding their experiences in the field of education in rural communities in North Carolina. Equally, their voices reflect new ways of dismantling systematic structures designed to destroy our African

American boys and prevent them from entering the field of education. Also, the study adds to the limited existing research reflecting the intersection of rural school leaders and African American male educators. In addition, I drafted recommendations toward dismantling the systematic racial structures that prevent African American boys from reaching their potential in the field of education. I wanted to discover, from their perspectives, the factors that have contributed to the low percentage of African American male school leaders in rural communities. Lastly, I want to offer counternarratives to the existing discourse regarding the purpose of African American males in the field of education.

Preliminary/Pilot Study

For my pilot study, I got the opportunity to interview an assistant principal at a rural high school in North Carolina. Due to the coronavirus resulting in school closures across the state of North Carolina, I was only able to complete one interview. In terms of specifics, I traveled to a rural district in North Carolina to a traditional 9-12 high school to conduct an in-person interview with a local assistant principal pre-COVID-19 closures. Upon arriving, I got an opportunity to meet the school secretary, their principal and then my interviewee. We traveled to his office, a former converted classroom, where we conducted our interview. Utilizing the app Rev, after our brief small talk and explaining the process, I started recording our conversation. To my delight, my interviewee was very open during our interview, provided insight into his lived experiences while working as an assistant principal in three different rural districts. He communicated his passion for students and his perspective of working in a rural district as a school leader.

My goal for my interview was to practice using questions from my interview protocol as a data collection instrument. I have selected interviewing to capture the lived experiences and perspectives of African American male school leaders in rural communities. My interview was

extremely productive as it allowed me to practice my interview instrument protocol and make changes before the implementation of the instrument in my dissertation. My pilot study interview recording was completed in one hour and 15 minutes. The interview permitted me the opportunity to practice asking questions and ensure my open-ended questions were clear to the interviewee to address. Secondly, my pilot study provided additional trustworthiness to my dissertation. Overall, the interview allowed me time to practice following my scripted questions while simultaneously offering the ability to ask follow-up questions based on the participant's responses. I enjoyed interviewing and capturing the thoughts, perspectives, and feelings of this African American male school leader in his rural high school.

Lessons Learned

During my pilot study, I learned that it is essential for me to stay engaged with the interviewee. I found myself matching mannerisms, expressions, and providing relevant follow-up questions. However, I have to be extremely careful and remain focused during the interview process. Since I am not an auditory learner, I have to ensure I discipline myself to remain focused on the individual's responses and be fully engaged in the process of interviewing with my full attention. I also learned that my question order is appropriate for the flow of the interview with opportunities for follow-up questions should they arise. In terms of flow, my initial questions focus on his current position. Then the questions transitioned to his journey to becoming a school leader. Next, I had the interviewee reflect upon the Black church and its role in his life, thus creating an opportunity for childhood experiences to potentially surface to the forefront of our conversation. The next series of questions focused on the benefits, challenges, and opportunities associated with being an African American male school leader in a rural school. The next series of questions focused on previously received advice from various school

stakeholders regarding their role, forms of experienced racism, and reasons for choosing a career in education. The final series of questions weigh in on his perspectives on why there is an underrepresentation of African American males in the field of education.

After interviewing my participant, I learned that my topic is relevant and needs further investigation in rural communities among African American male school leaders. During the interview, I heard many statements that corresponded with my research on rural communities. My participant mentioned being from his community in that he grew up in the community, knowing the families, having taught many of the students' parents and observing demographic changes within his community. He spoke about being a part of a family-oriented community environment within his school. Equally, he spoke about being a teacher, wrestling and baseball coach. He spoke about disciplining students through a culturally relevant style where students are challenged to review their academics while facing disciplinary actions. He spoke about his family background and the connection with the Black church within this same community. These examples all align with the research of rural school leaders with both their successes and challenges. Budge (2006) noted that, "Successful leaders need to understand the mentality of a small rural community which includes a willingness to be highly visible, accessible and approachable as well as reach out to members of the community to provide rationale for district action" (p. 7).

Design Influence

After completing my interview, I made significant adjustments. First, I reduced the number of research questions for my dissertation, from four questions to, as mentioned earlier, two research questions. This reduction permitted me the opportunity to ask more follow-up questions without the need to attempt to answer four research questions for my dissertation.

Secondly, I adjusted the number of interview questions on my interview protocol instrument. With the reduction of research questions, it allowed me to reduce the number of interview questions asked of my participants.

Thirdly, my pilot study assisted in helping me to decide the number of interviews to conduct for my dissertation. I concluded that conducting seven interviews between 75-90 minutes will permit a richer discussion and set a realistic timeframe for the participants during the scheduling of interviews. Having interviewed three African American males thus far with my pilot study and an initial project during the first semester of my doctoral studies, I have learned the more comfortable the atmosphere is for these men, the more they open up about their experiences. Lastly, writing this dissertation during a global worldwide pandemic has been an adventure to remember.

Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences and perceptions of African American male school leaders in rural K-12 public schools?
2. What factors do participants believe have led to the underrepresentation of African American males in school leadership roles in K-12 rural schools?

Specific Methodology

In my study, I employed the methodology of basic qualitative research with elements of phenomenology. Basic qualitative research methodology focuses on different aspects and perspectives of a given topic of interest (Creswell, 2016). That “central phenomenon” is then investigated utilizing data collection methods of observation, interviews and/or document analysis to discover and construct meaning from the perspectives regarding the identified phenomenon (Creswell, 2016, p. 6). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) summarized basic qualitative

research as “to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experience” (p. 24). My study explored the lived experiences and perspectives of African American male school leaders in rural K-12 schools.

Creswell (2016) further identified different elements of qualitative research. These include: documenting the participant’s voices during an investigated experience, conducting the data collection in the participant’s setting, having a small sample size to analyze, and giving written voice to a typically ignored population by the dominant culture. Utilizing a basic qualitative research methodology, I provided a written avenue to feature African American male school leaders’ voices in traditionally underrecognized rural schools in North Carolina.

I also included components of qualitative phenomenology in my research. According to Sanders (1982), phenomenological research “makes meaning of human experiences” (p. 353). It is the understanding of the essence of feelings and experiences by individuals who have experienced the indicated topic of interest (Gates et al., 2018). In using components of this method, I attempted to uncover how participants experience the research phenomenon (Gates et al., 2018). Qualitative phenomenology research gives written language to the voices of verbalized lived experiences. Patton (2002) noted that phenomenological researchers explore the experiences of human beings both individually and collectively. It is how participants “perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, talk about it with others” (p. 104).

I selected basic qualitative research methodology along with components of the qualitative phenomenology research design to understand the lived experiences of being an African American male school leader in K-12 rural communities in North Carolina. Through detailed written descriptions, my goal is that the “reader should come away from the

phenomenology with the feeling, I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 28). These orientations permit an in-depth interview analysis to discover the essence of the African American male school leaders’ lived experiences in the phenomenon of rural communities as school leaders. As Van Manen (1997) stated, “lived experiences is to the soul what breath is to the body” (p. 36).

Setting

My study’s setting varies; my research took place online, representing different rural school communities in North Carolina. According to Public School Forum (2019), North Carolina is the second-largest rural student population in the United States. In fact, in North Carolina, “Eighty of the NC 100 counties are classified as rural” (Public School Forum, 2019, p. 6). My study took place within five of these rural K-12 districts in eight rural schools and communities.

Sample Population/Unit of Analysis

My eight research participants were African American K-12 male school leaders in rural school communities in North Carolina. I selected the following criteria for my sample population:

1. Self-identified as an African American/Black
2. Self-identified as a male
3. Currently serving or served as a rural school leader for at least 2 years (Assistant Principal/Principal) in the state of North Carolina
4. Willing to reflect on and share personal experiences of their school leadership as African American males in a rural community
5. If currently working in a District Central Office, they must meet the above criteria

I selected this population of participants to access and portray a variety of lived experiences of African American male school leaders within rural communities in North Carolina. In addition, I wanted to discover themes from various voices of African American male school leaders from multiple grade levels, years of experience, and varied points of view within rural schools across the state of North Carolina.

For my study, I used purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In purposeful sampling, I researched information on school principals and assistant principals utilizing the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction website statistical profile. On this profile, under Part II, Local Education Agencies, I pulled the public school personnel interactive report. This report allowed me to sort the year, 2020, the number of principals and nonteaching assistant principals in North Carolina by districts, gender and race. For example, Guilford County schools, a nonrural district, is listed as having 39 male principals and 61 Black principals inclusive of males and females. Equally, according to the report, this district has 59 male nonteaching Assistant Principals and 90 Black nonteaching Assistant Principals combined. Based on the report, currently, for the 2019-2020 school year, there were 1694 Black Principals and nonteaching Assistant Principals in North Carolina, with 2,286 identified as male principals inclusive of all racial identities.

Next, I reviewed the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction education directory database spreadsheet custom report for schools. Within this report, I filtered districts/schools based on rural-distant, rural fringe and rural remote. Returning to the statistical profile personnel report spreadsheet, mentioned earlier, filtering by race and gender, I identified rural traditional K-12 districts of interest to me by regional location and the number of Black principals and nonteaching Assistant Principals that have been identified by the report. For example, in filtering the

information, some rural communities do not have any African American school administrators. These rural communities would not be of interest to me. However, there may be other rural communities with one male school administrator and five Black school leaders. This rural community may be of interest in determining if the only male school administrator is an African American male.

Next, I reviewed the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction education directory database spreadsheet for the Local Education Agency (LEA) personnel report. I set up the parameters to include a list of superintendents, assistant superintendents, associate superintendents, and office of civil rights coordinators for North Carolina. From this list of all the LEAs in North Carolina, I sorted the list to include only North Carolina rural communities as per my interest. Utilizing this information, I reviewed local districts with African American male superintendents, inclusive of the information located on the North Carolina School Superintendent Association website of Superintendent directory.

Once the filtering, research, and sorting were completed, I reviewed district websites and school websites of the identified districts of interest and generated a list of initial eligible candidates for my study. A total of 115 potential candidates were identified on my initial list. After securing the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I began obtaining school district approval to conduct my research study. The rural districts, where I had an interest in conducting my research, received an initial email. These initial emails were sent to the superintendent. They included a copy of my approved IRB notification, a formal letter, my study overview Workplan, and a copy of my research proposal. After obtaining nine rural school district approvals, I sent an introductory email, my UNCG informed consent form, and school district approval notification, to potential candidates inviting them to participate in my research study. Eight candidates met

my study criteria and agreed to participate in the study. A follow-up email was sent to my candidates outlining dates and times of availability to conduct their 75- to 90-minute interview. Candidates also had the option of completing their interviews in-person or online. Once an agreed-upon date, time, and format were selected, I emailed the details to access their zoom room or confirmed our meeting location. My data collection method, interview protocol instrument, was pilot tested, as mentioned earlier, with one individual who met the indicated criteria for my study.

As a summary, four North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reports were pulled: Statistical Profile Report, School Personnel Interactive Report, Educators Directory Database spreadsheet custom report for schools and the Educators Directory database spreadsheet for LEA Personnel Report. In addition, local district websites, school-based websites and the North Carolina School Superintendent Association Superintendent Directory were used to identify African American male school leaders in rural communities in North Carolina.

Data Collection Methods

For my study, I employed a basic qualitative research approach using components of qualitative phenomenology research. I solicited 23 North Carolina rural school districts, secured nine district approvals, and interviewed eight participants from five approved districts. I started my rural district approval process by emailing superintendents. Emails were identified from the North Carolina Superintendent Association Superintendent directory website. As mentioned earlier, Superintendents received a copy of my proposal outline, my overview dissertation work plan, introduction email (see Appendix C), my approved IRB letter (see Appendix D), and a formal letter of request (see Appendix B). District approval processes varied among rural school districts, including submitting the request for school board approval, a former letter by the

superintendent or designee, a phone call, or an email from the superintendent indicating acceptance.

I conducted eight interviews with African American male school leaders in rural schools in North Carolina. Seven of my interviews were conducted online utilizing the zoom platform, and one interview conducted in-person at his rural school, all using my interview protocol instrument (see Appendix A). I set up a 90-minute timeframe for conducting online interview meetings and scheduled a 90-minute timeframe for my in-person meeting. In my online meetings, zoom room titles were identified by the order participants confirmed their date and time for the interview. For example, the meeting title for the first participant was “Participant #1”. Participant zoom meetings included a required password to enter the zoom room. Once participants arrived in their zoom room, they were placed in a waiting room where I admitted them access to the zoom room for the interview. Upon entering the zoom room, participants’ names were changed to their zoom meeting title (ex., Participant #4) for zoom room additional security. Before recording the interviews, participants were shown the zoom settings via the shared screen feature. They were able to see the “audio recording only” checked for their session. I reviewed my UNCG informed consent form and answered any additional questions before recording the interview. Once interviews were completed, I explained, per the UNCG informed consent form, that a copy of our session transcript would be sent. They would have a two-week window to review and indicate any discrepancies with the report. After each interview session, I wrote my thoughts regarding the interview in my reflexivity journal.

My interview questions are semi-structured, open-ended, and in-depth in order to allow me to explore the lived experiences of the selected participants. Using my interview protocol instrument that I adapted from various dissertations (Dawson, 2018; Miller, 2019; Wilkerson,

2014), the first seven questions are general background questions regarding the participants. Questions 8-13 focus on the participants' journey to leadership. Questions 14-17 focus on participants' leadership approaches and experiences in their role as rural school leaders including before COVID-19 and after COVID-19. Questions 18-22 focus on race and serving as a rural school leader. Question 23 allows participants' the opportunity to provide advice to future African American rural school leaders. In response to my second research question, I have identified three questions addressing their belief regarding the underrepresentation of African American males in rural school leadership roles. My final question allowed participants to share any final thoughts associated with their lived experiences. Interviews were audio-recorded using the Rev App for in-person interviews and zoom for online interviews. A third-party vendor transcribed interviews to ensure the accuracy of the information gathered during the interview.

Data Analysis Strategies

My primary data analysis method was the constant comparative method (Boeije, 2002; Glaser, 1965; Savin-Badin & Major, 2013). According to Savin-Badin and Major (2013), constant comparative method is "one of the most frequently used analytical methods of qualitative data analysis" (p. 437). My first step in this analysis process was to read the first interview transcript in its entirety. While reading the transcript, I simultaneously listened to the audio transcript recording for accuracy of the third-party transcribed transcript. Next, I read my reflexivity journal from the first interview as a reminder of my thoughts, biases, beliefs, assumptions and/or disposition after the completion of the interview (Creswell, 2016). For example, during my pilot study, after the completion of the in-person interview, I walked to my car and immediately wrote in my reflexivity journal. After the pilot study was transcribed for practice purposes, I also reviewed my reflexivity journal to recall my initial assumptions

regarding the completion of the interview. During my study, after each interview, whether in-person or online, I wrote in my reflexivity journal.

Next, in the second reading of the first interview, I completed open coding, analytical memos, consistency analysis, and in vivo coding. I begin coding, line by line, text segments using the open coding strategy. Open coding permits codes to be identified based on my interpretation of the text segments (Boeije, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Savin-Badin & Major, 2013). I created a table for my coding, including a column for my interview questions, participant direct text statements, open coding and axial coding. In addition to open coding during the second reading of the first interview, I wrote my reflection notes also known as analytical memos in the table (Savin-Badin & Major, 2013). Also, during this reading of the first interview, I identified key quotes, in vivo code, for future reference, highlighting these responses in green in my data analysis table (Savin-Badin & Major, 2013).

Boeije (2002) stated, in his explanation of the comparison of single interviews, that interviews are compared within segmental parts of the single interview for consistency. For example, the participant indicated that they never experienced racism but, during the interview, spoke about a situation that the researcher interpreted as clearly a racially motivated situation. During the second reading of the first interview, I identified any inconsistencies within the interview based on the interview questions and my interpretation of the data. I repeated this process for each interview until all transcribed transcripts have gone through these steps of open coding, analytical memos, consistency analysis, and in vivo coding. Next, I identified and develop axial codes, making connections and descriptions based on my open coding strategy.

Once all transcripts have been coded, I scrutinize these transcripts for any common codes. I investigate both similarities and differences among the sample participants (Boeije,

2002). I generated a list of all axial codes, and then I identified six themes that emerge across all the axial coded transcripts. These themes serve to address the answers to my two research questions.

Trustworthiness

My study addressed trustworthiness in three ways: Member Checking, Thick Descriptions, and Research Reflexivity (Creswell, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Member Checking

In his study exploring four Black male teachers' experiences, Pabon (2016) conducted member checking for trustworthiness. Each participant was provided a copy of their profile to check for accuracy after the completion of transcriptions. For my study, each interviewee received a copy of their interview transcript. Interviewees had a two-week window via online platform (zoom, WebEx, email) to discuss any discrepancies with the report and ensure accuracy of the information captured.

Rich, Thick Descriptions

Korstjens and Moser (2018) identify thick descriptions where the writer or researcher provides descriptive details for other individuals who read the results of the study. There is a clear level of accurate details within the descriptions for readers to sense and understand the context of the participants (Creswell, 2016). "They can smell, feel and hear people" through the written text of the research (Creswell, 2016, p. 194). I wrote rich, thick descriptions of my participants by providing detailed biography profiles of their background information and using their direct quotes to support and enhance any specific information I provided.

Research Reflexivity

Lastly, researcher reflexivity addresses the researcher's "biases, dispositions and assumptions regarding the research" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 249). To identify my biases, I kept a reflexivity journal after my interviews and read it during the data analysis process. After each interview, I wrote in my journal my immediate thoughts, beliefs, feelings, biases, and assumptions associated with the completed interview. During the data analysis, I reviewed my journal entries after the first full read of the interview transcript to gauge my thoughts regarding the completed interview. Similarly, during data analysis, I used my notes to create analytical memos to uncover any biases associated with the study. Segments of notes were available for usage with my study findings; however, these notes were primarily held for my records as a document audit trail and available as needed.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations for my study include informed consent, clearly outlining the purpose of the study, and confidentiality. As a researcher, it is important for my participants to know that their identity will not be compromised by participating in the study. Miller (2019) utilized the NATO Phonetic Alphabet to identify his participants in his dissertation. Each participant in my study has been provided pseudonym names to ensure confidentiality. Data was stored in my UNCG Box account, per the IRB application. All participants, at any time, may withdraw from the study for any reason.

Informed consent provides me with permission to conduct the study, granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Wallace and Gagen (2019) utilized the Institutional Review Board for consent to conduct the investigation of their study due to working with human beings. For my study, informed consent was explained, outlining the purpose of the research and

granting permission to conduct the data collection process. I secured authorization and approval from the IRB at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and reviewed the informed consent form prior to conducting the interview with the selected participants for the study. Per the IRB, UNCG informed consent form signatures were not required to obtain by my participants.

