

Experiences in the Principalship for African American Women

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the perceptions African American female principals hold regarding the challenges and opportunities they experienced when seeking and holding administrative positions in a K-12 public school setting. The interview protocol contained open-ended questions and was used to conduct semi-structured interviews with six participants. Findings indicated that when seeking the principalship, African American women inspired to become principals, obtained the required credentials through district-sponsored cohorts and university programs, were knowledgeable of the required skills, felt mentors and networking were most helpful in obtaining a principalship, and noted that as they served as principals, they took advantage of opportunities to serve their school community. They reported that as they sought and served as principals, stereotypes about African American women were unique challenges and their experiences, opportunities, and challenges were different than those of their peers. Implications from the study indicate school district leaders can encourage African American women to pursue the principalship by promoting positive relationships with other administrators and supervisors, developing mentorships, and promoting district-sponsored programs. District leaders must also maintain awareness and combat the stereotypes faced by African American women as they seek and hold administrative positions.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the perceptions African American female principals hold regarding the challenges and opportunities they experienced when seeking and holding administrative positions in a K-12 public school setting. The target population was six African American female principals serving in elementary, middle, and high school settings with differing levels of administrative experience, diversity, and socioeconomic status. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the purpose of uncovering and capturing the perspectives of African American female principals as they seek and serve in the principalship.

The analysis of participants' experiences provides a lens district leaders can use to recognize the opportunities of African American female leadership and to address and dismantle the challenges African American female leaders face as they seek and serve in the principalship. Results of the data analysis showed the African American female principals perceived that district-sponsored licensure cohort programs and mentorships were the most helpful in obtaining a principalship and they took advantage of the opportunities as they served in the principalship. Negative stereotypes about African American women were a challenge and they perceived there were differences in seeking and holding the principalship in comparison to their peers. Findings from this study indicate more research is needed on the perspectives of African American female principals as they seek and serve in the principalship in K-12 public schools.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father and mother, John and Faye Edmunds. Their unwavering support and love provided me with the motivation and persistence needed to complete this work. I am forever grateful to have them as my parents and as my first educators.

Acknowledgements

I was eager and nervous to begin this doctoral program. I began doctoral work several years ago but had to put it aside when I began my first principalship. For years, it remained on my list of things to do, but I did not know how I would make it happen. Several principalships later, I decided it was time to begin again. To my husband, David A. Heard, thank you for your constant words of support, serving as a sounding board and serving as my “Tech Guy.” Your support has served as a source of encouragement and inspiration. To my children, Courtney and Morgan, thank you for constantly checking in to see what chapter I am on and for encouraging me to keep moving forward. Your presence and encouragement meant so much to me. To my extended family, my siblings and their spouses, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews and friends, thank you for your words of encouragement and expressing your belief in me. I am proud to call you family.

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Chapter I

Introduction

There is an ever-increasing recognition of the importance of educator diversity (Fuller et al., 2019). Research supports the need to increase the diversity of school leaders with regard to race, ethnicity, and gender (Khalifa et al., 2016). Improving administrative diversity is linked to research that shows there is a positive impact on a variety of outcomes for teachers and diverse student populations (Khalifa et al., 2016). Specifically, African American leaders are more likely to hire African American teachers (Grissom & Keiser, 2011; Grissom et al., 2015). African American teachers make a strong impact on students of color to include a reduction in differential discipline outcomes, increased placement in gifted educational programs for students, decreased identification for special education programs, and increased graduation rates and overall improvement in achievement for African American students (Grissom et al., 2015).

The school principal “can have a profoundly deep impact on instruction and student learning” (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1274). African American principals make a difference for African American students and most African American principals are women (Lomotey, 2019). African American female principals lead their schools with the intention of creating positive school environments for the students and communities they serve (Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015).

From 1993–2017, only a few studies have been conducted on the leadership of African American female principals (Lomotey, 2019). Studying the leadership of African American female principals will provide opportunities to gain insight into the future of African American female principal leadership, give voice to African American female principals, and provide a greater understanding of how they lead in schools (Flores, 2018; Lomotey, 2019; Moorosi et al., 2018; Robinson et al., 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Many principals, at both the elementary and secondary levels, face challenges leading their schools (Jean-Marie, 2013). However, African American female principals confront additional barriers connected with the intersection of gender and race (Jean-Marie, 2013; Moorosi et al., 2018; Reed, 2012). “Racial and gender discrimination in school leadership is

widely known to exist (Jean-Marie et al., 2016; Muñoz et al., 2014), and can impact who gets access to these roles and their treatment within them” (Burton et al., 2020, p. 1).