Lastly, a pilot study of one individual who met the criteria of the study was conducted prior to the implementation of the dissertation plan, as I mentioned earlier. The pilot study was used to practice my interview protocol instrument and as used as practice for my data analysis process.

Limitations

My study focuses on the lived experiences and perceptions of African American male school leaders in K-12 rural schools in North Carolina, along with factors contributing to the underrepresented number of African American male school leaders in rural schools. My small sample size of eight African American male school leaders limited my ability to make generalizations of my findings. This study is limited to African American male rural school leaders in the state of North Carolina and the number of completed interview questions along with follow-up questions if needed and time permits provided by me. Lastly, accessibility of the sample size was limited given the tight-knit community access associated with rural communities and the amount of time available by the participants due to multiple responsibilities placed upon rural school leaders and the demands of reopening of North Carolina schools due to our global pandemic, COIVD-19.

Reporting My Findings

My report is organized based on my two research questions. My interview protocol instrument (see Appendix A) aligns with my research questions in terms of numerical order for the participants to answer. Each research question serves as a focus for themes generated by all completed combined interviews. I report my findings in Chapter IV with six themes that emerged after my analysis of the interview data from my research participants. In Chapter V, I restate and answer my research questions and I enrich my analysis by connecting my study's thematic findings to the existing research that I reviewed in Chapter II.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The purpose of my study is to explore the lived experiences, challenges, and opportunities of African American male K-12 school leaders in rural communities in North Carolina. My study looks at the intersectionality of African American male school leaders leading rural schools within rural communities. My study gives voice to African American male school leaders in rural schools and contributes to the dearth of current academic scholarly research associated with this intersectionality.

The goal of my study was to address two research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences and perceptions of African American male school leaders in rural K-12 public schools?
2. What factors do participants believe have led to the underrepresentation of African American males in school leadership roles in K-12 rural schools?

My findings revealed a total of six central themes, four themes related to the first research question and two themes related to the second question. My themes for the study emerged as a result of conducting interviews with eight African American male school leaders across five districts within North Carolina. My participants' criteria included: self-identified as an African American male, served in rural schools for at least 2 years (including currently serving in at least their second year), and demonstrated a willingness to reflect on and share their personal experiences as African American males in rural communities. These 60- to 90-minute interviews were conducted to uncover more narratives of African American males who work as school leaders in rural communities. Currently, my participants serve or have served as Assistant Principals, Principals, and District Central Office Staff across the state of North Carolina. This

chapter will provide brief biographies of each participant followed by the six themes identified and participants sharing their lived experiences associated with each theme.

Participant Profiles

I gave my study participants a pseudonym to protect their identity. Equally, participants, including those with earned doctoral degrees, are referred to by mister and their given pseudonym name to protect their identity.

Richard Washington – Middle School Assistant Principal

Richard Washington (40-50 years old) has been a rural school leader for 10 years. He serves as an Assistant Principal of Curriculum and Instruction for his local middle school, sixth to eighth graders, in his rural community. As an alumnus of a Historically Black College and University, his college major was in a non-education degree. During his senior year in college, he recalled:

And so what I decided to do in the spring, I- I took some courses in education, foundations of education, and I had some practicum classes. And so just kinda just to see. And I said, “O- okay, I wa- I don’t wanna rule out anything.” And- but I knew in my mind what I wanted to do. I learned about want- what- what I wanted to do and what the higher being had for me are two different things.

With a passion for education, he continues to empower his school, community, and the students he serves. He has an earned doctoral degree in the field of education.

Jerry Williams – Middle School Administrator

Mr. Jerry Williams (60-70 years old) has been working exclusively in rural communities for over 30 years. He brings a wealth of knowledge and experiences to the field of education. Mr. Williams currently serves on the leadership team at his local middle school, sixth to eighth grade,

in a rural community in North Carolina. He started his college studies in education with both his major and minor degrees at a Predominantly White Institution. Gifted in athletics, he played college basketball, football, and track and field with alternative aspirations beyond the field of education. He recalled, “And so during my sophomore year, my coaches and adviser are always telling me, ‘You’re going to need something to fall back onto.’” Upon an unfortunate injury, he returned to his hometown rural community and served as a teacher and athletic director for over 20 years. In addition to being a teacher, athletic coach, and director, Mr. Williams has also served as a dean of students, assistant principal, and principal of an alternative school. He considers himself a man of faith or a person who lives by biblical principles. He is a husband and father of two children.

Demarcus Jones – District Central Office

Mr. Demarcus Jones (40-50 years old) has been a rural school leader for over 5 years but in education for over 19 years. He has served in numerous educational roles, including teacher, assistant principal, principal, and positions at the district central office level. Mr. Jones has received various recognitions and honors with aspirations of always starting his career in education. He attended a Predominantly White Institution where he received his bachelor’s and master’s degree and has earned a doctorate in education from a Historically Black College and University. From a middle school principal to district central office, when asked about what motivated him to pursue the field of education, he recalled,

Um, I had several excellent teachers throughout my career. But I mean, I, I really can’t recall too many bad teachers as I reflect back on it now. And, they just inspired me to do things. Um, my high school principal was an African American man, and he pushed me and saw me, saw that I could do some things.

Derrick Kirkpatrick – District Central Office

Mr. Derrick Kirkpatrick (40-50 years old) has been working in rural communities in education for over 20 years. He started his college studies in an alternate non-education major at a junior college. However, he later transitioned to a Predominately White Institution, where he graduated with a degree in education. He has worked exclusively in rural communities serving in various leadership positions, including teacher, coach, assistant principal, principal, and the district central office. In his interview, he spoke of the turning point that led him towards the field of education. After sitting in his alternate non-education major, he recalled:

I knew that, uh, programming just wasn't for me. And so I decided that I needed to follow what my heart was anyway, which was really, I wanted to work with children, young people. I wanted to be for young people, what many educators have been for me.

He is a father of three children and currently works at the district central office.

Calvin McDonald – High School Assistant Principal

Mr. Calvin McDonald (30-40 years old) is currently in his second year as a high school assistant principal in a rural community. He has been an assistant principal for 4 years in an urban district in North Carolina. Mr. McDonald started college majoring in a non-education degree at a Predominantly White Institution on an athletic scholarship. During his college years, he served overseas in schools providing tutoring, enrichment, and academic programming. He recalled:

I worked with afterschool program where students actually came to our college campus and we did enrichment activities with them. I also went to the local elementary school and I read to the primary grades, kindergarten, first grade, second grade. I read those students, and then I also went to a local middle school and I would do tutoring as well as

participating in PE classes as well with those students. That is kind of what gave me the bug for, I don't wanna call it a bug, but that's kind of what gave me the inspiration, lean towards education.

After graduation, he started coaching and serving as a teacher assistant. He later became a licensed teacher and earned a Master's degree in school administration. He provided a powerful example of homophily practices:

I will tell teachers students are our clientele. We can't just switch them up. We can't just leave them. This is our clientele. We have to serve them. Our clientele is going to give us feedback, just like you do something on Amazon or Google. And you can give two stars, three stars, four stars, five stars. The way that we treat our clientele is going to determine the reviews and the reflection that we are going to receive.

Douglas Thomas – Elementary School Principal

Mr. Douglas Thomas (50-60 years old) is a native of his rural community. He is the principal of a local elementary school in his rural community, where he has served for over 14 years. He started his college studies in an alternate non-education major at a Historically Black College and University. He left and entered the community college in an alternate non-education major while working part-time. He recalled,

And I went to a community college and said, I'm gonna be a computer engineer, got in there, didn't know a thing about computers, I was like, what in the world am I doing, so I decided to go back to school.

He completed his bachelor's and master's degrees in education and school administration. Prior to returning to his hometown rural community, he taught for 7 years and served as an assistant principal for 2 years in an urban district in North Carolina.

Rafeal Walker – Elementary School Principal

Mr. Rafeal Walker (60-70 years old) is a native of his rural community. He has 20 years of experience being a rural school leader in the field of education. Mr. Walker is currently in his fifth year as an elementary school principal. He started his college studies in an alternate non-education major attending a Predominantly White Institution. Upon graduation, he started his career outside of education but was searching for personal career fulfillment. He recalled earlier in his career speaking with a manager of a small accounting firm:

And well, I was working in accounting and I was working for a actually a firm in [city]. And, uh, and, uh, the, the partner had I mean, I was doing well according to him. He said, "You know, uh, I'm, I'm building, It was a small firm. I'm building this firm around you and I'm a make you a partner," and, you know, just all this and, But, uh, I just weren't enjoying it. Uh, it was, Yeah, the money was good. Um, but as I was working and just working numbers and, uh, doing all the things you do in a accounting firm, it just didn't give me that, I don't know. Whatever it was I was looking for. So, that's when I just, And I tried another company, I, I went to another company and worked in their accounting department. And that didn't do it for me either. So, I knew it wasn't, It was me, it won't, It was something that I had to find, what it is I'm, I, I really was supposed to be doing. I, And, uh, so that's, Like I said, it was just a Godsend that, uh, a friend of mine, I was just talking, And it was actually two friends of mine and they said, "Yeah. I know a principal." And, "I'm a talk to 'em." And they said, "You need to talk to 'em." And, and I got into teaching.

He has served as a teacher, coach, athletic director, assistant principal, and principal, all in rural communities in North Carolina. When asked what advice he would recommend to future African American male rural school leaders, he shared,

Make sure you put the students first. Uh, and you treat all students consistently and equitably. And don't, even though we might be drawn to hook up our fellow African-American students. Uh, we can't do that. We got to be equitable for everyone. 'Cause, and remember, even though you don't know it, everyone is always watching you.

Marcus Ray – Middle School Principal

Mr. Marcus Ray (60-70 years old), a native of his rural community, has had a unique pathway towards education. He has spent numerous years as a successful business owner in his rural community while serving as a substitute teacher. Since his years as a substitute teacher, Mr. Ray has served as a teacher assistant, teacher, assistant principal, and current principal in his hometown rural community. He has been an elementary principal for 4 years and in his second year as a middle school principal. As a successful businessman, his college studies began in a non-education industry. Later he attended both community college classes and completed his educational studies at a Predominately White Institution with both a teaching license, a master's degree, and an add-on school administration license. With interest in instruction, upon accepting a teacher assistant position, he recalled, "I told them when I took the job, If I'm gonna be grading papers and making bulletin boards, I'm not interested. I want to work with children in an instructional role." He is married, a father of three children, and has only worked in education in his hometown rural community. When asked about the advice he received from teachers upon entering administration, he shared, "Uh, number one, don't forget that you are a teacher. That was the first thing. All the teachers (laughs), when

I left and went into a, a principal's role, they said, 'Don't. Whatever you do, do not forget what it was like to be a teacher.'”

Findings: Six Central Themes

Theme I: African American Male School Leaders Emphasized the Importance of Building Relationships Between the School and Their Rural Community

One of the themes participants shared was the value of having strong relationships within their rural communities. Rural school leaders' success depends on their ability to connect with their local rural community through relationships. My participants shared their lived experiences of leading in rural communities and the importance of building relationships with their schools and community. This section will focus on several specific aspects of the general theme, including my participants' hometown rural community connections, unique experiences of working in rural communities, the Black church experiences, and the difference between urban schools and communities and rural schools and communities.

Hometown Rural Community Connections

Rural communities have a uniqueness in their community lifestyle, relationships, and building tight-knit environments among community members. My participants shared several commonalities in their introduction to teaching positions. Many made references to being able to return to their hometown rural community for teaching positions.

Mr. Thomas, when asked about his career transition from an urban district to accepting a rural district position and understanding the culture and lifestyle changes, shared, “Well, uh, it's, uh, by the fact that I'm from here, it really wasn't that much of a culture shock because, I mean, I know what I was going, you know, coming back to.” Growing up in his rural community, he

recognized the difference between urban and rural communities and was familiar with his hometown's rural community lifestyle.

Mr. Washington recalled his opportunity for a teaching position in the rural community where he grew up. He shared,

So that's when I interviewed, at first, the- at the middle school where I- I- I went as a student, I – as a math teacher. And the principal asked me, he said, “What do you feel about math?” And I honestly told him, I said, “The kids will probably be worse with me as their teacher than-” In math. So I – I ventured back into communications, thinking with the same job, and then he called me back maybe 3 weeks later to tell me that the English position was open. Well, this time I jumped on it, didn't even think twice, I said, “Yes, I will do it.” And so, um, as we say, the rest is history.

Through relationships with his hometown rural community, Mr. Washington entered into education as a lateral entry teacher.

Mr. Williams recalled his journey into the field of education. After, what appeared to be an initial tragedy due to an injury, turned into a passion for students' education. He recalled,

And, at that point in time, I was angry at the world. I was angry at God And I was thinking about going into the military and everything, but then, the school that I – did my student teaching at, when I went back home, the young lady I was dating, they found me and said that they are looking for me to offer me a job. So my first job that I got was in [district name] county as a math and science teacher.

His hometown rural community relationships granted him access to his first teaching position.

In reflecting on his educational journey and his relationships within his hometown rural community, Mr. Jones shared, “Okay. Um, upon graduating [from college], I went back to my

hometown of [city] North Carolina, and I taught one year there. Um.” Because of relationships, Mr. Jones graduated from college and secured a teaching position in his hometown rural community.

Unique Experiences of Working in Rural Communities

The second component of rural community relationships highlights the unique experiences of working in rural communities. Four of my participants shared their unique experiences as African American males and school leaders working in rural communities.

Mr. Kirkpatrick shared his experiences regarding the challenges of working in rural communities. He shared,

Well, sometimes it’s the closed-mindedness. Um, and I don’t say that to be, um, disrespectful, um, and maybe I should use another word, not necessarily closed-mindedness, but, um, sometimes limited experience to other cultures and other things make it difficult when you want to do something different that’s not the status quo of that particular community.

He further elaborated on a particular school event where this mindset became a challenge. He shared about an experience of a Black history program and his rural community response:

Doing a Black history program. “Well, you, we don’t need to do a Black history program here because we don’t have those issues here. We, we do appreciate, um, (laughs) our people of color in the community and, and um, and we all get along well and respect each other. We don’t have problems and, and we don’t want to cause no problems.” Or on the day, or if you and you, and you decide to have a Black history program, then, um, many of your White children start checking out of school so that they’re not having to be there during the, the program.

Mr. Kirkpatrick's example illustrates both the challenges of working in rural communities along with a perpetual cycle of systemic racism in his rural community.

Mr. Kirkpatrick also shared the importance of knowing your staff and community influencers. When asked about advice he received from teachers upon starting his new role as principal, he shared,

Um, another thing was the staff doesn't believe in being held accountable. Um, so, um, I knew there's gonna be issues there that I was gonna have to have tough conversations. But also, and I knew this from already, um, transitioning to one school as principal, I knew you, you had to be aware of the politics of the school and the community. And you had to find out who your influ- who your influences are within your staff and then what role they might have in the community, uh, as an influencer. Um, so people would tell me who I needed to look out for and, you know, and I just, I listened to folks when they gave me names and never wrote names down, I just listened. Okay. But I certainly remembered. (laughing). And so, as, um, as I got into doing the work, you know, I'm thinking, okay, at what point do I need to, because when you're coming in, you can't jump, that you can't jump in right away with both feet. That's how you get ran out. You got gotta take your time. You got to slow walk in. You got to address the things that need to be addressed.

As a rural school leader, Mr. Kirkpatrick served his staff and students by recognizing the political framework of leading in his rural school. Also, he listened to other key leaders and understood who the influencers were in his rural school and community.

Mr. Thomas shared when asked about advice he would give to future rural school leaders. He shared,

Uh, don't talk down to people. Um, in, in, in education, you find that the majority, especially in a rural community, the majority of the people you meet or deal with, uh, are, are I- not in a, not in a, uh, negative way, but are ignorant of things, the way things go. Their speech may not be up to par. Their dress may not be, They may, they may smell. Or anything I- you know. Don't let that hinder your communication with them. You know. Uh, that would be a strong, strong advice to, to prospective leaders in a rural community because you find a lot of that. You really do.

Mr. Thomas challenges future rural school leaders to see individuals beyond the external appearances and have genuine conversations with families in rural communities using a common shared language.

Mr. McDonald shared his rural experiences and the challenges of changing the mindset of students in his school. He shared,

And I know that we focused on the African-American experience, but that has also been a challenge for my students of color and that mindset of, I don't need to go to school because I'm going to work with so-and-so at this construction company. Is there anything wrong with that? Absolutely not, that they see their fathers or mothers or cousins and nieces and nephews what they're doing. And changing that, again, that's, that's something that has been a really big stigma here in the rural setting is we have a lot of Hispanic students that they quit school at 16 and go ahead and start making that money.

Mr. McDonald's challenge in addressing students' mindsets can be quite tricky without his rural community's support.

Mr. Washington shared the challenges of rural families identifying with school leaders beyond an academic focus. He shared how he is able to connect with rural parents by sharing his humanity. He recalled,

Everything to them is not always about how well you know math, how well you know English. They like the simple things. Um, things that I- I would do, I will see parents come in with a Duke, sweatshirt on. I'm like, Duke, I said, "I'm a Carolina fan." I said, "Let me tell you something. Come back-" "Into my school again, I'ma call 911, we gonna get you out of here, 'cause You know, they're like, "What?" I'm like, "I'm a Carolina fan, man, like come on." But he just deals in, like, I said, "Well, you have a good day. I appreciate you, man. You know you're welcome any time." So it helps to lower the guard, it's just like, "Oh, he is a human." Like, oh, he- he's not like stuck behind that title. Like, nah man. I like sports, too. So, you know, we had a conversation. And I'm, "Hey, man, what's going on? Man, I saw Duke loss the other night, you came to the school?" "Ah, man, you know I had to come, my kid goes to school here." You know, just making (laughs) You – you know, making them feel at ease.

Mr. Washington's comments reveal the importance of school leaders in rural communities building relationships beyond an academic focus. He was able to build rapport with his rural community parents by removing the stigma of titles and positions of leaders within schools. In this example, the parent views Mr. Washington as an individual and can connect with him through their interest in athletics.

The Influence of the Black Church Experience and Faith-Based Community

Faith and the Black church have played significant roles in the lives of my participants. Many shared their belief systems and how the Black church has played a role in developing their faith. Mr. Ray shared,

The church is very important to me and has been throughout the years. And, uh, I can't separate one thing from the next, whenever I, uh, I come to work, in my family life, in my work life and in my church life, it's, it's all knitted together like I said, with those, those good biblical principles.

Mr. Ray expressed how the Black church has influenced every area of his life. Equally, he continued to share: "So, you know, in my daily devotion and in my prayer time, in the morning, I always, before I leave the house, I always say, 'Help me to stay rooted and grounded in what's at the foundation.'"