Research has shown African American female principals experience age barriers, subtle sexism, and racism (Burton et al., 2020; Jean-Marie, 2013). Once they have obtained their leadership positions,

They may face challenges, such as institutional racism, sexism, males failing to submit to their authority, ‘pull-her-down’ syndrome, gossip, resistance from staff, varying from defiance to subtle non-compliance, the school management team distancing itself from decisions made during meetings, and mistrust from parents. (Ndlovu & Proches, 2019, p. 12861)

In comparison to other groups, African American women often feel they need to “modify aspects of their identity in the workplace to succeed” (Nickens & Washington, 2016, p. 236). Byng (2015) further indicated African American women may sometimes sense a need to censor what they say and how they act because they are worried about how they are viewed by coworkers and supervisors and are concerned about stereotypical labels given to African American women. African American women work to be viewed as professional, collegial, safe, and flexible (Byung, 2015; Holmes, 2015). Several studies have documented that

stereotypes, stereotype threat, overt discrimination and more covert cases of discrimination, such as exposure to daily microaggressions, can make the road to leadership fraught with potholes, pitfalls, and impediments for women and individuals possessing non-dominant identities or multiple minority statuses. (Chase & Martin, 2021, p. 2; see also Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Martin, 2018; Rodela et al., 2019)

Research on female leadership has increased over the last 4 decades (Moorosi et al., 2018). Though there has been increased research on women, it tends to be biased toward White middle-class women with very little focus on the differences between different groups of women and especially African American women (Moorosi et al., 2018). According to Curtis (2017), the current literature lacks adequate representation and analysis of the distinct voices and experiences of African American women.

The leadership needs and experiences of African American women beckon scholarly attention from researchers and policymakers (Dowden-White, 2011; Hamilton-Honey, 2013). There are many benefits to examining the opportunities and challenges experienced by African

American female administrators (Burton et al., 2020). Understanding the experiences of African American female principals, particularly their stories of success, can serve as a valuable resource in addressing problems and developing viable solutions for school improvement (Moorosi et al., 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the perceptions African American female principals hold regarding the challenges and opportunities they experienced when seeking and holding administrative positions in the K-12 public school setting. African American female leadership has been critical for educating communities for decades and can be identified as far back as the antebellum period (A. Y. Davis, 1983; Tillman, 2004). Though there is much historical context for the leadership provided by African American women, research is lacking in highlighting their contributions to the field of school leadership (Horsford, 2012; Lomotey, 2019).

The researcher employed a qualitative methodology to explore the perceptions of African American female principals about the challenges and opportunities they experienced when seeking and holding administrative positions in the K-12 public school setting. The researcher identified and interviewed six African American women who were currently serving as principals in K-12 public schools in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Questions were posed to enable the researcher to identify the perceptions these African American female principals held regarding the challenges and opportunities related to seeking and holding administrative positions in the K-12 public school setting.

Research Questions

This qualitative study was designed to identify the perceptions of African American female principals regarding the challenges and opportunities they experienced when seeking and holding administrative positions in the K-12 public school setting. The questions that guided this research were as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of African American female principals regarding the opportunities and challenges they faced when seeking an administrative position?

2. What are the perceptions of African American female principals regarding the challenges and opportunities they face in the principalship?

These research questions aligned with the purpose statement to identify the perceptions of African American female principals regarding the challenges and opportunities they experienced when seeking and holding administrative positions in the K-12 public school setting.

Overview of the Study

Qualitative studies contain a focus on the contextual richness of real-world settings and allow the researcher to examine the daily lives of a variety of individuals and their thoughts about different circumstances (Yin, 2016). In this study, the researcher conducted qualitative interviews with African American women who were currently serving as principals at different levels in K-12 public schools to identify their perceptions of their experiences when seeking administrative positions. Additionally, the interview data were used to identify the challenges and opportunities these African American women are currently experiencing as they are serving as principals in their schools.

An African American feminist epistemology was adopted to study the lived experiences of the African American female leaders. The value in an African American feminist epistemology is that it enables a focus on the unique standpoint of African American women (Clemons, 2019; Curtis, 2017; Dotson, 2015; Lomotey, 2019; Perez & Williams, 2014). Additionally, intersectionality was used to deconstruct the reality of being a school leader who is both African American and female (Alinia, 2015; Curtis, 2017; Jean-Marie, 2013; Peters, 2012; Reed, 2012). Collins (2015) explained, “The term intersectionality references the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities” (p. 2). Intersectionality provides a means for recognizing social identities that are sometimes marginalized or invisible (Burton et al., 2020).

Theoretical Frameworks

This qualitative study was designed to understand the specific perspectives held by African American female principals based on their intersecting identities of race and gender. To frame the experiences of the participants in the study, an African American feminist

epistemology rooted in the African American woman's standpoint (Collins, 2000; Jean-Marie, 2013; Peters, 2012) and intersectionality, which examines the multiple aspects of a person's identity in informing their experiences (Curtis, 2017; Flores, 2018; Fuller et al., 2019; Peters, 2012; Reed, 2012), were used. This provided a means for understanding the lived experiences of African American women.

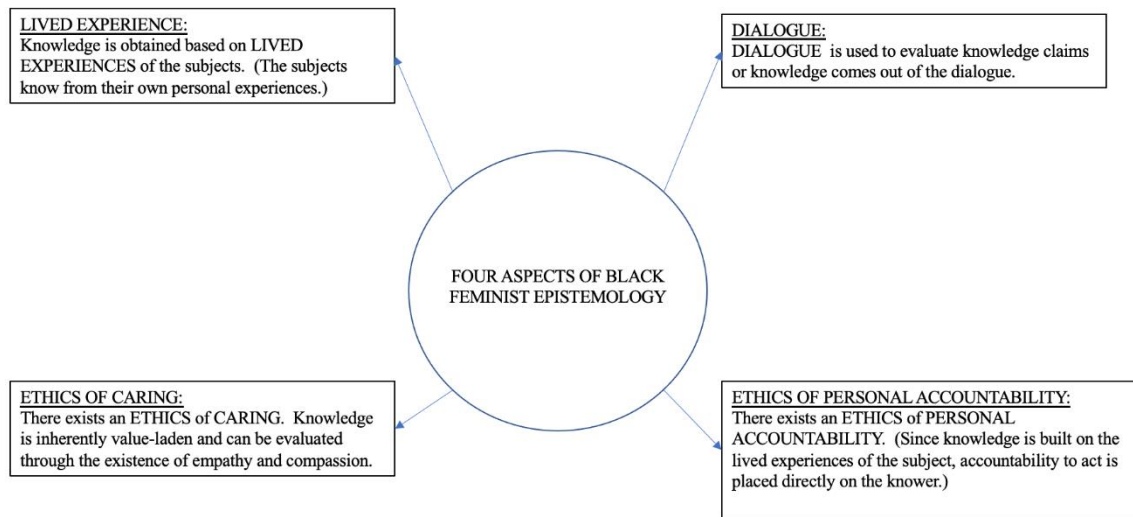
African American Feminist Epistemology

The life experiences of African American women are different from those of African American men and White women given their history and culture, as well as socio-political factors that include years of racial oppression (Curtis, 2017; Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015). African American women have a unique perspective of the world (Collins, 2000; Jean-Marie, 2013; Moorosi et al., 2018; Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015). Their perspectives are situated within their social position located within the larger context of social structures (Collins, 2000; Jean-Marie, 2013; Moorosi et al., 2018; Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015). Epistemology refers to the knowledge production rooted in lived experiences (Collins, 2000; Jean-Marie, 2013). A Black feminist epistemology is helpful in exploring the connections among race, class, gender, and other aspects and circumstances that might affect the experiences of African American women (Jean-Marie, 2013; Lomotey, 2019; Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015). Alinia (2015) explained that African American feminist epistemology is distinguished by its concern with oppression as well as resistance, activism, and the politics of empowerment.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the African American feminist epistemology is based on four aspects: (a) the lived experience is considered to be the criterion of meaning, (b) dialogue is used to evaluate knowledge claims, (c) there is an ethics of caring, and (d) there is an ethics of personal accountability (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Clemons, 2019; Collins, 2000).