Through daily practices, Mr. Ray displays his commitment to biblical principles learned within his Black church experiences. He also shared an experience with his students and utilizing his Black church and biblical belief system. He shared,

When I was in the classroom, you know, I would quote scripture to kids, but I would, I would never tell them I was quoting scriptures. I would always say, "You know there's a really old book that I really like to read. And it's got a whole lot of wise stuff in it. You wanna know what it says?" (laughs). And, uh, one of the funniest things though is when I, uh, my, my kids that I taught when I was taught fourth grade, some years, I taught a combination class if someone reports to have every 2 years, but they know that if, if Mr. [School leader] started singing a hymn, you know (laughs), they would say, "Mr. [School leader] is singing a hymn, y'all better get somewhere and set down." (laughs).

Mr. Williams shared how his Black church experience plays a role in his life. He shared,

So the church helped me understand that faith, faith without works is dead, number one. But you've got to have faith in whatever you're doing to know that it's going to work. It's going to work for your good. Now, do you get all, Do you always get everything you want Absolutely not. Do you cross every T and dot every I? No, you don't. But you got to believe that if you continue to keep your hand in God's hand, and hold true, and hold strong, things going to work out.

Mr. Williams is a man of faith and believes his Black church experiences have allowed him to know that life situations and circumstances will work out for him.

Mr. Washington shared how the Black church's influence shaped his leadership style as a rural school leader. He began by talking about biblical characters such as Moses, Daniel, and the Hebrew boys. He concluded his comments by sharing:

So just looking at those various, uh, stories from the Bible and Church and learning how you can apply that. And that's what I did, as well, as an administrator. Like, okay, they don't want us to be successful, but I know we can. This is what we have to do.

Mr. Washington uses these biblical examples to strengthen and guide his leadership practices as a rural school leader.

Other participants shared how their partnerships with Black churches and White churches have contributed to student achievement and staff morale. Mr. Thomas shared how his local rural community churches partnered with his district to provide bible classes after school. He shared:

We have a, a program in, in this county. And it's where, uh I don't know who the founder is or whatever. But they, um, established a program to where they can come to the schools in the afternoon and basically teach the Bible. Uh, 'cause it's outside of school.

And, uh, um, so, several churches, several of the, the White churches that joined in with that. And of course, now that we have COVID, they, they don't come. But they used to come once a week. Uh, so that was very instrumental. Very instrumental.

Mr. Thomas provided the benefits of living in rural communities and their ability to teach biblical principles to students as an afterschool class Pre-COVID-19.

Mr. Kirkpatrick shared his experiences of using rural churches to communicate information about the resources available to students and families. He shared,

Um, and so I always felt like it's really not just the Black church, but the White church that really, um, when you find communities that you're struggling getting parents in, or you getting information out that the church was a vehicle for helping in doing that, uh, that the church would also be a vehicle for helping provide services, uh, to families.

He continued to reflect upon this experience by sharing:

I work with pastors who, um, ran a mentoring program for me for 4 years. And they showed up to my school every year for 4 years, um, and made a difference in the lives of 16 young men. Um, so the, um, the Black church in particular, but the church community has definitely played a role in, in helping me, um, make connections, reach out to be able to support some of, uh, my students and their families.

Mr. Kirkpatrick, in building school-community relationships, was able to bridge connections for the benefit of his students and the rural community at large.

Mr. Jones, in his leadership manner, provided a profound example of how his foundation of faith has been an encouragement to staff. He shared,

What, uh, it was, it was crazy. One of the things that I always would tell my staff, is sometimes your path will just present itself to you. And I said, if it means leaving your

current station, you do that because that's what God has set it forth in place for you. So, don't worry about leaving here because whatever He has planned for you there is greater than what you have here. And the same thing applies to me.

Mr. Jones's courage to transition from certain positions without fear or hesitation was based upon his solid foundation in his Black church experiences.

Lastly, Mr. Williams connected his students and his rural church community by taking students to church on Sundays for exposure opportunities. He shared,

I took my kids to church, my athletes. We went to a Black church one week, went to a White church the previous other week. And we did the same thing with athletics.

Basketball: went to a Black school, went to a White school. Football: went to a Black school, White school because I wanted to get them experience from both sides because we have to work in this world together. I knew that from a long time ago, even though I went to a majority White school. But I knew I was Black, you know, and I knew that there were some things I couldn't get.

Mr. Williams balanced his students' exposure to the faith-based communities by visiting two types of churches in his rural community. These experiences allowed for the strengthening of relationships between the school and faith-based organizations within his rural community.

Urban Versus Rural Schools and Communities

Several of my participants shared their differences, observations, and experiences between urban and rural schools and communities.

Mr. Washington expressed the need to access financial resources, to his rural community, by utilizing his urban settings experiences. He recalled,

But now, working in a rural, having the experience in a rural, um, district or school, it- it helped me, again, to see that, okay, this is how you really can take advantage of the resources that you have, but also having that background knowledge of working in an urban center. I know how to say, “Okay, this is how we can apply for these grants. This is-What we can do to expose our kids, to put them on an even playing field.” So, uh, I look at it with the rural, at least you have the opportunity where people like, okay, well, this is where we are, we know what we need to get, or let me help navigate you to- to where it is that we need to be using these resources.

Mr. Washington was able to use both his urban and rural experiences to galvanize his rural community on the importance of the need for resources to increase student achievement and equity.

Mr. Jones equally shared the dynamics between urban versus rural schools and communities. He shared,

It’s just, we’re just real people, and it’s not what the title, kind of, just they don’t care about title, really, They really don’t. And that’s one of the biggest things that I’ve seen, um, you don’t get caught up in the bureaucracy that you do in, in a lot of urban places. And to do something simple, you got to have a ton of red tape to get through. You just call, call who’s in charge, and if you can do it, you can, if you can’t, you move on, Real simple.

Mr. Jones compared his experiences of the quick decision-making process found in his rural community versus in urban communities. Equally, he shared the importance of relationships with his rural community key leaders. He recalled,

Um, each commissioner, I know each commissioner, you know, we're on a first-name basis, and, you know, see each other in a grocery store and sit and hold conversations about football, and that kind of stuff. Um, and then just the people. It's, if I'm home, and I got on sweats and a ball cap and outside to go to Walmart, to go shopping, and I see folks in the grocery store, it's not, it's not a, a thing.

Mr. Jones communicates the importance of building and establishing everyday relationships within his rural community that may not occur in urban environments. He can be himself at local events and participate in everyday activities that can only be established through his rural community relationships.

Mr. Thomas shared the differences in racial diversity observed in district leadership roles in urban and rural communities. He shared,

So, that part, Being a Black male, you, it's, you don't see that Whereas in, in, in Guilford County, you have a lot of minorities: not only Black males or Black females. You had some Hispanics, some Asians. You have none of that in leadership here, None. It's all White.

During his urban community experiences, Mr. Thomas has seen how racial diversity helped him see individuals who look like him in key leadership roles. However, within his rural community, there is a lack of racial diversity. Therefore, staff and students do not have examples of people in key district leadership roles due to this lack of racial diversity.

Mr. McDonald shared his experiences with the lack of racial diversity within his rural community in school leadership positions. He shared,

If I remember correctly off the top of my head, there are four combined for middle school and high school. There are four schools total that are led by a person of color. I'm not

saying they don't have any assistant principals that are people of color, but again, I believe there are only four schools in our district at the secondary level, middle and high school that are led by a person of color.

As an assistant principal with aspirations of being a principal, he is quite observant of the potential lack of promotion opportunities within his rural community as opposed to an urban community. Mr. McDonald also focused on the differences in community voices and influences comparison between urban and rural communities. He shared,

And for a smaller setting, having a couple of people that start to dominate, domino, like their displeasure with your, your direction, it can do a lot more damage than if you were at a much larger school, because those few voices may get muffled by the larger population. As in a small rural setting, those few voices may quickly reach the vast population. And then it sets your agenda and it could completely throw it off track here. That would make sure that it never happens at all.

Mr. McDonald stresses the importance of building school-community relationships and valuing inclusion. Equally, because of tight-knit rural community environments versus urban settings, these relationships can create community buy-in to advance their rural school vision. Equally, when I asked Mr. McDonald about the benefits of working in rural schools, Mr. McDonald compared his experiences between urban and rural. He shared,

One of the first benefits that I see is there is smaller populations. Even with me being in my current position for such a small amount of time, I started to learn students' names a lot more as to where, when I was at the larger school and again, having almost 2,500 students every single day, you have a kid walk by and you're like, "Do you go to school here?" It's like, uh, "Yes, I'm a senior here." And you just see so many different faces

and, you know, you know, the school that I'm currently at with a population of less than 800 or somewhere around those lines, you know, it's a lot easier to learn names ... Um, I still feel like there is political presence even being in a rural district as compared to urban district that I was in.

Mr. McDonald recognized the benefits of learning and knowing his students within this smaller student population. Though politics exist in both settings, his ability to connect with students personally was different between the two communities.

Mr. Walker shared the difference in pace of lifestyle between urban and rural communities during recruitment of personnel. In addition, he reflected on his transition from working in Greensboro to now working in his hometown rural community. He shared:

When I was at the high school in this county, uh, that I first came to, it was very difficult finding personnel. Just because of the location of the school. Uh, if you couldn't find someone from there Who had gone to school and moved back, uh, it was very difficult because there's not a lot to offer, especially Uh, a young person Uh, to come and live there Uh, to come and live there. Uh, again, and I'm going back to Greensboro. Like, in Greensboro, I mean, there's a lot to offer Uh, you know. And if looking for a job, obviously I did it myself. Uh, Greensboro was a big lure Uh, as opposed to the rural area here, uh, unless you're, uh, a country bumpkin, um, is You know, there, there's not a draw 'cause you, you want a faster pace of life, uh, than what was offered. Uh, now, you know, I enjoy, you know, I come home and I go get me a grape soda and sit on the porch and I can sit out there for an hour and I'm happy.

Mr. Walker is perfectly content to return home and serve as a rural school leader. Future rural school leaders need to consider their preferred lifestyle upon accepting a career opportunity in education in rural communities.

Mr. Kirkpatrick also shared the lack of resources with the same accountability expectations compared with urban and rural schools. He shared,

And so I just often think that, uh, rural America is forgotten about in many ways when it comes to educating children, and they have to find a way to educate children and they're expected to perform in the same manner, but they don't have the same dollars. They don't have the same resources. They don't have the access to, um, things that children and, uh, Winston Salem/Forsyth and Wake and, um, um, Greensboro and Cumberland, we, we don't, and they have rural areas too, but those areas also have money.

Though financial resources are different, rural schools are expected to meet the accountability measures set forth by the state of North Carolina.

Summary

The African American rural school leaders' ability to build relationships between the school and their rural community is essential for their success. My participants shared their lived experiences, challenges, and opportunities associated with being rural school leaders. The relationships that have pre-existed gave many of my participants opportunities to secure teaching positions and develop a passion for the field of education. Rural communities have unique working experiences that my participants have reflected. Also, their experiences with the Black church, either personally or professionally, have influenced their leadership abilities within their rural schools. The Black church and personal and professional partnerships played a significant role in my participants' lived experiences. Finally, the access to resources, culture dynamics, and

lifestyle pace are quite different between urban and rural communities. However, cultural wealth, tight-knit community connections, and strong partnerships exist between rural schools and rural communities.

Theme II: African American Male School Leaders in Rural Communities Display Ethno-Humanist Role Identity Leadership Practices

A second theme shared by participants centered around Lomotey (1989) definition of Ethno-Humanist Role Identity, which “encompasses a commitment to the education of all students; confidence in the ability of all students to do well; and compassion for and understanding of all students and the communities in which they live” (p. 131). This section will focus on specific aspects of the definition of Ethno-Humanist Role Identity displayed by my participants in their leadership roles in rural communities. It will also explore how these practices were implemented during our global pandemic of COVID-19.

Commitment to the Education of All Students

My participants shared their lived experiences of displaying the commitment to educate all their students in rural communities. Mr. Thomas, as an elementary school principal, shared this belief when he spoke about his love for all students in his building. He shared,

I am in a White community, I think people, uh, respect me even more so because, um, you know, people have stereotypes. But when they see that you're genuine, And it doesn't matter. You know, I'm, I love the White kids as much as I love the Black kids, the Hispanic kids. And I think they see that. And that goes above and beyond in just, maybe, I would say, uh, your typical, um, uh, uh, Caucasian or White leader 'cause you expect that from them, but you don't expect that from a Black male.

Mr. Thomas is building relationships through an expression of care for all his students. At the same time, he is dismantling negative stereotypes and society's underlying expectation of the African American male school leader. The underlying expectation is the African American male as disciplinarian first and educator second.

Centered around the importance of being the school leader for all children, Mr. Jones shared similar sentiments as Mr. Thomas. He shared,

I don't, And I told, I had I got in one of my assistant principal's mess, uh, not too long ago because she said that she felt that I was not doing enough for, for the kids that looked like me. I said, "Here's the problem." I said, "I'm not the Black [school leader], I'm the [school leader] for 12,500 kids, Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, American, Indian."

Mr. Jones sees his role as the educator and leader of all students and is truly committed to all students' education in his rural community.

Mr. Walker shared an example of how he continues to be the school leader for all children through the expression of care. He shared,

But, uh And before the pandemic I really loved my hugs every day and people said they, they thought I was a rock star 'cause when I went into the hallways, I was just a disruption. The teachers tryin' to line the kids up and they all coming up, wanting a hug.

And Um, and I just loved that and they said it was the first time they'd heard it.

He continued by sharing an experience during morning announcements as a rural school elementary principal. He shared,

I remember I was doing morning announcements. And I don't know what came over me but I just said, "Hey, you know, I love all of y'all." And one of the teachers came to me and she said afterward, she asked her students. She said, "Did he just say he loved us?"

And she was like, “Nobody has ever said that over the intercom.” And, uh, so after that I had to say it every time. (laughs).

Staying in that same communication line, Mr. Walker recalled when he forgot to mention “I Love You” on the intercom. He shared,

‘Cause I missed it one day and they called my phone in my office and said, “you didn’t you didn’t say it.” I said, “My bad. I, I’ll, I’ll fix it.” I went back on, on the air and said, “Hey, I love y’all.” Yeah. So, that’s what I, I love about this age, is, you know, I tell ‘em I love ‘em. And I can hug. Well, before it all just came about, and I could hug ‘em. And, uh, they hugged me ‘cause I, I loved the hugs. They, they have no idea, they help my day along. It’s better than pay.

These three words communicate Mr. Walker’s commitment to his students’ education and the importance of being the school leader for all students.

Mr. McDonald, a high school assistant principal, shared advice he would give to future rural school leaders based on his lived experiences. Mr. McDonald shared how, as a rural school leader committed to all students, attending all extracurricular activities is important. He shared,

And I would say that honestly, it was the most difficult balance of being seen for everybody. Like, not just, don’t just come to football games. Like you need to be at the chorus performances, you need to be at the band performances, be at the, the STEM robotics performances. Like you’re making yourself visible to all parties so that nobody can just bring up your name and say, so-and-so only cares about going to support the football team. He doesn’t care about the kids in chorus, doesn’t care about the kids in band.

Mr. McDonald stressed the importance of visibility as a rural school leader at all events and not exclusively athletic events. As a rural school leader, visibility is critical for student success, student engagement, and positive community perspectives.

Confidence in the Ability of All Students to do Well

My participants shared their experiences as leaders who exhibit what Lomotey (1993) called “Ethno-Humanist Role Identity.” Several participants specifically provided examples that correspond with their confidence in all student’s ability to do well.

Mr. Washington shared a profound revelation he recalled as a teacher that has guided him as an administrator. During our interview, he recalled the transition that students experience year after year from one grade level to the next. As a teacher, he recalled,

And that’s – and that’s when I just started realizing I need to change every year. You know, something – some things remain the same, but, you – you know, delivery, how the kids respond to it, that has to change. That will change. And so that was a- a key concept that I learned and I stick with even now as administrator. Because how I – I deal with one group of – set of kids is different and not the same what I can do with another.

Mr. Washington is confident that all students are unique and teaching styles and handling administrative duties are critical at each level of their development. His ability to make these adjustments and impart knowledge to all his students reinforces his confidence in them and their ability to do well.

Mr. McDonald provided a different perspective of this concept. As a high school assistant principal, his school level serves as the final gateway before students enter society. He believes that consequences matter and confidence built by students understanding that poor decisions

result in consequences. He shared his experiences of issuing disciplinary consequences in school to avoid future societal implications. He recalled,

And somebody is like, all y'all want to do is just put kids out of school. Y'all don't care about kids and so forth. That is when I may have to butt heads and say, no, that's not the case. If your son or daughter or somebody has a beef in the neighborhood and they bring it to school and they start fighting, they're causing like a school disruption, do you just want me to say, y'all break it up and just go back to class? Like, what type of, what type of consequences do you want to put in place? And then I reflected to, this is high school. This is the next step before they're "in the real world," they get to scrapping out in the street, they're going to get arrested.

Mr. McDonald is instilling confidence in his students and their ability to do well in their future lives by providing discipline consequences in schools before the potential life alternating decision in society. Though challenging at times, the results actually display care, confidence, and concern for all students, both in school and students experiencing the given discipline consequences for their actions.

Mr. Williams summarizes his Ethno-Humanist Role Identity by imparting words of wisdom and knowledge beyond academics. He shared his passion in his confidence in all students to do well by the following:

You can't cut a redwood tree down once it get full grown. And so we try to get these kids at an early age before they become adults. And so my main thing is that if I can just reach one, teach one, at an early age, and just stay with them, and give them something that they will remember. You know, the old saying, "reading, writing, and arithmetic," it's, it's not the same anymore. You got to give them just a little more, um, to hold onto.

Mr. Williams's life experiences allow him to recognize the future skills students will need to succeed in life. Though academics are critical for student success, confidence is equally essential for life success after school.

Compassion for and Understanding of Students' Communities

Two participants' experiences reflected the third component of Ethno-Humanist Role Identity. They shared experiences as rural school leaders through their compassion and knowledge of students and their communities. Mr. Ray spoke about extending his support for his students as a teacher. He recalled:

I had great relationships with my students, all of them, not just the African-American, but I, I if I had an African-American male student in my room that needed extra, I went the extra. If we'd go to ballgames, you know, 'cause he didn't have a daddy to go to his ball games, whatever I needed to do, I tried to do it. And, uh, I think that was parents appreciated that.

Mr. Ray was able to connect personally with his students while recognizing the community his students represent. Equally, the mentioning of absentee fathers displayed understanding and compassion for the students he serves.