Figure 1

Four Aspects of African American Feminist Epistemology



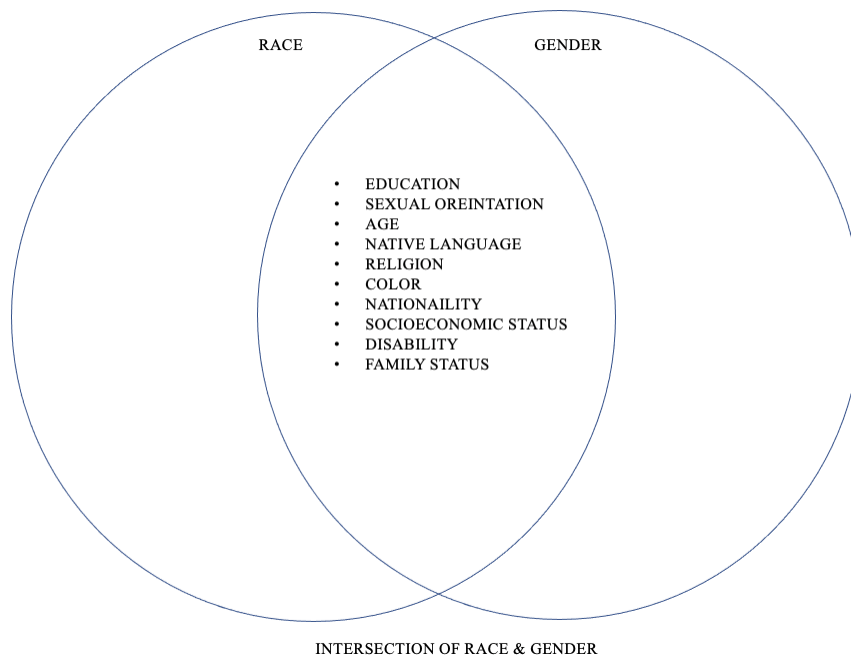
The first aspect, lived experience, illuminates the unique ties African American women have to the knowledge because it is connected to their lived experiences and the voice they have in addressing societal issues (Clemons, 2019). The second aspect of African American feminist epistemology is the use of dialogue (Clemons, 2019). This implies there is conversation between two subjects and a respect for the ideas and thoughts of each speaker (Clemons, 2019). The third aspect, ethic of caring indicates one is speaking from the heart with an emotion that demonstrates they believe in the truthfulness of their beliefs and can show compassion for others (Clemons, 2019). The fourth aspect, the ethics of personal accountability, indicates one must be accountable for their personal knowledge beliefs. Individuals who own their beliefs are admired for their moral and ethical connections to their beliefs and these beliefs cannot be separated from the person who espouses them (Clemons, 2019). African American feminist epistemology offers four attributes for alternative epistemologies, which are ways of understanding and substantiating nontraditional schools of thought (Clemmons, 2019). Research based on African American feminist thought raises up the importance of survival as a strategy of resistance and provides a place for critical discourse based on the historical roots in education and pedagogy stemming from African American women’s activism and African American feminist pedagogy (Clemons, 2019).

Intersectionality

Reed (2012) explained that “intersectionality refers to specific forms of intersecting oppressions, such as the intersections of race and gender” (p. 42). The conceptualization of the combination of race and gender as shown in Figure 2 provides a better understanding of how African American female principals are perceived in the role of leadership.

Figure 2

Intersection of Race and Gender



The framework for intersectionality was developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw to provide an understanding of the tendency to think about race and gender as separate categories of experience and analysis (Fuller et al., 2019). The intersectionality framework has been adopted by researchers as they explore discrimination and bias against persons, and specifically women of color (Breslin et al., 2017; Rosette et al., 2016). The framework was especially important for the current study because it was used to examine how school leaders are affected by the intersectionality of race and gender.

The African American feminist epistemology and intersectionality provided the theoretical frameworks for this study. These theoretical frameworks helped to provide an understanding of the experiences of the participants and how the intersection of race and gender

informed their experiences. These theoretical frameworks provided meaning and context to the accounts provided by the participants regarding the challenges and opportunities they experienced when seeking and holding administrative positions.

Definition of Terms

African American feminist epistemology – African American feminist epistemology is helpful in exploring the connections among race, class, gender, and other aspects and circumstances that might affect the experiences of African American women (Collins, 2000; Jean-Marie, 2013).

Code-switch – “a means of adapting to or negotiating various communication contexts” (Toliver-Weddington, 1973, p. 108).

Double jeopardy – The dichotomy that occurs when race intersects with gender. For African American women, this can result in discrimination, reduced access to leadership opportunities, and doubts about their ability to lead (Burton & Weiner, 2016; Chase & Martin, 2021).

Intersectionality – The ways in which race, gender, and social class mingle to influence the everyday experiences of African American women (Collins, 2015; Fuller et al., 2019; Stanley, 2009).

Othermothering – To lead in a way that identifies with mothering, caring, and the nurturance of children (Loder, 2005a; Lomotey, 2019; Lumby & Azaola, 2014)

Racial discrimination – “Racial discrimination refers to unequal treatment of persons or groups on the basis of their race or ethnicity” (Pager & Shepherd, 2008, p. 182).

Stereotypes – Certain characteristics typically associated with those in a social group with the belief that everyone in the group is associated with the characteristic(s). (Hinton, 2017).

Limitations

Limitations are influences and factors that, fall outside of the control of the researcher. This qualitative case study was conducted with six African American female principals in K-12 public schools at varying levels and with different experiences in the principalship, making it difficult to generalize the findings. As some respondents may not have answered all questions with complete candor, results from the study may not reflect the opinions of all members of the

included population (Baron, 2008). The researcher's own personal experiences of being an African American female principal were recognized for possible bias.

Delimitations

Delimitations of a study refer to the intentional decisions made by the researcher and must be shared with the audience (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). The participants chosen for this study were African American women who were currently serving as principals in K-12 public schools. The selection of participants was limited to the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The study does not consider the perceptions of female principals from other races or ethnicities or those who might have sought a principalship and did not obtain one. The principals had a range of experience, serving 3–10 years as school principals. The participants served in schools that were representative of two school districts located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The principals represented different school levels (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school).

Chapter Outline

This document is organized into five chapters. Chapter I provided the reasoning and overall purpose of the study, as well as an overview of the research questions, definition of terms, and the limitations and delimitations of the study. Additionally, Chapter I provided an overview of the organization of the study. Chapter II presents a comprehensive review of the literature regarding African American women in the principalship and the challenges they face in this role. Chapter III details the research methods used to conduct the study. Chapter IV contains the results of the study to include vignettes from participants and an analysis of the data. Finally, Chapter V includes the findings, implications, recommendations for future research, and a summary, and concludes with personal reflections.

Chapter II

Literature Review

There is a body of literature surrounding the experiences of African American female principals that provided a foundation for understanding African American women's experiences in school leadership (Peters, 2012). African American female principals continue to live with the many challenges of race and gender (Horsford, 2012; Moorosi et al., 2018; Reed, 2012). Though they may strive for visibility, African American female principals often state that their connections to family, culture, and spirituality influence them as leaders and prepare them early for leadership (Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015). In identifying the perceptions African American female principals hold of the challenges and opportunities related to holding and seeking administrative positions, this literature review contains a focus on the principalship, women and the principalship, African Americans and the principalship, and African American women and the principalship.

The library at Virginia Tech University provided access to peer-reviewed articles and books on African American women and the principalship. The ERIC and EBSCO databases were used, which resulted in 8,000 results. The search was narrowed using the following keywords: African American female principals, female principals, challenges for African American female principals, intersectionality, gender and school principals, history of African American principals, and African American women and school leadership. Using these terms helped to streamline the results to a list of 253 references, which was further narrowed to 56.

The Principalship

Researchers have established that school leadership is a major contributor to student success and other school outcomes (Stronge, 2013). Though teacher quality continues to be the number one contributor to student success, principal leadership comes next above a host of other important school priorities (Lynch, 2012; Wallace Foundation, 2011). Principals have an impact on student achievement and school performance through their practices, which entail their understanding, character, and actions (Clifford et al., 2014). Through their positions, principals can have a direct impact on the state of the school, systems and community contexts, teacher quality and placement, and the quality of instruction (American Institutes for Research, 2010).

Principals serve as visionaries and instructional leaders for schools and have a large impact on outcomes for students (B. W. Davis et al., 2017).