Mr. Williams shared about leaving a legacy for students to follow. He shared:

So it's, it's enlightening training and teaching the kids that are going to be me one day, to take my place when I'm no longer on this earth. There's a saying that one of my former pastors said, "If I could teach somebody where I'm traveling along, if I could show somebody where they, um, where they're wrong, so I can teach somebody that they are traveling wrong, then my living will not be in vain." We've got to reach them no matter what. Every child wants to be reached. Every child wants to be taught. Everyone wants to

be disciplined, so we just can't give up on them. And, and in myself, because of my age and my years, I might not see the fruits of my labor, but I just got to know and believe that I'm planting those seeds now, and they're going to grow up.

Recognizing his students and their communities, he used his time to impart wisdom, knowledge and a biblical awareness for students to be successful. His compassion is shown in his ability to recognize that though his earthly transition will occur, he is sowing seeds that will last generations to come.

Establishing a New Normal in Schools

One way my participants showed Ethno-Humanist Role Identity was their ability to lead during the global pandemic. Mr. Jones's initial words when asked about the worldwide pandemic of 2020, COVID-19, conveyed the essential mark in history this virus has had on our students, families, and communities. He shared,

You know, it's kinda like, people know where they were when John F. Kennedy was shot. They know where they were when King got killed, you know, that kind of stuff. I know where I was when I got that call. Hmm. When I saw it come across the news. I was at my house, my mom and dad was at the house. We had just went around to, uh, the back of the community, where theirs a pond and my dad, and some other friends were back there fishing. I wasn't fishing because I was getting calls all weekend from parents.

The global pandemic, COVID-19, caused schools across North Carolina to close on March 16, 2020. Out of safety for our students, all schools closed and remained closed for the remainder of the school year. My participants continued to exhibit Ethno-Humanist Role Identity leadership during our global pandemic.

Mr. Williams shared his experiences regarding students and families dealing with the virtual learning environment. He shared,

Again, they're trying to transfer it over to this virtual learning. But, you know, we have students who have a myriad of – of learning styles that is not meshing. So that's when you have, oh, I'm not logging on today, or I'm truly having these connectivity issues, or my parents don't have the hotspot, so can I get a paper copy. Then you have par- parents who are trying. But they still have to work and you have grandparents assuming the role of the parents while the- the parents work. So it's just – it's just a – a – a long laundry list of things that we have to look at, you know, as administrators, and say, okay, even as administrator, we can't even govern or discipline the same as that way we would if they were in the building.

Mr. Williams illustrated Ethno-Humanist Role Identity with specific emphasis on component three of the definition. He recognized the need for change in instruction from in-person to virtual and how this change had an immediate impact on the students and the communities in which he serves.

Mr. Walker shared his commitment to the education of all students during COVID-19. As the principal, his teachers were looking to him for leadership and responses to this pandemic. He recalled:

Um, in trying to. Well, especially in March, we didn't know what we were doing.

Still don't, to a degree. Uh, but in trying to come up with how to educate the kids.

Without them being in front of us, which is, you know, that, that's all we know. That's

how we know to teach 'em. And they, they didn't know how and,

Mr. Walker continued, as he addressed his teachers:

Well, I told many, I said, “You know, everybody in this school, whether you’re a 20-year vet or this your first year, you’re a first-year teacher right now.” “And I hate to tell you but y’all being led by a first-year administrator.” So, uh, what that tells you is, we’re all in here together. We have to run things, talk to each other about different ideas and y’all know I’m, I’m all about if it’s a idea, try.”

Mr. Walker provided support, encouragement, and transparency to his staff while focusing on all students’ education. His commitment can easily be contagious for his team in their role as educators of all students during a global pandemic.

Mr. McDonald equally shared an example of conducting virtual walkthroughs during COVID-19. He shared,

First period, second period, third period, fourth period we do digi coach walk-throughs where we just stop into a classroom. And it may be anywhere from five to 10 minutes. And I say, stop in virtually. We join that Zoom class and we have a couple of questions and items that we’re looking for. And then we check those things off and then we can send teachers immediate feedback to say like, “Hey, I saw this in your class. I noticed that you were doing this, um, we’re standards posted, the students have clarity on the objective of where the assignment was.” Um, a couple of different things.

Through digital coaching walkthroughs, Mr. McDonald is able to remain connected with his team teachers and students. Clearly, this support showed Mr. McDonald’s commitment to exhibiting Ethno-Humanist Role Identity practices in his dedication to all students’ education.

Mr. Ray shared his challenges during COVID-19 as a rural school leader. He recalled, I, I think we shifted from academics being the most important thing and academics is really important, don't get me wrong. But for me, and I know a lot of my colleagues, the shift for us became safety, became the most important thing. How am I gonna keep my staff safe? How am I gonna keep my students safe? How am I gonna keep myself safe? Because I have family to go home to. And so, you know, that became, that became the big things that, you know, kept me awake at night in, in the beginning of that, and that's still at the forefront because I, uh, I don't want to, I don't wanna ever get comfortable.

With these questions in mind, Mr. Ray communicated Ethno-Humanist Role Identity by considering the whole child during the global pandemic. He recognized his community's needs, staff and personal safety, and students' and families' well-being.

Mr. Kirkpatrick shared his experiences of establishing a new normal at the district level and exhibiting Ethno-Humanist Role Identity practices. Mr. Kirkpatrick shared about his typical day Post COVID-19 with an example of a dialogue he would encounter during this pandemic:

Um, Mr. [School Leader] I have a staff member here who was in contact with, um, a person, his family two days ago and they've tested positive. When was the last time they were at school. Okay. Have you done your contact tracing? Yes. And so is there anyone else who we need to talk to? Are they, were there kids in a classroom with this person? Did this person drive a bus? And, you know, you have to go through all that. And, and if so, then you have to decide, well, who are you going to reach out to, um, to make them aware. Working with the school nurses, um, to put processes in place, um, for, um, screening staff and students and any visitors who come into the building and, and making sure that we follow the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

guidelines as protocols as it comes to, if someone is a presumptive positive, positive, um, uh, talk about the check-in, the check-ins and, uh, uh, the screenings and checks, um, temperature checks, um, at the station forms working with our guidance counselors and our social workers to try and find students who, um, are not regularly showing up for class. Um, some of them may have shown up only once or twice.

He continued:

Um, still trying to work with McKinney Vento family, still working with students who are coming in and then enrolling and making sure that they are placed appropriately. Um, still addressing the mental health issues. The discipline issues stuff to deal with because, um, you know, most of the kids are remote and you just don't have the large numbers in the building at the same time now. So we just haven't had a lot of a lot of discipline issues So, yeah. And now I've, I've had, um, trans- transportation and technology and a section of children are now in my department. So, um, I work with those directors, executive directors of those areas as well, um, to address any needs there.

As illustrated, Mr. Kirkpatrick continued to display Ethno Humanist Role Identity during our global pandemic.

Summary

Ethno Humanist Role Identity practices continue to be exercised through the rural school leaders within my study. They provided examples of each component of the definition. Simultaneously, during COVID-19, these qualities were exhibited in leading their staff, decision-making processes, and virtual learning transitions. Each shared their commitment to all students' education, confidence and compassion, and understanding of their rural communities' need for confident leadership during a global pandemic.

Theme III: African American Male School Leaders Make Connections by Using Homophily Practices

African American male school leaders can identify culturally with the students they serve. Many of my participants shared their reasoning for entering the field of education associated with homophily practices. As mentioned in Chapter II, homophily—the notion that people with homogeneous beliefs, values and cultural attributes tend to interact and communicate more effectively with each other” (Lomotey, 1993, p. 396). This section will discuss my participant’s experiences of turning towards education in search of personal career fulfillment and identifiable homophily practices displayed toward students served.

As discussed in their profiles, several of my participants did not choose the field of education as a college major. Still, through varied circumstances, they sought the fulfillment of education over other monetary gains. Mr. Washington reflected on his initial start in an alternate non-education career. He shared:

And so, um, I’ve worked at the radio station and it was not what I thought it was gonna be. ‘Cause I had this elaborate plan that I was gonna be such a – a – a big media star in the – in the radio industry. But, again, that didn't work out. And so I just came to a crossroads and I said I – I had to do something that I – I like and that I will feel comfortable doing and also where I will feel respected.

He continued discussing his newfound appreciation for the field of education. He recalled:

I got in there, I had to do the lateral entry, but that only took me like a year and a half, because I had a lot of courses, English courses that I- I took. And then those educational classes, which I- like I said, I just happened to take that spring semester. That helped, you

know, to speed the process up. And so I got into it, I really enjoyed it. I didn't realize I was gonna enjoy it.

Mr. Washington decided to exit an unfulfilling career in exchange for a job position that would bring joy and personal fulfillment.

Mr. Kirkpatrick shared the turning point in his life towards the field of education. He shared:

And what I felt like I was called to do was to teach. I was just running from it, I was, I just didn't, I didn't want it 'cause I wanted the money. (laughing). And, and then when I got into teaching and then I thought, begin to think back on who I was as a student. Um, my experiences as a Black male student, um, what I have seen in my student teaching and what I had seen as a teacher and a [specific] counselor. I knew that if I really wanted to impact change, I had to be at the table and I had to be at the table as, as the, the, the leader, the, the man that if I really wanted to impact that change. And so, um, that's what took me down, took me in from computer programming into education and then into administration.

Mr. Kirkpatrick wanted to impact education because he remembered his school experiences and wanted to affect change for other students who looked like him.

Mr. Walker shared an experience using homophily practices when serving disciplinary consequences with a student. He recalled,

But, I've always been able to talk to people. And it's funny that, uh, the principal I told you. That I worked with and we say we're brothers. Uh, he said when I was, uh, working there at the high school. He said he's never ever seen someone handle discipline and have kids who I have suspended and they walk out of my office with a smile on their face. I

said that, “Yeah.” I said, “There, there’s no reason to yell at ‘em. They know they were wrong.” So I would explain to ‘em where they went wrong. Ask them, “How can we have done this better?” “What are some, something we could have done? Okay. When I You know I’ve got to suspend you?” “I mean, you know that, don’t you?” “Yes, sir.” I said, “So.” Uh, so, yeah. So here. And then I’ll say a joke, “So here, take your five days.” I said that, “Yeah.” I said, “There, there’s no reason to yell at ‘em. They know they were wrong.” “And I’ll see you later.” Yeah. Yeah. But we would joke about it and, and, and move on.

Mr. Walker connected with this student culturally by relating to the student through creating a safe space for dialogue with the student who made a wrong decision. He provided coaching to address the problem and explained how inappropriate behaviors result in consequences. Equally, Mr. Walker talked with the student versus elevating his voice. These are all examples of homophily practices used by African American male school leaders.

Mr. Ray shared how he connected with his students through similar backgrounds and upbringings. When asked how being an African American male helped him as a rural school leader, he shared,

And I think that has helped me more than anything else because I can identify with a lot of our students. And when I have my dad at – I call them my dad talks that I have with kids. You know, I, I can tell them if they’re sitting in my office and if they live in a housing project, I can tell them, “You know what, I lived in a housing project. I lived in the one two doors down from where you are. And when we moved there, I thought we were the Jefferson’s because, you know, before we had no indoor plumbing.” You know, and so I relate to them in that way.

Mr. Ray's ability to relate to his students is homophily practices. He can connect and show a potential career opportunity in the field of education by being a role model and success story to students who look like him.

Mr. McDonald shared his lived experiences of being an African American boy in school and the limited opportunity to see teachers who look like him. He recalled,

My journey has been one that is, it's not ideal. When I was in elementary school, I had an IEP. Uh, I went to the breakout classes. I have attention deficit disorder. I was always being disciplined because I was bouncing off the walls. I have a lot of energy. I had a separate desk that was in the back of the classroom, away from everybody. And I love sports and basketball is my thing. And, and I'm wrapping all this into saying like elementary school. I had one Black teacher, there was a Black female. Um, her name was Ms. Witherspoon. The year after I left her classroom, she retired. Um, in middle school, I never had a Black teacher. Our in-school suspension coordinator teacher was a Black male. That was also my basketball coach. And I never had a Black teacher at that point. In high school, I went to multiple high schools, not bragging but I went to multiple. I had a Black female PE teacher. She wasn't actually my teacher, but our classes did PE together. So I was in her presence. It wasn't until my second year of college that I actually had the opportunity to have been taught by a Black male. And to know that from my own experience, I never had that type of presence in elementary school, middle school and high school almost feel like I need to give back because of this.

Mr. McDonald clearly can relate to his students and is determined to have the next generation of leaders have someone in leadership who looks like them. Mr. McDonald does not want any of

his students to experience this absence of African American male school leaders in leadership positions within schools.

Mr. Williams, when asked about the benefits of working in rural schools, he spoke of homophily practices. He shared,

The main benefit, uh, Ms. Smith, is that you have a lot of kids that look like us, that look like me. And I tell people is that iron sharpens iron, not that we're not trying to get through all the kids, but we know that Black males are endangered species.

Mr. Williams saw the primary benefit of rural communities is to allow rural students to see school leaders who look like them. This connection and example of being a role model to students of color are homophily practices. Equally, Mr. Williams shared a personal example of homophily. He shared about a time when he was recognized for his services in the field of education. He recalled individuals from this event sharing with him how he had impacted their lives. He shared,

So, when I retired, there were on the other side, there were three-fourths of the bleachers, they said, "Coach, turn around." And all these grown men stood up with their kids, daughters and sons, they walked across, and I just broke down. Um, and they just said, "We appreciate what you poured into us. Even though we didn't. You didn't think we were listening to you; we heard everything." So that's what it is. You plant those seeds, but you got to believe and know that, eventually, they're going to grow. We may not see all the fruits of our labor, but you just got to believe.

Mr. Williams's recognition shows how seeds sown in our children's lives have a tremendous impact on future generations. Mr. Williams also shared a powerful example of homophily

practices when working in schools. He provided an example of how he handled discipline differently from his White counterparts when leading his school. I'll close with his story:

So I never forget this one gang leader. He was tough. He would rule the school, too. So, when he came back, the teacher said, "You going to let him in, Mr. [participant's name]? Let him?" I said, "He's just a student." "No he told the te- the principal that he ran the school last year." I said, "Not on my watch." So I had to check him a couple times. And one day, I had to go into the classroom, and he said something. And I told him to "Come out here, now," and had to change my voice and my facial expression. I really don't like doing that. But you have to do it sometimes. And I said, "Let me ask you something, man." I said, "Have I ever disrespected you in front of your boys?" "No, sir." I said, "Huh?" "No, sir." I said, "Have I done this to you?" "No, sir." I said, "Don't you ever disrespect me." And I slammed the door on purpose to get their attention.

He continued,

And I said, "Now, you an athlete. You want to go do this, that, and the third, so you help me, and I'll help you. You control these boys up here, and I control how you. When you get back So there was an altercation in the gym. He almost got in a fight. He left the gym, came to my office, and said, "You may as well go ahead and send me home. I'm tired of this. I'm tired of this." I said, "Slow down. Let's talk." "No, I don't feel like talking. You mine as well go ahead and send me home." And I said, "Well, when you stop talking, then I can start." He kept talking, and I said and he kept talking. I said, "I told you when you stop talking, I can talk." And then once he finished, and I said, "Let me ask tell you something, man." I said, "If you don't ever remember anything else, never give somebody the gun, then put the bullets in it to shoot you." He said, "What are you talking

about?” I said, “Now, what if you were sitting beside your principal that’s not the same color as me?” I said, “You said, ‘You might as well send me home because I’m tired of this.’” Now, he would have been afraid because of who you are and your record. He would’ve called the SRO. Now you’d have caused a, a ruckus, and you’d have been going home. And he looked at me. I said, “But now let’s talk.” I said, “So that’s what I mean. You don’t give them the gun and the bullets to shoot you.” I said, “Tell me what’s going on.”

Summary

Homophily is a sense of connection with African American school leaders and African American students around an understanding of shared culture, beliefs, race, and traditions, just to name a few. My participants shared their turning point towards education and the desire to have the next generation of leaders see school leaders who look like them. They shared their similarities in backgrounds and life lessons learned and spoke to students through their shared languages. Overall, my participants used these homophily practices to educate, encourage and inspire students who look like them and remind them of themselves.

Theme IV: African American Male School Leaders in Rural Communities Personally Experienced Racism

My participants shared their lived experiences of racism while serving in leadership roles as rural school leaders. Many participants spoke about being the voice and representative of African American rural communities within their rural schools.

Mr. Washington shared his role as an African American male school leader as the “Flag-Bearer” or the representative of their African American rural community. He shared,

Uh, I would say, um, I – I – I’ma say this. As a – as a Black male administrator is when you’re in that role, you are the flag-bearer. If you want the – believe it or not, if you think you’re not, you’re the flag-bearer for the community. Regardless of what community that you’re in, but especially if you go in – into a rural, African American school, you’re the flag-bearer for the community, no matter if they don’t care what college you went to, they don’t care this, that, and the third. You the flag-bearer, so they’re gonna look for you for answers, even if you don’t know it. Say, “Okay,” go find the right answers, come back, and let them know, because once you have them on your side – They’ll go through – they’ll – they’ll go through a wall for you. And that means – that – that’s that relationship piece.

Mr. Washington’s term of “Flag-Bearer” reflects his ability to build relationships with his rural community. Equally, he serves as a bridge between the African American rural community and the rural school.

Mr. McDonald related to the theme by sharing his experiences and the weight of this challenge of being the representative of the rural Black community. He shared,

There have been a lot of times in a lot of situations, there have been a couple of situations where we, as at my school, the administrative team have been dealing with certain situations and there are, and I’ll just go ahead and be frank with it. There are Black families and parents that say, “I don’t wanna deal with any of those White people. I’m talking to you.” And with it. It’s a hard balance because that’s my team like, “Hey, this is my administrative team. We’re here for, you know, all the students.” They’re not going to just seek them out because of their race. But then also on the other hand, I can understand because of systems that we have grown up in they’re Black people don’t trust everything

that is put in front of them. And it's almost like I'm looking at somebody that reflects me in a position of authority. So I'm going to knock on this door, like this is who I'm going to talk to and try to navigate through this situation.

He continued:

So that pressure it, it is there. And it's almost like once you have supported students in the community and validated, and other parents will speak up and it's like, "Hey, so-and-so's good." People like, "He'll look out for you." Then you start to kind of build a chain of support to other people in the community will speak up on your behalf and it makes the presence. And it makes my presence a little bit stronger because then, you know, my chief secondary may say, well, Mr. [School leader], apparently a lot of folks like you. So we want your input on this. And, and then it's there. With it is speaking on behalf of an entire race of people, is it can be burdensome at times. And yeah. Yes, that's actually that's just the only words that I can think of to say.

Mr. McDonald has been able to cultivate the support of the rural African American community. At the same time, he feels the weight of representing and being a voice and advocate of his African American rural community while also balancing being on a school level administration team for the school district.

My participants shared their personal experiences with racism through the unrealistic expectations of turning around low-performing schools. Mr. Washington, when asked about his experiences with racism, related to this unrealistic expectation. He shared,

But yes I have. And going – if I could go back to when I told you about, um, being stereotyped, they're just gonna say we just put him in the Black school. And so the fact of looking at your budget opposed to this school over here, but at the end of the day, we're

ra – we – we’re all in the same marathon. We have – they want us to complete the marathon, but you’re not even in the playing field. You can’t start the – the marathon a day before me and then you expect me to finish at a – at a decent time. Like, it’s not fair. So yeah, definitely looking at budgets. Um, lo – looking at the resources, the lack of resources. And also just so – having unfair – unrealistic expectations that they want you to do.

He continued:

And – and – and – and also I think this – this is the key, my leash, not only like using the word leash, but my window of, uh – of – of crea – of having issues or my opportunity – my window of success is not as wide open as my counterparts, it don’t look like. And to – just to elaborate, where if I have 3 years I have to bring a school that’s been traditionally low – low-performing. I have 3 years. Research says it takes 3 years just to get things moving. But research goes out the window when it comes to someone that looks like me, and so basically, if I don’t get it moving within the first 2 years, I can pretty much hang it up after the third year. And which is not fair, but my colleagues down the street, same situation, they get going to a pilot gear and they’re just sitting back, as long as they continue to make the school look- the district look good, they’re okay. But I’m saying they’re not really moving their kids. On the surface, you know, in- in reality, they’re not moving kids, while on the surface it look like they’re doing so much, but they’re not But I – I don’t have that – that window, that – that long window, you know, ‘cause my window closes every year in those – every – those first 2 years, my window, it moves close faster because of – ‘cause those schools aren’t going as fast as they think. But it’s hard to do that when you- you have constant vacancies in key areas. (laughs) They get,

Then it's like, well, nobody really wants to come in this school. But why is that? So, again, I have to, this is the work, they – they – they know that we have to do it, but they don't care. You have to look at the optics of the school. You have to say, okay, how can I – I – I get the – the – you know, change the outlook of the school inside and out? So you – you know, and then I have to get people in that fit the – the – the vision that I- I have for the school. But when I have layovers who constantly would – could do whatever they wanted to do, don't listen to authority, could care less about kids, could care less about contacting parents, so you're fighting a battle within, then you have to fight the battle on the outside. Three years, but in reality, we're gonna say at least a year and a half. Because, to be honest, after about a year, they already know they're not gonna make it happen. So really, you only – you – you see what I'm saying? So you just like, whew, we're gonna give him a year and a half. And that's it. And then you can – then – and then you don't know, we don't know when the next time we're gonna have the opportunity to be a school leader.

From Mr. Washington's experiences, African American males take on this turning around a low-performing school challenge to avoid being box into roles as disciplinarians only because of the potential opportunity for continued advancement in education. At the same time, there is a time clock that he faces daily to turn a low-performing school around that his White counterparts do not have to encounter. Equally, the challenges of varied resources, vacancies, and school perceptions can hinder his ability to turn around a low-performing school. Yet, he has a certain amount of time to perform the change or be replaced.

Mr. Walker expressed his encounter with racism when he shared:

Oh, we all have. Yes. Uh, definitely. Uh, let me think. Well, One I can think of, uh, when I was leaving the high school in [district] County, and you've heard, [district] County is [district] County. Uh, when I was leaving, I, I, I was following a very, uh, popular, uh, principal when I was hired there, who I have worked with. And we're, we're great friends today, still. Uh, and we call ourselves brothers. Uh, and he's a White man but yeah, we call each, we say we're brothers. Uh, but now, uh, when I was leaving and I, I had some say in who to choose what's going to be my successor. So, when I was talking to him, who I felt was, you know, a good guy. Another White man, uh, and I told him, I said, "You know," I said, "You might be able to get some things done that I couldn't because I'm Black." He said, "[participant's name], uh, I hate to agree with you but I was told that already myself."

Despite Mr. Walker's leadership abilities, there discussion indicated the limitations he experienced based on race that the school's next school leader would not encounter as a White male.

Mr. Jones shared the covert racism he experienced in his previous district as a school leader. He explained his experiences of unrealistic expectations placed upon him to turn a low-performing school around. He shared,

But when you're there, you are relegated to the schools that look like you. That have no real resources or expectations put on them to do any better. Just keep them quiet. Um, but on the flip side of that over there, you have subpar and mediocre principals who don't look like me who are running the, the other schools. And they are touted as the greatest principals in the world, but when all you have to do is come in and turn the lights on?

Yeah. That see, that's the kind of stuff that bothers me. When you got folks down in the trenches that can grow kids, and move kids, and change cultures but you got other principals who get that as soon as they turn the lights on, and the kids come in the building. They're the model of leadership for the County. That's crap. That's crap.

Mr. Jones experienced covert racism by being placed in specific schools with low expectations and minimum resources to improve student achievement. Equally, compared with other White administrators who had more resources and fewer student disciplinary issues, his school was expected to perform well on state-mandated tests.

Mr. Jones also shared a situation with overt racism experienced in his rural community. He shared, "And, I'll say something that, I'll speak somewhere. And some of the old folks from the old, from old will come up and say, 'You did a good job for a Colored boy.' And I just smile." He continued:

it's 2020. Custom made suit and some black Gators on. (Laugh). You know, that's the kind of, but I'd rather have that. Because at least I know what I'm dealing with. So, I'm thinking if he had if he has the audacity, or the unintelligence to say that to my face. I know what he's saying behind (laughs) my back about other people. (Laughs).

When asked how does he remain calm, approachable, and articulate when encountering overt racism in rural communities, he shared,

Uh, uh, again, I chalk it up to simply unintelligent. It's just unintelligent, and that's and that's, that's okay. In some remote areas, they haven't in their entire lives, they've probably gone a radius of 50 miles. They don't have an experience. Everything they see looks like them, and they believe, um, that this is the best that they can do. They may have the—and what they have may be the best of what they've generations before them

have had. So, I have to let, you know, folks be who they are. And, while I simply, you know, listen to what they say, and, and, and endure what they say. I don't have the time nor the ability to change their hearts. Because that's just that's, that's a that's an ongoing project that you have to do to try and be able to change somebody's heart. I have to just give you another experience. Because who's to say what other person that looked like me, what was the experience that they had with them? So, I have to ensure the experience that you have with, with this Black man is a positive one that you can share with somebody else who will say, "I spoke to that [school leader], and he said this, that and the other. And it was okay." He didn't sound. He didn't sound like he was Black. (Laughs).

Mr. Jones, despite overt racism, has created another experience for his rural community with an African American male school leader. Though he cannot change hearts, he can alter individual experiences and encounters with an African American male. At the same time, his position allows the community to have an alternate meeting with a person of color in a positive light.

Mr. Thomas shared his experience with racism in what a parent shared with him. When asked about his experiences with racism, he shared,

Yes, yes. Uh, well first of all, let me say this. I am totally shocked that in the 14, this is going on the 15th, in the 14 years I've been here, uh, I haven't been called the N word. Okay? Or anything that's being said that way. However, I have had incidents where parents come in and, um, I would get h- one guy to tell me (laughs), in my office, "My family doesn't like your kind." He says, "But I can deal with you." That's what he told me.

Though he has not had a derogatory term used in his presence, the parent's comments suggest these negative terms are used outside of the school about him.

Mr. Ray's experience with racism was different than my other participants. From a solution-oriented perspective, he believes in the value of authentic relationships and kindness to dismantle racism and racist mindsets. When asked about his observations regarding the lack of racial diversity within the district, Mr. Ray shared,

Um, I'm gonna tell you what I said to the principal I worked for the year I was at the high school. In a community that is very, uh, you know, it's not diverse at all and probably has some reputation of not, um, embracing diversity. Uh, I was there the whole year and I went in for my, uh, end of year review. And he said, we were talking about the year that I had, and he asked me a question similar to what you just asked. And I said, "Well, as far as I know, nobody's had an unkind word to say." (laughs).

He continued:

I said, "Unless you know something else that you wanna share with me." And he was very honest with me and telling me that he had, you know, he had heard nothing but good. And I don't know, I've just always been the kind of person I've just always felt like that once you get to know people and once people get to know me, then they can get beyond my skin color. Now I'm not naive enough to know that there's probably some out there. I just don't get it. I don't it never comes back to me. I have never had in the years that I've been doing this, I have never witnessed someone being, um, you know, treating me any different just because, um, I was an African-American male. I, I don't know. And I know there've been subtleties. You know, I've known when I've had parents who have given me a hard time and you know, you kind of read between the lines. They don't just come out and say it. They didn't call me a name, you know (laughs), or anything like

that, but, you know, but they were always seem to, you know, find something to complain about.

He continued:

And, you know, and, and I've had teachers. I've got one this year who is, uh, probably has a, not probably, I know has a track record of, you know, not embracing diversity and, uh, you know, I it's, it's a cool relationship. Sometimes when I've walked down the hallway to speak and she, she doesn't always speak back and things of that nature, but, you know, I, I just keep trying to kill them with kindness (laughs).

Though he has not identified his experiences as racism, he has experienced microaggressions. Yet, he continues to remain determined to dismantle racism in his school and community through relationships and setting high expectations. He continued by sharing:

And be fair and open, you know. And, um, but I still have the same expectation. I don't lower my expectations, because of that. And, um, that person and knows that as, as well as others. But yeah, I, I just, I guess I just don't get hung up on my Blackness. I'm, I'm just gonna say that. I don't, it's not at the forefront of every day and every conversation that I have with people. I'm not trying to size them up to see how they're sizing me up.

Mr. Ray has determined to focus on his top priority, his students, and ensuring he remains an advocate by being their rural school leader and keeping high expectations of all his teachers.

Mr. Williams recalled his experiences of being the only African American teacher at a school and enduring racist remarks from his colleagues. He shared,

But what I have seen is just right in your face where at one school, I just won't say the name of it right now, I was pretty much the only Black, um, at that time, teacher in that department. And so I would walk into the office, or down the hall, and I hear them saying

racial jokes, or whether the coaches, or teacher, or even the, um, principal. But I had to make a choice. And it had to be because I was a quick thinker, do I say something argumentatively, or do I just kind of look at them and stare, and not say anything, and let them try to decide? So I had to do a lot of that. Several times, I would open the door, and they would stop. And I said, “Hold up. I heard what you’re saying. Don’t stop. Don’t stop on my account.” And I said it sarcastically, and they didn’t know what to say. And I’d walk out.

Mr. Williams showed a level of moral character, self-discipline, and leadership despite this overt racism in schools during his tenure.

Mr. Kirkpatrick shared how he has been able to overcome stereotypes associated with his race and gender. When asked about how being an African American male has helped him in his career, he shared,

It’s helped me because people see a big Black man and they think of school leadership and automatically they think, well, he can handle the bad butts. But they don’t, they don’t think about, there might be an actual brain in there and that he may actually be well-versed or, or knowledgeable of curriculum and instruction and, and know how to, to move a school. Um, when people look at me, uh, and, and not so much so now, but early on in my career, and when people looked at me, they were not looking at me, I don’t think, necessarily think because of my intelligence, just looking at me at first glance. They were looking at me saying that’s a big Black man who can, he can control the school. So it’s helped me get my foot in doors.

Though being an African American male has benefited him in terms of access to opportunities, he has also had to overcome the African American male's underlying purpose in schools, disciplinarian first and educator second.

Finally, Mr. Jones and Mr. Washington shared about the danger of being assigned to certain schools as leaders. Mr. Jones shared,

In many respects, covert does that to you. Keeps you in your place. Um, I look at many of my colleagues, former colleagues from [school district name] who are excellent, who have been excellent school leaders. But either two things have happened. They've gotten to that ceiling where they won't, couldn't go any further, and they leave. We had numerous African-American women and men leave [school district name] County and go on to be superintendents, go on to be great leaders of major high schools across the, the, the, the state, nation – um, do some great things. But when you're there, you are relegated to the schools that look like you. That have no real resources or expectations put on them to do any better. Just keep them quiet.

Mr. Washington shared these same sentiments when asked about the hindrances of being an African American male school leader in rural schools. He shared,

Because depending where the rural school is located- Black male, so it's – it's just like, oh yeah, we – we're on board. What can you do to help us? So it – it's like, you know, power to the people, we're here. But on the flip side of that is it's easily to get pigeonholed and stereotyped, say, "Oh, well, we're just gonna send him to – to the – to rural school where Black kids at." Because I look like them. But you're just looking at it because I – I look like them. And then the fact of, well, he's a Black male, and then it's, "He can get the discipline together." But you're not looking at what you do know I'm

very knowledgeable of curriculum – I am – I do know how to read a budget. I do know how to, okay, let’s – let’s open up, let’s make this community, let’s make this a community school. I do know how to build capacity in teachers. I do know how to grow school – scores, move schools. But you’re not interested in that. You just – it’s almost like, ah, you – he’s Black, he’s good, he’s young, put him here.

In both cases, these African American males have seen how African American school leaders were placed in certain schools under the justification of race and gender of the student population. At the same time, they bring to any school a wealth of curriculum knowledge, budget management, and the capacity to lead schools effectively.

Summary

Racism, in all forms, continues to exist in our society and in rural communities. My participants expressed their lived experiences and encounters with racism, racist behaviors, and microaggressions as others benefited from White privilege or White advantage. White privilege is seen in the unrealistic expectations and lack of resources with turning low-performing schools around—microaggressions with a teacher’s decision not to speak with her African American principal and rural school leader. Racism is also seen in the African American male having to represent the Black community and have the race’s weight on their shoulders. My participants remained focused on building relationships, serving students, being respectful, having decision-making seats at tables, and imparting seeds onto the next generation of leaders.

Theme V: African American Male School Leaders in Rural Communities Recognize a Lack of Opportunities in the Education Profession for African American Boys

With the changing student population demographics and the declining percentage of African American male educators, the need to understand why African American boys are not

choosing a career in education is critical for effective change. My participants shared their perspectives of why African American boys were not choosing a career in education. This section will focus on the two aspects of the section theme: the lack of role models in education and future financial stability.

Lack of African American Male Role Models

My participants shared their beliefs regarding why African American boys were not choosing a career in education. Many shared that the young boys do not have educators or role models in education who look like them.

Mr. Ray spoke about this lack of African American male role models in education. He shared,

Okay. First of all, they don't have enough role models. They don't see enough male role models in education, especially at the elementary level, because a lot of people wanna know why I chose the elementary level to teach. And I said, "We need African-American males in the elementary level." Um, and, um, so, so that's, that's a big one. Um, then obviously I could say in general too, just from what I know, not only in schools, they don't have a lot of male role models, good real male role models at home either.

Mr. Ray recognized the need for African American boys to see African American male school leaders leading at the elementary level. In addition, these African American male school leaders may serve as surrogate fathers to elementary African American boys during their formative years. Mr. Ray saw a need to serve as both a school leader and role model at the elementary level to impact boys of color.

Mr. Kirkpatrick also shared a similar standpoint regarding African American boys' need to see African American male school leaders in elementary settings. He shared,

I don't think that they see many examples of people who look like them, um, especially early on in, um, elementary school. Um, they probably see more of that, that the high school and middle school. And a lot of times that person is really going to be a coach or a physical education teacher.

Mr. Kirkpatrick noted that if African American boys see African American males in education, it is typically not as school administrators. Equally, there is a need for our elementary boys to see examples of African American males in roles of school leadership.

Mr. Walker shared this barrier of the lack of African American male role models and the single-parent household. He recalled,

Another barrier, some, for some African-American males, you know, many come from – and I was blessed and it doesn't have to be that way but many come from a single parent household. And I think that plays a part also. Well, I know it plays a part in relationships and the way that, uh, they see the world. And that's gonna, uh, play a part in, in, well, their strength of being a leader. Depending on how they were raised by that single parent. Um, and many it's going to be the mother. 'Cause the dad has, you know, left town. And so, a lot of the time just the mother and I don't care how strong a woman is, she's not a man. And so, you can't teach a boy to be a man. And so, uh, now many do a, a, a close to banging job with it 'cause that's what they got to do. But, you know, bottom line, you know, just you can't – they, they going to have to learn that from some other male. I, I feel. And I think that has created, uh, some, some gaps along the way.

Mr. Walker's insight continues to shed light on the importance of African American boys seeing and experiencing African American males in leadership roles to learn how to be men. He

acknowledges a mothers' role in single-parent households; however, he believes boys need to learn how to be men by seeing men who look like them.

Mr. McDonald agreed with my previous participants in sharing that African American boys do not see people who look like them. He recalled,

If you don't see somebody that looks like you in a position, you don't necessarily think that as something that you strive to be. I'll give the example of in the Black community we don't see enough Black doctors. We don't see enough Black lawyers. We don't see enough Black politicians. So unless we start to expose our population to these opportunities, and I know it's tough.

Mr. McDonald recognizes the importance of African American boys being able to see individuals in careers in their Black communities. There is a need for continuous exposure for African American boys with positions held by individuals who look like them.

Mr. Williams's comments summarize this section, with the reality of our future and the need for more recruitment towards the field of education. As our interview concluded, he shared,

And so we just can't give up on them. We just can't give up these young, young ones.

And we can't give up on education. And we got to continue to let particular Black males and female to know that we need them. The kids need you. The future depends on you.

Because if you don't go into education, who's going to train and teach them how to be Black? How to let them know that you made it? Because you don't want to – we don't want to go backwards, and I'm afraid if we don't start recruiting and don't start getting more people that look like these kids, um, it will go backwards. Um, all of us cannot go to a private school. We don't have the money. So community schools are hurting.

Community schools where you have a lot of African American is hurting. Because you

don't have people pouring money into them and taking them places and doing things with them.

Mr. Williams shared the importance of legacy and educating the next generation of males.

According to Mr. Williams, our African American boys need African American male educators to teach them about being Black in America.

Future Financial Stability

My participants shared their beliefs associated with the future financial stability and the African American boys' perception of the field of education. Several mentioned the male's role in the home and the need for finances to support their future lifestyle.

Mr. Ray shared his belief and the initial realities of a starting salary of beginning teachers. He shared,

Um, I will also say that, you know, for those who are fortunate enough to make it through high school and go off to college, I don't think education is attracted to them because it's really hard. It has gotten better in North Carolina, but it's not, still not great to be able to raise a family on a teaching salary. So if you're the male and you're the sole, if you're the main provider in your household, it's that is not that attractive. You know, come on, I mean, you can go to the community college and get, you know, um, certificate in welding and come out making \$40,000 a year starting.

Mr. Ray compares the starting salary of a community college graduate and the lack of an initial high salary for a beginning teacher in North Carolina. In addition, the African American boy may desire to support a family, and the initial North Carolina teaching salaries are difficult to help this decision.