History of the Principalship

Historically, teaching and school administration have been considered separate professions (Smulyan, 2000). Around the mid-1800s, teaching became feminized and was regarded as an acceptable role for women as an extension of their work with children (Hoffman, 1981; Spring, 1986). As school districts begin to take form in the late 1800s and early 1900s, teaching evolved into a female profession and administration into a male-dominated profession (Smulyan, 2000). Men controlled the management of schools and teachers as much as they ran industry and government in the early 20th century (Ortiz & Marshall, 1988). Schools established hierarchies where the principal or superintendent controlled the whole, with one male assistant or sub-principal and a female teaching force (Spring, 1986).

In the 19th century, unstructured, decentralized ward-boards controlled schools (Glanz, 1994). Superintendents and principals had very little authority in matters related to educational policy or the implementation of meaningful programs and curriculum (Gilland, 1935; Reller, 1935). Later in the 19th century, reform efforts were aimed at transforming schools into more tightly run and efficient centrally organized systems that were primarily managed by superintendents (Glanz, 1994).

Access to schooling grew dramatically in the first 2 decades of the 20th century (Glanz, 1994). During this time, principals and other supervisory roles began to expand, though principals still had very little power and had no significant impact on the essence of schooling (Glanz, 1994). Principals were typically appointed by the superintendent and were mostly responsible for assisting new teachers with instruction, curriculum, and classroom management skills (Glanz, 1994). From 1920–1930, the number of principals doubled, and their administrative duties increased as the principalship shifted to a more managerial position (Glanz, 1994).

As for female school leaders, the precedent of overlooking women for such positions was set as far back as the Constitution of the National Teachers Association in 1857, which at the time was only open to men (Little, 1984). Some barriers to female leadership began to be lifted after the Civil War (1861–1865). Female superintendents had been appointed in Chicago and Los

Angeles in the early 1900s (Little, 1984). As these two superintendents began to emerge as leaders, conversations started to form against women in leadership roles (Little, 1984).

D. Johnson (1971) noted that from 1929 forward, there was a steady decline in the number of women serving as elementary school principals from 55% in 1928 to 19.6% in 1973. Marshall (2000) reported that in the 1950s and 1960s, there were very few female principals and research in the 1960s and 1970s was conducted to determine why so very few women entered and moved into school administration. In the 1970s and 1980s, equal employment policies helped to decrease the barriers to women serving in school leadership roles (Helterbran & Rieg, 2004). The late 1980s to mid-1990s saw an increase in female principalships from 20% to 48% and growth continued to occur (Helterbran & Rieg, 2004). Currently, female principals dominate elementary school settings at a rate of 65% but are underrepresented in secondary settings at a rate of 30% (Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Snyder et al., 2008).

Path to the Principalship

Most leaders follow a similar path to the principalship, as most principals start in the teaching ranks and often assume additional roles and responsibilities performed outside of the typical teaching contract (Baker et al., 2010; Bastian & Henry, 2015; Fahrni, 2001; Robinson et al., 2017). Though succession plans are a more formal way of developing a leadership pipeline, many districts still use tapping as a method of identifying future principals (Parylo et al., 2013). Tapping is an informal method used by leaders to identify and recruit teachers they feel will be effective leaders in the future (Myung et al., 2011). Though tapped teachers are generally those with leadership potential, there continues to be a preference for male candidates (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Myung et al., 2011; Parylo et al., 2013; Robinson et al., 2017).

Typically, after obtaining a 4-year education degree and completing student teaching, teachers are immediately hired to teach (Bastian & Henry, 2015). In comparison, the promotion to school principal usually occurs several years after completing school administration requirements for a principal license (Bastian & Henry, 2015). For example, in North Carolina, first year principals usually wait an average of 5.12 years after completing their principal preparation program before becoming principals (Bastian & Henry, 2015; B. W. Davis et al., 2017). Most often, principals will begin their career as teachers, earn their administrative lic ense

through a formal program and then serve as an assistant principal for varying lengths of time (Bastian & Henry, 2015).

The on-the-job training gained as an assistant principal is seen as a springboard to the principalship and shapes the future performance of a principal (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Bastian & Henry, 2015; Parylo et al., 2013). Bastian and Henry (2015) analyzed a data sample of 981 novice principals (73% White, 60% women) in North Carolina of which 94% were assistant principals in North Carolina schools. Additionally, many of the principals held a principalship in the same school where they served as teachers (11%) and 75% of these novice principals received a promotion to principal within the same district where they served as teachers (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). Most of the novice principals were promoted to principal at the same school level in which they taught (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). Bastian and Henry (2015) also noted these first-year principals were more likely to assume a principalship in a lower performing school with fewer students passing the state's standardized assessment, higher levels of poverty, and fewer highly qualified teachers.