Mr. Walker also shared about the African American boys' decision to choose other careers for financial gains. He shared,

Uh, well, some of the barriers are financial. Uh, I think, just like I said that, you know, I was chasing the dollar. Uh, and many African-American, uh, boys, you know, most of us want to play some ball for a profession Uh, then a small group of us want to lay the rap down. And, you know, be in the entertainment field. And so, we're not really groomed to look at, uh, at giving back to society, as it were and, and being in the education field – as a, as a, a, you know, a strong, uh, uh, endeavor. Uh, uh, so, so in that way it's a barrier just, uh, of, of how that's presented to the African-American male.

Mr. Walker shared that most African American boys pursue sports or entertainment for their immediate financial gain. However, he further explained that the role of an educator is to give back to society, which may not be a concept introduced initially to the African American boy.

Mr. Thomas shared about gender role expectations in the home. This expectation relates to the male being the sole provider for their families. However, in education, there may be financial limitations due to early salary restrictions. He shared,

Because, uh, the way society is. Especially if, if a man is married and got a family. The man is, excuse me, the breadwinner. Education doesn't pay that much. Uh, I love it. But, uh, to try and raise a family on, on my salary it'd be almost impossible. Do you know what I'm saying? And, um, I think for that reason, a lot of men are, are deterred from that. Plus, the requirements to get into education. I mean, you really, really. With all of the things that we have to do and go through we should be I mean, our jobs should be respected as much as a doctor. Uh, it's – society just, they just don't put emphasis on, on education like that, you know. And, and for that reason, I think a lot of men stay out of

education, especially in, in, in the lower grades. And God knows that's where they need 'em. I mean, because you, you raise them up and you teach 'em right? Do you know what I'm saying?

Mr. Thomas's comments related to how society places expectations upon the male as the home's sole provider. However, our community does not provide the same monetary value on educators as they do other professions. This can create a conflict for boys in their selection of alternative careers outside of education.

Mr. Kirkpatrick, when asked why African American males were not choosing the field of education, he shared about potentially racist behaviors and the lack of financial gains. He shared, Um, and another thing is the way people perceive, still perceive Black males, um, that the images and the, the stereotypes that are often conveyed, um, through TV and through music, um, this implicit bias is real. Um, and, and people see us in a certain light and, and, and we know that people see us in that light. Um, and you're saying, I'm not going to go to a field where (laughs) where I'm already not making a lot of money and then have to deal with that too. At least if I'm going to be able to deal with that, let me go somewhere and deal with them where I'm making a money where I can live, uh, enough money where I can live and I have to work two or three jobs just to support me and my family. Um, so I, you know, I think that, that's a real issue too. Um, the, the economic part of it as well, um, is that Black men want to make money. They want to be, um, be able to provide support. Uh, and so it is less attractive to them in that sense.

Mr. Kirkpatrick recognizes the negative perceptions that African American males experience due to the media's portrayal of them. He rationalizes that if African American males must experience

these negative racial behaviors, why would they self-select to enter the field of education without proper compensation.

Mr. Jones shared how career exploration practices reveal low salaries for education which can deter African American males from selecting opportunities to become educators. He shared about the benefits of being in education:

First thing, because there are several. Most folks when you do any type of career exploration, they have the job title, they have the salary. When you look to see what a nuclear engineer makes, what a veterinarian makes, and then you go down and you have an elementary or high school teacher, and what they make. Any boy, any person is going to look at them and say, “no, ain’t no way, I’m going to be a teacher.” Second thing, no one is encouraging and telling them that they can, okay? No one has explained that, although your salary may be \$35,000, your insurance is free. You have a retirement after you work for the state, so, nobody explained that concept. I saw it firsthand, but nobody explained it to our boys today.

From Mr. Jones’s perspective, our African American boys may be unaware of the other financial benefits found in being an educator. These benefits do include health insurance and retirement. Proper explanation of salary and benefit packages found in education may increase interest in the field of education.

Mr. Williams shared his belief regarding why African American boys are not choosing a career in education. He shared,

Hmm. Well, number one, I think it’s, it’s the money. (laughs). They don’t make enough money to, um, take care of the appetite they have, where it’s, get this brand-new car, get this house, or these fulfilling those dreams. That’s number one.

He continued:

Number two is that no one is telling them about education. That's two as far as being a teacher. But they don't tell them that you don't have to stay as the teacher. They're just a stepping stone, and you become a principal or a superintendent, um, case.

Mr. Williams recognizes the need for continuous exposure of promotional opportunities found in education. These promotional opportunities yield higher financial compensation for the African American boy.

Mr. Thomas shared how money can hinder African American boys and their pursuit of education as a career interest. When asked about his recommendation for increasing the number of African American males into K-12 rural schools, he shared,

Um, probably, um, to not pre-judge it. Go into it and see what it's all about. Um, and, and I'm take, you know, I mentioned money. I think money is a deterrent. However, I think if, if, if you see what, what good you're doing, that's gonna, in every situation, that's gonna outweigh the money. And see, that's what I had to come to the realization of. Uh, I wanted a job that I was gonna make good money. You know. And so, all I saw was money. And I started thinking, after dealing with certain things, I said, "You know, I have to be happy first." "And if I'm not happy, I don't care how much money I make. I'm not gonna be satisfied," you know.

Mr. Thomas shared his revelation about his selected career in education. As an African American male, he desired financial gains but found personal fulfillment of more value than working for money.

Summary

My participants shared their beliefs regarding the lack of role models contributing to the underrepresentation of African American male school leaders in K-12 rural schools. Each participant shared the need for African American boys to see examples of leaders who exhibit their gender and race. At the same time, early exposure to these male school leaders is critical as they would serve as examples of manhood to African American elementary boys. As shared, my participants recognized the need to be role models and set standards as leaders to young boys from K-12th grade.

My participants also shared their beliefs regarding the underrepresentation of the African American male in education was due to the need for future financial stability. Several participants shared the need for money that males pursue to raise their families and obtain other material possessions. Others shared the need to expose our boys to potential benefits found in education, including promotions, health insurance, and retirement. Lastly, my participants shared about the pursuit of personal fulfillment over the chase of financial gains. To summarize my participants, our African American boys need examples of strong African American male school leaders.

Theme VI: There Is a Lack of Targeted Recruitment of African American Males Toward the Field of Education

My participants shared the importance of targeted recruitment of the African American males to increase representation in K-12 rural schools. This section will focus on the need for targeted recruitment and how to address the negative perceptions of the African American male.

Targeted Recruitment of the African American Male

My participants shared the importance of targeted recruitment of the African American male to increase representation in K-12 rural schools. Mr. Washington shared about the lack of marketing for education to our African American males. He shared,

We don't market it well. And I say that because when you look on TV, you see NBA has a commercial – NFL has a commercial, music has the whole gamut. Even, um, extreme sports has a ga- ga- uh, avenue, or E-sports. But you never see educators. The only time you really see educators or education being promoted is I would say when the NCAA basketball tournament where somebody says, “Oh, they went pro,” or something else. So that's in March. That's the only time – that's the only time I've ever seen that. Or you – when you see the back to school commercials. But that's – that's the only thing. We don't promote education and make it a – make it something that we need, like that's something I want to do. We don't do that.

Though there is target marketing in other arenas, Mr. Washington noted that education has not adequately advertised to recruit future African American boys into the field.

Mr. Williams shared how he encouraged his students to attend a Historically Black College and University and major in education. He shared,

And, and I said, before, a lot of time at HBCU, depending on the making of your school, they're not going to be told about HBCU a lot. Nothing against the others, but sometimes, when iron sharpens iron, I'm the one that would tell them, “Look here, man, you need to go into education. There's a lot of money. There's a lot of grants. Man, the sky is the limit, man. You get with the right school. Do what you need to do. Keep your nose clean, and you can keep it moving.”

He continued by reflecting on the importance of sharing personal narratives of success in education and starting early in recruitment efforts. He shared,

We've got to tell our own story. Um, and I don't know how many guys over the years I've told about going into education, and they think, you know, like this. I mean, a small mind. But I have to let them know you don't also have to start on a high-school level. Start on an elementary level. You know, just start somewhere, or go out and get your degree, and don't stop there. Go and get your master's and go on to the collegiate level.

Mr. Williams stresses the importance of sharing our lived experiences and the varied levels of opportunities found in education from the elementary level to the college level. Early exposure is critical toward the recruitment of the African American boy towards education.

Mr. Jones also shared the importance of recruitment of African American males. He shared,

It's really starting from your, your teacher recruitment pool. Because if we can, if we can get more African-American men into teaching I'm a firm believer that they will teach for a while, and want to do more-professionally I just believe it. I, I mean, I'm a, I'm a product of the product of that. I just think if we can, if we can get them into the classrooms, we can get them into the boardrooms.

Equally, he referred to larger urban districts' recruitment efforts in terms of signing bonuses when asked about the initial steps toward recruitment. He shared:

Well, places like Guilford County, no, those larger districts, they have such a vast advantage. I was just looking at some of the recruiting stuff that they're doing. They're giving brand new teachers, \$10,000 signing bonus. They're giving teachers that have 2 years of EVAAS data that is in the blue. \$20,000 signing bonus. They're giving teachers

that have 3 to 4 years of exemplary EVAAS scores, \$30,000. Who wouldn't go? And it goes back to our high school career planning. No one is showing what teachers can do, what you can do as starting as a teacher to move up. Um, we always just flash the immediate dollar sign and not flash what I like to call the "art of becoming," because that's what is.

Mr. Jones's reflections also point to the difficulties of rural communities to compete with larger urban districts in recruiting African American males into education. Simultaneously, early recruitment efforts, such as high school planning and exploration, can help African American males choose careers in education, recognizing highly qualified teachers are compensated for their teaching abilities.

Mr. Ray shared the need for target recruitment to increase the number of African American males in school leadership. He shared, "Um, I don't think that school districts probably target that demographic. So probably if we, if school districts could come up with some type of creative way to recruit that population that may help." Mr. Ray's reflections show the need for creative targeted recruitment to increase the number of African American males into the field of education.

Mr. Kirkpatrick equally shared the importance of targeted, intentional recruitment of African American males early in school. He shared,

You have to be intentional about recruiting Black males when they're in high school or middle school and start preparing them, uh, give them an incentive to want to do it. And even if they, they go in thinking, well, this is not going to be my career path, but I'm just going to do it for these 4 years and get my college paid for 2 years of my, it may, it may hook.

Mr. Kirkpatrick believes that early awareness and understanding the benefits of being in education may assist in recruiting African American males.

In closing, Mr. Kirkpatrick also shared an example of how targeted recruitment has helped hire former students within his district. He shared,

So, when I was at [School name], we had a teacher prep program, but it was through CTE. And I never had more than 8 or 10 kids in there. And every year they wanted me to get rid of that course. Because it took up two blocks that one teacher could teach 56 students if I put them in another class. But I believe the return that we got from having that class in place was invaluable. And the truth is actually 2 years ago, we hired like five students who had graduated from [School Name] who had been a part of that program as teachers. And they are still in the district right now. So that, that one, that right there is, is enough for me to know it, it works.

Addressing Negative Perceptions of the African American Male

A few of my participants shared about the negative perceptions that African American males encounter in education. Mr. Williams shared his frustrations when the education system uses our Black boys solely for athletic and entertainment purposes. However, this system fails to monitor grades, thus not preparing Black boys for employment or postsecondary access. He shared,

So I get up – I get upset when these Black kids on a high school level, and the college level, get used, and then kicked to the side. Or the grades are not monitored, so they can't get into college. Or they get into college, the grades are not monitored again, and they don't graduate. So they go back to what they used to do – doing, whether it's just hitting the streets, or working a five-to-nine job, or, you know, hate to say it, um, going back to,

um, slinging drugs or gang banging. And then what happens? You have kids. They grow up, and you angry at the world, and you don't push education on them. So that cycle kind of goes over and over.

Mr. Williams recognized how African American students can be used for their talents and then dismissed without a clear pathway for their futures. If African American boys are athletic but fail in their academics, it can potentially be detrimental toward their future ambition, thus creating a cycle of societal issues, including poverty.

Mr. Kirkpatrick shared about having diversity and equity dialogue sessions where all parties have a voice and role in these discussions' successes.

The other is, is putting in, um, um, diversity programs, um, to actually, um, talk about diversity and equity issues, um, throughout the district. Um, having those courageous conversations, um, making students are part of those, um, those forums where you have that dialogue, um, and you don't want those, those, um, opportunities for dialogue to be blaming sessions, uh, because everybody at the table has skin in the game. And everybody at the table should come willing to be a listener because everybody has a perspective. Everybody has a perspective, whether I agree with it or not, everybody has a perspective. And, um, so I think opportunities for dialogue about issues of equity and race and racism, um, should be made available for students, made available for teachers, parents, communities, um, having those equity, uh, programs in place, I think are crucial.

Mr. Kirkpatrick's suggestion was to create safe spaces for dialogue centered around discussing diversity and equity issues in education. Everyone involved should share their point of view regarding race and racism from the perspective of students, teachers, and their rural communities.

Mr. McDonald shared his personal experiences of overcoming barriers toward his success in becoming an assistant principal. He shared,

Successes, challenges, opportunities. Uh, if you told any of my elementary school teachers now that participant number six is an assistant principal potentially going to be the leader of a school in some district, they would have said that you are a bold-faced liar and how dare you come around here saying that type of stuff.

He continued, “Um, yeah. Most people, even in my own town still have a hard time comprehending that participant number six is doing exactly what he’s doing.” Mr. McDonald can serve as an example that he has served his rural community as an African American male school leader despite negative perceptions he experienced from his childhood in school.

Summary

My participants shared their beliefs regarding increasing the number of African American males into K-12 rural schools through targeted recruitment. Participants shared the need to market education similar to other professions such as entertainment and athletics. Participants shared the importance of early exposure toward education and opportunities to explore postsecondary educational institutions, specifically promoting Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Though there are challenges in competing with larger urban districts, creative targeted recruitment, such as home-grown strategies, may increase the number of African American males into the field of education.

My participants also shared the importance of how to address negative perceptions of African American male school leaders. Each reflected upon the need to create school and community environments where students are valued, appreciated, and celebrated for their unique gifts and abilities. The key towards creating these environments requires authentic dialogue,

whether in monitoring grades of an athlete or holding forums around Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion or sharing lived experiences. All are tools for how to address negative perceptions of the African American males in education.

Conclusion

The purpose of my study is to explore the lived experiences, challenges, and opportunities of African American male K-12 rural school leaders in rural communities in North Carolina. Giving voice to the intersectionality of African American males and rural communities, my participants shared their experiences in addressing my two research questions, and my findings revealed six central themes. First, my participants recognized the importance of building relationships with their rural communities for success in their leadership as the school leader. Secondly, my participants displayed Ethno- Humanist Role Identity leadership practices with each component of the definition. At the same time, these leadership practices were displayed during our global pandemic, COVID-19, where they led their schools and community to establish a new normal. Thirdly, my participants made connections using homophily practices. They identified with students' backgrounds and their shared language, culture, and traditions of their rural students. Fourth, my participants shared their experiences with racism. Each shared their encounters and how they handled the experience by focusing on relationship building, serving children, walking in integrity, and remaining committed to all students' education. Fifth, my participants shared their beliefs regarding the underrepresentation of African American males in education because of a lack of awareness of educational opportunities. Both the lack of role models and securing financial stability were key to their reasoning for this lack of awareness of opportunity. The final theme reflected the lack of targeted recruitment of African American males toward education. My participants shared the need for marketing campaigns to be

appealing and reflect the opportunities found in education. At the same time, they shared the need to have strategies in place to dismantle the negative perceptions of the African American males. These strategies should be designed to create an authentic dialogue of lived experiences while celebrating the cultural wealth and human capital found in the African American male rural school leader.

CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

My study aimed to investigate the intersectionality of the African American male school leaders and rural schools and communities. My study examined the lived experiences, challenges, and opportunities associated with being an African American male rural school leader. My research created opportunities for K-12 African American male rural school leaders to share their lived experiences of leading in rural schools utilizing Critical Race Theory through counternarratives. Through 60- to 90-minute semi-structured interviews, my eight participants shared their lived experiences and perceptions of leading in rural schools along with their beliefs of why there is an underrepresentation of African American males choosing education. This section will include an analysis of my two research questions, six findings, discussions, and implications for how the study contributes to the literature review from Chapter II. In addition, I will offer recommendations for practice, recommendations for future research and conclude with my final thoughts.

Analysis

In my study, I identified six findings that represented my results from my research. My first four findings addressed my first research question, while the additional two findings addressed the second research question of my study. This section will include an analysis of my findings. In doing so, I will connect my initial research findings from Chapter II with my study findings from Chapter IV.

Research Question #1: What are the lived experiences and perceptions of African American male school leaders in rural K-12 public schools?

Finding I: African American Male School Leaders Emphasized the Importance of Building Relationships Between the School and Their Rural Community

My first finding was that for rural school leaders to be successful, they will need to embrace the importance of building relationships between their school and their rural communities. My participants' lived experiences highlighted the importance of serving their rural schools and rural communities. Through their lived experiences of growing up in a rural community, many of my participants were able to return home to secure teaching positions. As Mr. Thomas shared, "Well, uh, it's, uh, by the fact that I'm from here it really wasn't that much of a culture shock because, I mean, I know what I was going, you know, coming back to." These opportunities emphasize the value of rural school and community relationships.

My participants also shared the unique characteristics and dynamics of working in rural communities. These unique experiences included encountering differing mindsets, holding educators accountable, genuine conversations with families regardless of their external appearances, and building a rapport with community stakeholders. My participants recognized the cultural differences within rural communities as it relates to urban schools. As Mr. Kirkpatrick shared when he reflected on both resources and urban versus rural communities, he noted:

And so I just often think that, uh, rural America is forgotten about in many ways when it comes to educating children, and they have to find a way to educate children and they're expected to perform in the same manner, but they don't have the same dollars. They don't have the same resources.

Rural communities are unique, tight-knit community dwellings in a cultural wealth of leadership, historic preservation, and community connections to create a family-style environment of shared knowledge, language, and experiences.

My participants shared their lived experiences associated with the Black Church both personally and professionally. Many reflected on how their upbringing cultivated their current biblical belief system and foundation for their rural schools' leadership abilities through these lived experiences. Others shared their experiences of partnering with the Black church in sharing resources, mentors, and programming. As Mr. Thomas shared,

We have a, a program in, in this county called, um, uh, the [program]. And it's where, uh I don't know who the founder is or whatever. But they, um, established a program to where they can come to the schools in the afternoon-and basically teach the Bible. Uh, 'cause it's outside of school. And, uh, um, so, several churches, several of the, the White churches that joined in with that.