The Changing Role of the School Principal

In the past, principals were considered managers of the school (Ediger, 2014). As described by Whyte, the principal oversaw buses, boilers, and books (The Wallace Foundation, 2011), which once was enough to be considered an effective principal. Ediger (2014) added that though management is important, school leadership related to teaching and learning is paramount. School leaders set the vision for the school, provide instructional leadership, and serve as one of the largest levers influencing learning (B. W. Davis et al., 2017).

In an age of standards-based reform and accountability, a different conception has developed for school leadership (The Wallace Foundation, 2011). Flores (2018) explained that the consistent discourse on the achievement gaps demonstrates the continued challenge in the United States to adequately educate all students. Over the last few decades, increased federal and state accountability policies have been enacted to address the gaps that continue to exist in the educational performance of African American and Latina/o students (Diamond, 2006; Flores, 2018; Peters, 2012). Gaps in student achievement are exposed when student data are organized by race/ethnicity and gender and show some groups of students experience higher levels of achievement in comparison to their peer group (Flores, 2018). The demographics of the U.S.

population have continued to change, and this has resulted in a student population of diverse cultures and languages, which affects the attributes needed for school leaders (Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014). School leaders must have the ability and capacity to lead and manage diversity in schools and school communities (Horsford, 2012). Modern-day school leaders must provide instructional leadership and serve as change agents who ensure all children perform at high levels (The Wallace Foundation, 2011).

Principals are challenged to move beyond school management to become instructional leaders who can develop a school organization that provides high-quality instruction (The Wallace Foundation, 2011). The Wallace Foundation's (2011) research outlined five key principal responsibilities: (a) develop a vision, (b) create a conducive learning environment, (c) grow leaders, (d) maintain high levels of instruction, and (e) work effectively with people. All five tasks must interact with each other for any part to succeed. Effective leadership is at work when all five responsibilities are carried out (Wallace Foundation, 2011).

Alvoid and Black (2014) indicated the role of today's principal would not be recognizable to school leaders of the 1960s, 1970s, or 1980s. The principalship has morphed into a model in which the principal is an inspirational leader, a relationship builder, a coach and visionary (Alvoid & Black, 2014). In a study by Goodwin et al. (2003), principals noted the importance of the roles of instructional leadership, strategizing, organizational leadership, and community and political leadership and how these roles had increased in their jobs (Hauseman et al., 2017).

New principal evaluation systems also contribute to the changing role of the principal (Alvoid & Black, 2014). Student performance has been catapulted to the frontline and principals are expected to develop new competences regarding data, curriculum, pedagogy, and human resources to meet the new performance expectations (Alvoid & Black, 2014). Principal leadership is a necessity and an expectation that leaders will provide the finest experiences imaginable for all students in schools (Ediger, 2014; The Wallace Foundation, 2011).

Women and the Principalship

Title VII was passed following the Civil Rights Movement and has been in existence for more than 50 years (Dworkin et al., 2018). The law put many standards in place for employers in order to hinder discriminatory practices.

Title VII made it unlawful for an employer to engaged in employment practices that discriminate against a person with respect to compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment;” or “to limit, segregate, or classify . . . employees . . in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities . . . because of such individual’s race, color, religion, sex or national origin.” (Dworkin et al., 2018, p. 273)

Despite the passage of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (the Act) and the Equal Pay Act (EPA) gender disparities continue to persist for women (Dworkin et al., 2018; Ndlovu & Proches, 2019; Reed, 2012; Sims & Carter, 2019). England et al. (2020) indicate major progress toward gender equality was made between 1970 to 2018, but recently, change has decreased or become stagnant. This slowing down in some areas and stalling in others indicates further progress will require substantial institutional and cultural change (England et al., 2020).

Jean-Marie (2013) indicated that in reviewing the research on women in K-12 leadership, gender issues in the principalship continue to exist into the 21st century. In K-12 public schools, teaching is a female-dominated profession with 86% of teachers in the United States being women (Burton & Weiner, 2016; Feistritz et al., 2011; Grissom et al., 2013). However, as is true in other industries, few women are promoted to serve as leaders (Burton & Weiner, 2016). These findings are consistent internationally as well with teachers being predominantly female but principalships being male-dominated (Cunneen, 2021; Martinez et al., 2020; Murakami & Törnsten, 2017).