Rural school leaders face numerous challenges and varied responsibilities that are different from urban and suburban school leaders (Parson et al., 2016). Preston and Barnes's (2017) study examined the key leadership characteristics and behaviors rural school leaders need to possess in order to run schools effectively. They found that rural school principals need to be "visible, approachable and accessible" within their rural communities (p. 10). This approach relates to my study in the uniqueness of building relationships between the rural school and the rural community. My participants' reflections point to these leadership characteristics in how they relate, communicate and collaborate with their rural school partners within their rural communities. Mr. Washington's example of relating with a parent about an athletic team is an example of being approachable and visible with his community. He shared,

Everything to them is not always about how well you know math, how well you know English. They like the simple things. Um, things that I – I would do, I will see parents come in with a Duke, sweatshirt on. I'm like, Duke, I said, "I'm a Carolina fan."

Importantly, Ashton and Duncan's (2012) toolkit provided skills and directions needed for their intersectionality of individuals who are new principals serving in rural school settings. In this article, they identified the challenges within rural communities of conducting business as usual to preserve both the rural community's historical legacy. My participants echoed the need for challenging mindsets within their rural community to create innovation opportunities within schools to increase student achievement. As Mr. McDonald shared,

And I know that we focused on the African-American experience, but that has also been a challenge for my students of color and that mindset of, I don't need to go to school because I'm going to work with so-and-so at this construction company. Is there anything wrong with that? Absolutely not that they see their fathers or mothers or cousins and nieces and nephews what they're doing. And changing that, again, that's, that's something that has been a really big stigma here in the rural setting is we have a lot of Hispanic students that they quit school at 16 and go ahead and start making that money.

The research studies, previously discussed, were reflected in my findings regarding how rural school leaders can lead their rural schools. Preston et al. (2013) noted, "Successful rural principals realized that the school is a symbol of the community's social wealth, economic prosperity and overall identity" (p. 3). Overall, their success is built upon their ability to build relationships with their rural stakeholders, including community leaders and parents. African American principals served as the bridge between the school and community during the pre-*Brown* era. These practices continue to exist today.

Finding II: African American Male School Leaders in Rural Communities Display Ethno-Humanist Role Identity Leadership Practices

The concept that Dr. Lomotey termed “Ethno-Humanist Role Identity” identifies and describes African American principals’ shared leadership qualities (Milner & Lomotey, 2014). The definition of this leadership practice is “commitment to the education of all students; confidence in the ability of all students to do well; and compassion for and understanding of all students and the communities in which they live” (Lomotey, 1989, p. 31). My second finding addressed my participants’ lived experiences working in their rural communities. My participants’ lived experiences aligned with Dr. Lomotey’s definition of Ethno-Humanist Role Identity, particularly during our global pandemic, COVID-19. African American principals who inscribed to Ethno-Humanist Role Identity are preparing students for academic achievement and global and societal impact. They can balance the dual roles of bureaucrat/administrator and Ethno-Humanist Role Identity practices. Bureaucrat/Administrator focuses on the traditional purpose of leading schools where students receive instruction to navigate the K-12 education system. Ethno-Humanist Role Identity prepares students beyond academics to handle life encounters through life skill development for global impact and citizenship.

My participants’ experiences reflected Dr. Lomotey’s definition both individually and collectively of Ethno-Humanist Role Identity. I believe this definition was fully displayed during COVID-19 where all schools in North Carolina were completely shut down in March of 2020. My participants’ lived experiences reflected the need to lead their schools through this leadership practice. The dual role vision of leadership shifted from managing a school for academic success to caring for a community in establishing a new normal in education. Through navigating virtual learning environments, securing community hot spots for Internet usages and designing a matrix

of physical distance but social connection, my participants displayed the concepts of Dr. Lomotey's definition. As Mr. Ray shared:

I, I think we shifted from academics being the most important thing and academics is really important, don't get me wrong. But for me, and I know a lot of my colleagues, the shift for us became safety, became the most important thing. How am I gonna keep my staff safe? How am I gonna keep my students safe? How am I gonna keep myself safe? Because I have family to go home to and so, you know, that became, that became the big things that, you know, kept me awake at night in, in the beginning of that, and that's still at the forefront because I, uh, I don't want to, I don't wanna ever get comfortable.

Each of my participants exhibited Ethno-Humanist Role Identity in leading their rural schools and collaborating with their community to ensure safe, academic and social-emotional learning occurred during our global pandemic.

Finding III: African American Male School Leaders Make Connections by Using Homophily Practices

The third finding that addressed my research question was on homophily practices. The African American male school leader makes connections by using homophily practices. Homophily, according to Lomotey (1993), "the notion that people with homogeneous beliefs, values, and cultural attributes tend to interact and communicate more effectively with each other" (p. 396). In terms of lived experiences, my participants continued to reflect upon their reasoning for choosing education and serving as school leader role models to future generations of children. Many shared their connection with their students through similar upbringings, which connect to homophily practices. Mr. Ray shared,

Because I can identify with a lot of our students. And when I have my dad at – I call them my dad talks that I have with kids. You know, I, I can tell them if they're sitting in my office and if they live in a housing project, I can tell them, "You know what, I lived in a housing project. I lived in the one two doors down from where you are. And when we moved there, I thought we were the Jefferson's because, you know, before we had no indoor plumbing." You know, and so I relate to them in that way.

Others shared how their search for personal career fulfillment was found in the field of education and serving our African American children. Still, others, such as Mr. McDonald, know firsthand how his childhood lived experiences shaped his career choice toward education while also demonstrating homophily practices. He shared,

My journey has been one that is, it's not ideal. When I was in elementary school, I had an IEP. Uh, I went to the breakout classes. I have attention deficit disorder. I was always being disciplined because I was bouncing off the walls. I have a lot of energy. I had a separate desk that was in the back of the classroom, away from everybody.

He continued, "And to know that from my own experience, I never had that type of presence in elementary school, middle school and high school almost feel like I need to give back because of this."

Homophily practices allowed my participants to connect with African American children through their shared culture, beliefs, languages, and values. This sense of commonality is instantaneous and based on the culture and race and the unwritten rules associated with a shared understanding of one another (Lomotey, 1989). As it relates to my study, my African American male school leaders could understand and connect, in terms of gestures, mannerisms, communication styles, and their lived experiences, with African American children. My

participants were able to create safe spaces for teachable moments through discipline practices, educate, lead, and inspire Black and Brown children. My participants served as school leader role models for children who look like them and demonstrate homophily practices by relating to students and their shared lived experiences. My participants viewed their roles as opportunities to teach, train and develop young people in a language, culture, and value system that the student could identify.

Finding IV: African American Male School Leaders in Rural Communities Personally Experienced Racism

My fourth finding addressed racism, in its varied forms, as experienced by my participants. Many shared their experiences as it relates to handling their responses to racist behaviors. Others reflected upon the expectations placed upon them due to their race and gender. Many reflected upon being placed in schools with minority-majority students while others shared about being the representative of their Black rural community. Mr. Washington shared the importance of being viewed as a school leader beyond exclusively the factors of race and gender.

Because depending where the rural school is located – Black male, so it’s – it’s just like, oh yeah, we – we’re on board. What can you do to help us? So it – it’s like, you know, power to the people, we’re here. But on the flip side of that is it’s easily to get pigeonholed and stereotyped, say, “Oh, well, we’re just gonna send him to – to the – to rural school where Black kids at.” Because I look like them. But you’re just looking at it because I – I look like them. And then the fact of, well, he’s a Black male, and then it’s, “He can get the discipline together.”

Racism still exists in America and in urban and rural schools. My participants experienced institutionalized racism, microaggressions, overt and covert racism, and stereotypes.

In terms of these types of racism, both Mr. Jones and Mr. Washington shared the expectations of turning around low-performing schools within a certain period. Mr. Ray experienced microaggressions from a teacher who chose not to speak, but his cheerful disposition allowed kindness to govern his response. Mr. Kirkpatrick's ability to overcome negative stereotypes of his outward appearance by communicating his ability to lead schools. Both Mr. Jones and Mr. Williams have experienced overt racist behaviors within their careers. Bristol and Mentor (2018) study echoes the resilience of the African American male teachers, who were able to build student relationships despite the initial perception of controlling disciplinary issues. These African American male teachers set a standard for relationships that permitted them to perform their teaching responsibilities. Equally, these institutions of power continue their cycle of placing men of color in intentionally low-performing schools or receiving verbally offensive abuse, but my participants were able to use their lived experiences as opportunities. These opportunities have come in the form of promotions, district and state recognition, demonstrating leadership, destroying stereotypes, and confronting racist behaviors.

Bristol and Mentor's (2018) study identified the term universal carceral apparatus. In the study, African American male teachers discussed their duty positions upon school dismissal of being in front of the school. Like a mini-prison, the universal carceral apparatus positions schools and school leaders to perform dual roles of disciplinarians followed by educators. Several of my participants shared their experiences of being assigned to lead alternative schools. Though leading through an Ethno-Humanist Role Identity leadership practice lens, many did believe their placement at these schools were due to race and gender. Mr. Jones, Mr. Walker, and Mr. Williams all served as principals in these alternative schools. Contrary to the research and circumstances, my study participants used their leadership roles to build a community within

their schools and established relationships with their students, families, and communities in these alternative learning environments.

I now turn to my second research question, which focuses on our African American boys and their interest or lack of exposure to opportunities in the field of education. Two of my findings address this second question.

Research question #2: What factors do participants believe have led to the underrepresentation of African American males in school leadership roles in K-12 rural schools?

Finding V: African American Male School Leaders in Rural Communities Recognize a Lack of Opportunities in the Education Profession for African American Boys

My participants believed the lack of awareness of opportunities was directly related to our African American boy's failure to see men in school leadership roles who look like them. As mentioned previously, "the teaching force in NC remains over 80% White and interestingly nonrepresentative of our student population" (Public School Forum, 2019, p. 8). Rural school principals in 2017-2018 demographics breakdown consist of 89.7% White, 4.5% Black, 3.1% Hispanic and 2.7% other (Taie & Golding, 2019). Given these statistics, an African American boy can experience K-12 schooling and easily not encounter an African American male school leader. My study participants recognized this lack of role modeling and ensuring African American boys see the representation of themselves in their rural schools. As Mr. McDonald shared: "If you don't see somebody that looks like you in a position, you don't necessarily think that as something that you strive to be."

From a historical perspective, the African American Principal was considered the leader in the Black community. As Walker (2000) noted, they were the bridge between the school and the community partners, parents, and stakeholders. They served as visionaries, innovators,

advocates, speakers, professional development leaders, fundraisers, and even role models to African American children. They build schools, designed Sunday learning environments, and collaborated to advance higher education opportunities. However, the Post-*Brown* Era created White backlash with the dismissal of Black teachers and Black school principals. Tillman (2004) reminds us that in North Carolina alone, between 1967-1971, Black principals were reduced from 620 to 40. Sadly, the numbers have never recovered from this reduction. In fact, African American male teachers only represent 1.9% of public school teachers nationwide (Goings & Bianco, 2016; Wallace & Gagen, 2019). This percentage is then eligible to become African American male school leaders. As my participants shared their beliefs around this question, the nationwide statistical data also aligns with the lack of African American males who can model leadership in education for the African American boy.

In addition, my participants believed another reason for the underrepresentation of African American males is money. According to my study participants, the concern for financial stability is preventing African American males from selecting careers in education. Mr. Thomas's reflections shared this expectation on the African American male:

Because, uh, the way society is. Especially if, if a man is married and got a family. The man is, excuse me, the breadwinner. Education doesn't pay that much. Uh, I love it. But, uh, to try and raise a family on, on my salary – it'd be almost impossible.

There are numerous attacks on the African American boys, including the War on Drugs, Zero Tolerance Policies, negative perceptions, dual existence, high suspension, and the school-to-prison pipeline. My research supported the need for the African American male's desire to have the financial stability to support their families. Therefore, pursuing other careers is appealing for financial gains typically not associated within education (Wallace & Gagen, 2019).

Mr. Kirkpatrick's reflection combines my research and the attack on the African American boy and my participants' responses regarding the lack of finances associated with being an educator.

He shared,

Um, and another thing is the way people perceive, still perceive Black males, um, that the images and the, the stereotypes that are often conveyed, um, through TV and through music, um, this implicit bias is real. Um, and, and people see us in a certain light and, and, and we know that people see us in that light.

In addressing my second research question, there is a need to create an awareness of opportunities in the field of education; however, my participants also believe that financial stability was critical in the reasons for the current dilemma.

Finding VI: There is a Lack of Targeted Recruitment of African American Males Toward the Field of Education

Ladson Billings's (2011) article addressed how African American boys' childhood is being erased through manhood perceptions. Our society celebrates African American boys for their musical and athletic abilities but are unrecognized for their academics and intellectual curiosity. My participants equally associated their beliefs centered around the lack of targeted African American males' recruitment toward education. Mr. Washington's and Mr. Williams's reflections align with this negative perception and lack of target marketing. First, Mr.

Washington:

We don't market it well. And I say that because when you look on TV, you see NBA has a commercial-NFL has a commercial, music has the whole gamut. Even, um, extreme sports has a ga- ga- uh, avenue, or E-sports. But you never see educators.

Mr. Williams shared,

So I get up – I get upset when these Black kids on a high school level, and the college level, get used, and then kicked to the side. Or the grades are not monitored, so they can't get into college. Or they get into college, the grades are not monitored again, and they don't graduate.

In both cases, the ability to celebrate the African American boy athletically but fail to monitor their academics or lack of targeted marketing are their beliefs for this lack of representation in the field of education. Though my research did discuss lack of preparation for the National Teacher Examination, which is directly related to enrollment in rigorous classes to prepare in the Praxis areas, my participants' reflections differ. As Hozien (2016) noted, another reality for African American males is that "once minority group members have their credential, they face discrimination in employment practices, culturally discontinuous school climates and taboos about raising issues of racism, lack of promotion and failure of others to recognize their leadership skills" (p. 2). My participants did recognize the need to address these negative societal perceptions of the African American male. Through Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion forums, which will be recommended for future practices, celebrating all student abilities beyond athletics and music, and sharing more lived experiences through targeted recruitment, more African American males may consider the field of education.

Discussion: Revisiting My Theoretical Framework

My theoretical framework is Critical Race Theory, where it examines race and racism and its impact on people of color (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Critical Race Theory challenges systems where Whites are considered superior or the norm and people of color are considered inferior. Cook (2013) noted Critical Race Theory lens allows for a systematic process of

examining social injustices through the lens of race and racism for people of color. According to Taylor (1998), “CRT is grounded in the realities of the lived experience of racism which has singled out, with wide consensus among Whites, African American and other as worthy of suppression” (p. 122). Critical Race Theory rest upon these five tenets, including Whiteness as property, the permanence of racism, critique of liberalism, interest convergence, and counternarratives (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Parker et al., 1999; Rodriguez & Greer, 2017).

My participants, who are African American men currently serving as rural school leaders, had the opportunity to share their lived experiences through counternarratives. These lived experiences displayed their passion for working with all students; dismantling some of the racial structures that have been implemented within their rural schools; or serving as school leader models for African American boys so that they are able to have individuals who look like them in key leadership positions. Counternarrative or counter-storytelling allows people of color to share their lived experiences against the dialogue of the dominant majority (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). Counter storytelling exposes what has been the current narrative by the dominant White majority about African American males serving as disciplinarians first and educators second. Other disruptions include African American school leaders serving exclusively for role modeling purposes without consideration of their creative abilities, innovational strategies, culturally relevant pedagogy, building teacher leader capacity, critical thinkers, and problem solvers. Counternarratives focus on the heart and soul of hearing the authentic voices of stories that possibly would never be told by individuals who have lived those experiences. This section will focus on the examples of counternarratives my participants shared regarding their lived experiences of being African American male K-12 rural school leaders.

Example of Lived Experiences: The Pursuit Towards Education

My participants were able to share their authentic truth, and real lived experiences in how they pursued the field of education. Some participants changed their initial career pathways in order to be an example to African American children, specifically African American boys, through homophily practices. Some of my participants started in a degree that was an alternate toward the field of education but later discovered that personal career fulfillment outranked monetary financial gains. Other participants were able to analyze their turning points in their lives toward choosing education, whether it was a faith-based decision based on their belief in God or realizing their true passion was toward working with young people. My participants were able to change their career trajectory or solidify their chosen educational choices to have an impact on young people and support them as they migrated through the education system. Through counter storytelling, Mr. Kirkpatrick and Mr. Jones shared specifically about the support they experienced while growing up in school and experiencing homophily practices. They were led by African American males in school or having a strong support system in their communities. Specifically, Mr. Jones identified African American males who served influential roles at his childhood schools as he pursued the field of education.

My participants varied lived experienced drew them to work in education. They were able to visualize how their presence in schools could impact all generations of children. Their passion for running toward their destiny despite being the minority, in gender and race, displays their commitment to all children's success both academically and in life. They equally displayed Dr. Lomotey's definition of Ethno-Humanist Role Identity.

Example of Lived Experiences: Faith in God Through Their Black Church Experiences

My participants shared their belief and faith in God through their experiences in the Black church. Through the Black church experience, their solid biblical beliefs allowed them to lead their schools, handle racism, and create partnerships with other faith-based organizations. Whether their Black church experiences were personal or professional, my participants used their faith in God and understanding of biblical principles to impact their schools and communities effectively. Equally, my participants built partnerships and exposed students to community resources and relationships within their rural communities. When I reflect on my interviews, my participants' counternarratives represent their ability to be resilient and manage their emotions by having experienced their Black church encounters. This experience, in some cases, changed their career decisions and has been used as they serve as African American male K-12 rural school leaders.

Example of Lived Experiences: Encountering Racism

My participants have experienced racism within their rural communities. Racism is defined as “a system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppose African Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, American Indians, other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms, and color” (Marable, 1992, as cited in Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b, p. 24). Many of my participants were able to navigate through racist situations and circumstances that personally happen to them in their schools and communities. These examples include a mindset that racism does not exist within the community, covert or overt racist behaviors such as being called a “Colored Boy” or a lack of racial diversity in key leadership roles at the district office.

Alternative School Placement

My participants shared about their experiences of being school leaders placed in alternative schools. Traditionally, alternative schools are schools where districts place students with behavior issues. These schools are designed to create smaller classroom environments, wraparound services, small teaching staff, and typically one administrator who serves as the school's final decision-maker. Previously stated, "African American male principals are usually assigned to schools that are low performing academically, serve high minority student populations and maintain large numbers of inexperienced teachers" (Wilkerson & Peck, 2018, pp. 17–18). Racism can be associated with where rural school principals are placed to lead schools. A few of my participants were placed to lead within these schools to serve as disciplinarians first followed by educators initially. Mr. Jones recollection illustrated this sentiment when he finished his master's degree:

And upon finishing, uh, that same superintendent came back to my office and said, "I need you to go run the alternative school in the system." The school everybody was scared of. Um, [School name] High School. It might've been EC, East side High School Lean On Me. They call me Joe Clark for a little while. Uh, so I went over to, I went over to [School name], and I had a ball ended up staying there, and had the longest tenure-staying there about [specific year identified] years – as the principal.

Within the alternative schools, my participants were able to use their experiences in order to build relationships with their students, staff, and rural community. They helped recognize students' unique gifts, talents, and abilities while creating learning environments where students were celebrated, seen, and heard. At the same time, through Ethno-Humanist Role Identity, my participants shared their passion for the field of education and these personal reflection

experiences as identified through homophily practices. My participants were heavily involved in ensuring that access and opportunities were available to all children to be successful.

From a historical perspective, minister educators opened up their churches to provide their communities with educational opportunities in instruction during the pre-*Brown* era. Oddly enough, these alternative learning environments were designed to educate, encourage and prepare African American children and adults through literacy, critical thinking and problem-solving. Simultaneously, my participants utilized their school leadership opportunities to build relationships, inspire the community and utilize their academic abilities to prepare students for global citizenship. These counternarratives will hopefully dismantle the image and negative stereotypes of alternative school placement. My participants used these opportunities to impact students' lives and leverage to be presented with other options to lead more traditional schools. Through counternarratives, my participants discussed how they managed to navigate racism and racist behaviors and remain committed to their educational careers.

Example of Lived Experience: Ethno- Humanist Role Identity During COVID-19

My participants also shared post-COVID-19 experiences utilizing Ethno-Humanist Role Identity leadership practices. Despite the initial fear of the unknown, my participants' leadership demands shifted during our global pandemic, COVID-19. They experienced the shift to online instruction, distributing paper classwork packages, ensuring every child had an electronic device for at-home learning, coaching parents and guardians on using the school-issued device, hotspot access, and accessing online course materials. From leading staff, my participants experienced how to coach teachers in online instruction, identifying labeled days of A or B when instruction shifted and visiting zoom room class learning environments while offering social-emotional support to teachers as the world navigated the pandemic. Other leadership aspects included

conducting and attending district-level meetings, working with students' service departments, and conducting contact tracing of schools with a positive COVID -19 testing result.

My participants were able to display Ethno-Humanist Role Identity leadership practices during a global pandemic. Ethno-Humanist Role Identity, according to Dr. Lomotey's definition includes "commitment to the education of all students, confidence in the ability of all students to do well, compassion for and understanding of all students and the communities in which they live" (Lomotey, 1989, p. 31). My participants were committed to educating all their students. They continued to ensure all students had access to the online curriculum with an electronic device irrespective of their home zip codes. They continued to coach, support, and train their teachers and principals by providing resources for online instruction. They also provided consistent communication with their rural communities. All those Ethno-Humanist Role Identity leadership practices were implemented as my study participants were able to make the shift towards leading in a global pandemic.

Given my participants' abilities to serve as Ethno-Humanist Role Identity leaders, my second research question addresses their reasons for why there are not more of them in schools. Why is there such an underrepresentation of K-12 African American male school leaders in K-12 rural schools? My participants and my research differ in terms of how this question was addressed. My research reflected numerous negative perceptions and the number of attacks that African American males experience. Equally, my research exposed the lack of the African American boy being enrolled in Advanced Placement and Honors courses involving themselves in critical reading, writing, and mathematics skills needed to pass the National Teacher Examination. When African American males potentially are unable to overcome the negative

perceptions that are experienced in school, why would an African American boy choose the field of education?

To counter the current narrative, my participants focused on the African American boy not having a clear awareness of what opportunities are associated within the field of education. They specifically spoke about early exposure where they are seen, heard, and experience what it is like to be an educator, whether as a teacher and then an administrator. In addition, there are opportunities for promotions as they navigate through the different areas within education. More will be discussed regarding early exposure in our recommendation section.

Summary

North Carolina is the second-largest rural student population within the United States, with Texas as the largest (Public School Forum, 2019). As disclosed earlier, 89.7% of principals are White, followed by 4.5% Black, 3.1% Hispanic, and 2.9% others within the rural communities (Taie & Golding, 2019). Though the data shows, many rural community principals are White; there are African American male school leaders within rural communities. Equally, their lived experiences serve as counternarratives to the current narrative of why they exist in schools, their benefits, and why they believe there is a lack of them within education. With the changing student demographics to more Black and Brown children, more counternarratives need to be shared by African American male school leaders. Critical Race Theory gives voice to a marginalized population regarding race and racism, and through counternarratives, my participants lived experiences can be included in adding to the dearth of literature associated with this intersectionality of rural schools and the African American male school leader. My participants were able to navigate through potential pitfalls that could have easily ruin their careers. My participants managed to handle racism and the negative perceptions that individuals

have of the African American male through media, other forums, and outlets. My participants' faith in God through their Black Church experiences recognized that their placement in schools and education were divine interventions. These personal Black church experiences allowed them to handle the different pressures, situations, and circumstances that may take place in their rural working environment. Through their lived experiences, seen through a Critical Race Theory lens, my participants were able to share their authentic truth, their real experiences, challenges, and opportunities associated with their roles as school leaders leading in rural schools as African American males.

Recommendations for Practice

The following are recommendations for future African American male K-12 rural school leaders and superintendents who hire this highly qualified population in school leadership positions.

Recognize the Cultural Wealth of the African American Male Rural School Leader

African American male school leaders possess a rich cultural wealth and the currency of knowledge that can benefit rural schools and communities. This cultural wealth, as seen in culturally relevant pedagogy, homophily practices, and the galvanization of leaders, helps rural schools and districts because of their passion for preparing all students for global citizenship and life skill development beyond academics. This aligns with Dr. Lomotey's definition of Ethno-Humanist Role Identity leadership practices. For future African American male K-12 rural school leaders, in avoiding potential pitfalls of serving exclusively as a school disciplinarian, should focus on becoming instructional leaders and well versed in the different curriculum subjects. Simultaneously, learn how to build teacher capacity, make data-driven decisions and lead instructional conversations in various departments within your schools that focus on student

achievement and social-emotional learning. These males bring a unique but valuable set of leadership practices found in Ethno Humanist Role Identity. However, each year, the data shows a decline in African American males in the field of education. More research is needed to explore how Ethno Humanist Role Identity leadership practices are fully displayed in the leadership styles of this culturally rich population of leaders.

Learn and Respect Your Rural Community

Rural schools and communities share unique characteristics that differ from urban and suburban schools. Rural schools possess tight-knit community connections, noteworthy community recognitions and celebrations, historical traditions, and a shared language, culture, and belief systems for their communities. For future African American male rural school leaders, in order to be successful, you must build relationships with your rural community. Previously mentioned, “Successful leaders need to understand the mentality of a small rural community which includes a willingness to be highly visible, accessible and approachable as well as reach out to members of the community to provide rationale for district action” (Budge, 2006, p. 7). Relationship building can include presenting at local civic events, attending community functions, and vocalizing your school’s success to the community. Overall, rural school principals need to be “visible, approachable and accessible” within their rural community (Preston & Barnes, 2017, p. 10).

Facilitate Conversations About Race and Racism

Currently, we live in a changing world where the nation is exposing racism and racist practices; at the same time, we live in a changing student demographic population shifting toward minority-majority. For superintendents, it becomes critical to start having courageous conversations about race, racism, stereotypes, discrimination, microaggressions, and implicit

biases, just to name a few. To start, it may mean having experts to facilitate these conversations, designing a strategic plan for addressing race, and/or providing training and small group discussion forums with established group norms for safe and brave conversations. Facilitating diversity, equity and inclusion forums will allow others to hear marginalized groups' lived experiences and become advocates, allies, and activists. Lastly, African American males need support networks with other African American males who can identify with their lived experiences. They can learn from one another's experiences and build community.

Homophily Practices Should Be Used as a Strength and not as an Alternative Placement

Homophily, according to Lomotey (1993), is “the notion that people with homogeneous beliefs, values, and cultural attributes tend to interact and communicate more effectively with each other” (p. 396). My participants indeed shared various levels of commonalities with African American students. These shared commonalities can include their mannerisms, upbringings or similarities in lived experiences. However, regulating African American males to serve in alternative placement settings to monitor discipline practices alone overlooks their other talents, skills, and abilities. These men possess numerous leadership qualities to serve as school leaders in any rural school environment, from elementary, middle, or high schools to district office personnel. Allowing them to grow and develop in curriculum and instruction while attending professional development designated to become effective instructional leaders to facilitating numerous conversations about increasing student achievement and building strong curriculum teams to move a school forward. Our alternative schools need strong leaders; however, continuously relegating our African American males to these schools is a disservice to the cultural wealth and knowledge they possess to effectively lead schools.

Creative Targeted Recruitment

Given the low representation of the African American male educator in K-12 public schools, early exposure toward the field of education is needed. We need to create early opportunities for middle and high school African American males to see the possibilities in the field of education. It is recommended to develop marketing strategies appealing to the African American boy similar to the appeal associated with athletics and entertainment marketing strategies. Early career assessments, internships, sharing of lived experiences, and the authentic realities of serving in education are critical for students' exposure to education. African American boys need to understand that there are benefits of being an African American male school leader, inclusive of financial gains through promotional opportunities, health insurance, retirement, and personal fulfillment of a career.

Recommendations for Future Research

My study was basic qualitative research with elements of phenomenology. My eight participants participated in a semi-structured interview between 60-90 minutes either in person or online utilizing zoom with specific criteria. In terms of recommendations, I would recommend interviewing more African American male K-12 rural school leaders within North Carolina to learn of their lived experiences in leading rural schools. Another suggestion would be to interview retired African American male K-12 rural school teachers and school administrators who served before and after the *Brown vs Board of Education* decision. Another recommendation from my study would be to conduct in-person interviews. Due to the global pandemic, the majority of my interviews were conducted online. I would recommend a hybrid model of initial in-person interviews and online follow-up interviews for additional questions, comments or analysis from the first interview. Another recommendation would be to complete at

least one focus group to have African American males share their lived experiences working in various rural counties in North Carolina. This can create a support network for African American male rural school leaders. Another recommendation would be to examine racism and racist practices against African American male school leaders leading in rural communities. Lastly, I would recommend researching best practices to effectively recruit African American boys into education. What specific strategies can be implemented and assess for their effectiveness in increasing more African American males into education?

Final Thoughts

My study looks at the intersectionality of the African American male school leader and rural schools and communities. The significance of this study is that it serves as a scholarly contribution to the current dearth of literature associated with this intersectionality. Equally, this study aligns with Dr. Lomotey's definition of Ethno-Humanist Role Identity and how this leadership practice continues to be displayed by African American school leaders. The ability to exhibit dual leadership roles will be critical as our student population demographics change. At the same time, it may encourage more African American males to consider education as careers to increase the declining representation of this population in our current school system.

As I close this chapter, I reflected upon my participants' lived experiences and the tremendous strength and courage they expound as they entered daily into this sphere of influence in education. I think about our children's lives that have forever been changed as a result of my participants' decision to choose the field of education. I equally think about the courage and boldness it took to share their authentic truth and allow their stories to inspire future generations. I was surprised at the number of African American male school leaders who chose not to participate in the study after learning of the school district notification approval process. The

need to secure district approval did hinder a few of my potential candidates from interviewing for my study. I was also surprised at the number of districts that did not respond to my initial request to conduct my research. However, I am grateful for those districts that recognized the impact this study may have on future African American male rural school leaders and the ability to contribute scholarly to this intersectionality and the dearth of research regarding this intersectionality.

My participants' experiences were unique. They led schools and districts during a global pandemic and were given a platform, through this scholarly source, to share with others how they displayed Ethno-Humanist Role Identity leadership practices. As I have shared and experienced, rural communities are unique places. Yet, dwelling in them are individuals who are committed to educating children, building legacy, and in some cases, challenging the status quo. These men have remained faithful to impacting lives, securing resources, and providing others with opportunities to follow in their footsteps. Through this study, their success, challenges and opportunities are forever printed on the pages for others to learn of the cultural wealth that resides within the African American male K-12 rural school leaders. My study inspired and encouraged me to continue to write more lived experiences of African American male rural school leaders in rural communities.

I could not close without sharing about one more African American male who also served as a rural leader in a Black rural community. This rural leader, born in 1926, believed in the importance of school. Though pausing his studies in the fourth grade, he was determined to ensure a better future for his children. He was a man of various occupations, including driving a tractor, working on the railroad, owning real estate, and retiring after 31 years at a local plant company in his rural community. He was instrumental and played a valuable role in building his

Black rural community. He was the first Black man on the local school board during the early periods of school integration. Demonstrating school leadership, he spoke at two of his children's graduation on "A Moment to Remember." He was one of the first Black men to build and own a house in his rural community. He was involved in his local church, including assisting, designing, serving in a leadership role, and financing the church building, where he served as a member for over 40 years. He was one Black man who defied the odds against him as a Black man during his era, built a church, supported a wife, sent his four children to college, purchased real estate, and engaged in community services. When I asked him in 2005 what words of wisdom you would have for future generations, he said, "Keep Christ on board and keep walking; the bible is a roadmap to go by." This rural community leader was my grandfather, grandpa Southey James (SJ) Lacy. As a rural leader who passed away in 2005, his life impacted his rural community, his rural community all-Black school, and future generations, including myself and his five grandchildren. My participants are equally doing the same thing as they are standing on the shoulders of giants who have gone before them but are also cheering them onward towards victory. Keeping in line with my participants' Black church experiences in living in rural communities and honoring my grandpa, I leave these words from the Holy Bible:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (II Timothy 4:7-8)

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL INSTRUMENT

Research Question:

- I. What are the lived experiences and perceptions of African American male school leaders in rural K-12 public schools?

Interview questions

Background

1. What is your current job title?
2. In terms of tens, what is your age range 20-30, 30-40, 40-50, 50-60, 60-70?
3. How many years have you been in your current position?
4. How many years have you been a K-12 rural school leader?
5. What grade level was your school?
6. What is/were your title(s) as a rural school leader?
7. What was the name of your undergraduate college/university?

Journey to Leadership

8. What motivating factors influenced your decision to choose a career in education?
9. Tell me about your journey to becoming a K-12 rural school leader?
10. Upon accepting the position as a rural school leader, what was the initial advice teachers shared with you about your role?
11. Upon accepting the position as a rural school leader, what was the initial advice community members shared with you about your role?
12. Upon accepting the position as a rural school leader, what was the initial advice parents shared with you about your role?

13. Upon accepting the position as a rural school leader, what was the initial advice other school leaders shared with you about your role?

Leadership Approaches and Experiences

14. Describe a typical day for your role as a rural school leader Pre-COVID-19
15. Describe a typical day for your role as a rural school leader After COVID-19
16. From your perspective as a K-12 rural school leader, what are the benefits of working in rural schools?
17. From your perspective as a K-12 rural school leader, what are some of the challenges of working in rural schools?

Rural Leadership and Race

18. As a rural K-12 African American male school leader, how has being an African American male helped you?
19. As a rural K-12 African American male school leader, how has being an African American male hindered you?
20. From your perspective as a K-12 rural school leader, what is/was the most challenging aspect of your job as an African American male school leader in rural schools?
21. As a rural school leader, have you experienced any form of racism? If so, please share your story.
22. How has the Black Church played a role in your lived experiences as an African American school leader in K-12 rural schools?

Advice

23. What advice would you give to future K-12 African American male rural school leaders?

Research Question:

- II. What factors do participants believe have led to the underrepresentation of African American males in school leadership roles in K-12 rural schools?

Interview questions

1. In your opinion, what barriers in our current educational system do you believe African American males encounter that prevent them from entering the field of education?
2. Currently, African American males represent less than 2% of educators nationwide, In your opinion, what are some of the reasons for African American men not choosing a career in education?
3. What recommendations do you have to increase the number of African American male school leaders?
4. Do you have anything else you would like to share with me?

APPENDIX B: FORMAL LETTER OF REQUEST

Superintendent Smith
Smith County Schools
322 S. Main St
City, State, Zip

November 15, 2020

To: Superintendent Smith

Subject: Participating in Research Project

My name is Chameeka N. Smith and I am a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

The title of my study is *Yes, Rural Communities Do Have African American Male School Leaders*. I am seeking school district approval to conduct my dissertation study exploring the lived experiences, challenges and opportunities of African American male school leaders in rural communities in North Carolina. My goal is to uncover more narratives of African American male school leaders regarding their lived experiences in the field of education in rural communities in North Carolina.

I am attaching the following documents of my study for your review and consideration:

- Research Proposal Outline
- Workplan/Timeline
- Institutional Review Board Approval Notification

Thank you for your consideration in conducting my study with County Schools. My contact information via email is cnsmi24@uncg.edu.

Sincerely,

Chameeka N. Smith
cnsmi24@uncg.edu

APPENDIX C: INTRODUCTION EMAIL

Good Evening, Superintendent Smith,

My name is Chameeka N. Smith and I am a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I am seeking school district approval to conduct my dissertation study exploring the lived experiences, challenges and opportunities of African American male school leaders in rural communities in North Carolina. My goal is to uncover more narratives of African American male school leaders regarding their lived experiences in the field of education in rural communities in North Carolina.

I would greatly appreciate your consideration of conducting my study with County Schools. Attached is a copy of my approved UNCG Institutional Review Board document, research proposal, and overview work plan for your initial consideration. I can also provide any additional documentation as needed. My contact information is 336-382-9578 or 252-549-0068 or via email at cnsmi24@uncg.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time and have a wonderful weekend.

APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY
2718 Beverly Cooper Moore and Irene
Mitchell Moore Humanities and
Research Administration Bldg. PO Box
26170
Greensboro, NC 27402-6170
336.256.0253
Web site: www.uncg.edu/orc
Federalwide Assurance (FWA) #216

To: Chameeka Smith
Ed Ldrship and Cultural Found
Ed Ldrship and Cultural Found

From: UNCG IRB

Date: 10/01/2020

RE: Notice of IRB Exemption

Exemption Category: 2. Survey, interview, public observation

Study #: 21-0114

Study Title: Yes, Rural Communities Do Have African American Male School Leaders

This submission has been reviewed by the IRB and was determined to be exempt from further review according to the regulatory category cited above under 45 CFR 46.101(b).

Study Description:

The purpose of my study is to explore the lived experiences, challenges, and opportunities of African American male school leaders in rural communities in North Carolina. My goal is to uncover more narratives of African American male school leaders regarding their lived experiences in the field of education in rural communities in North Carolina.

Study Regulatory and other findings:

- If your study is contingent upon approval from another site (school district), you will need to submit a modification at the time you receive that approval.

Investigator's Responsibilities

Please be aware that any changes to your protocol must be reviewed by the IRB prior to being implemented. **Please utilize the consent form/information sheet with the most recent version date when enrolling participants.** The IRB will maintain records for this study for 3 years from the date of the original determination of exempt status.

Please be aware that valid human subjects training and signed statements of confidentiality for all members of research team need to be kept on file with the lead investigator. Please note that you will also need to remain in compliance with the university “Access To and Retention of Research Data” Policy which can be found at http://policy.uncg.edu/university-policies/research_data/