In the United States, women make up only 52% of K-8 principals (Burton & Weiner, 2016). Low percentages of female principals, approximately 30%, exist at the secondary level and these numbers have remained relatively unchanged for the last decade (Burton & Weiner, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Marczyński & Gates, 2012). Regardless of the school, most female administrators are leading in elementary settings (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Robinson et al., 2017). Because the high school principalship is typically seen as a requirement for district leadership, women who lead in elementary schools are less likely to be selected for superintendent or other high-level district positions (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Chase & Martin, 2021; Robinson et al., 2017).

The lack of women in high-level leadership positions and the pay gap between men and women provide examples of the “stubborn, gender-based disparities that persist in the

workplace” (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; p. 722; see also Dworkin et al., 2018). Though overt gender discrimination in the workplace is less common now, subconscious workplace gender biases exist (Dworkin et al., 2018; Ndlovu & Proches, 2019). Subtle biases contribute to gender inequality in the workplace and interfere with leadership opportunities for women. For example, when educators end their careers as assistant principals instead of at the principal level, their salaries and subsequent retirement funds are lower on average (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). This results in women experiencing financial inequities associated with not being promoted (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Robinson et al., 2017). Hopkins (2012) added that discrimination, sex role stereotypes, diminished access to networks, hindrances to establishing their credibility, and poor opportunities for visibility are consistently cited as issues for women who desire higher level positions.

Kruse and Krumm (2016) additionally cited “long work hours, too many personal responsibilities, longer tenure in the classroom before moving into administration, changes in career opportunities, outmoded hiring practices and school politics as concerns for female administrators” (p. 28). According to a study by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), an average work week is 50 hours for a school leader (Kruse & Krumm, 2016). Women in younger age brackets with families indicated schedules with long work hours were not sustainable (Kruse & Krumm, 2016). Many female leaders were deciding to wait until their children were older due to the hardship caused by balancing their family with their career responsibilities (Cunneen, 2021; Kruse & Krumm, 2016). On average, women spend more years as classroom teachers (7–10 years for women; 5–6 years for men) before moving into administration and do not find it favorable to move into administration when they are close to retirement (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, 2016).

Despite these obstacles, the percentage of female principals has increased over time (B. W. Davis et al., 2017; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, 2016). B. W. Davis et al. (2017) noted there was an increase in female principals from 25% in 1987–1988 to 44% in 1999–2000. According to the 2011-2012 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), female representation in the principalship in U.S. public schools stands at 51.6%. Burton and Weiner (2016) indicated women comprise

52% of K-8 principals and 30% of high school principals. Though these data show an upward trajectory, the percentage of female principals remains low compared to the percentage of female teachers, who comprise 86% of the workforce (Feistritz et al., 2011; Grissom et al., 2013; Robinson, 2014).

Female administrators must persist and overcome barriers to prove they can lead and be successful in school leadership (Ndlovu & Proches, 2019). Female principals can break barriers, discard preconceived expectations of failure, and be effective school leaders (Searby et al., 2015). According to Bailes and Guthery (2020), women's leadership styles are "empirically associated with school improvement including collaboration, relationship-building, and the effective mentoring of emerging educators" (p. 3; see also Robinson et al., 2017; Urick & Bowers, 2014). Female principals find empowerment by building their knowledge, attending professional development and trainings, and by reviewing and understanding education-related laws (Ndlovu & Proches, 2019). The research is clear that women do aspire to the principalship and prepare for school leadership through the most typical avenues—education and instructional experience (Bailes & Guthery, 2020).

African Americans and the Principalship

In today's racially diverse society, schools continually require leaders and models of leadership that reflect the cultural, racial, and ethnic makeup of their communities (Khalifa et al., 2016). This section of the literature review covers the lack of research on African American principals pre-Brown and post-Brown and the need for more African American principals.

Lack of Research on African American Principals

In the study of leadership, the perspectives of some leaders have been omitted, both in educational leadership in general and the principalship in particular (Curtis, 2017; Dowden-White, 2011; Gooden, 2012; Hamilton-Honey, 2013; Moorosi et al., 2018). Most theory and practice in organization and administration is based on research and the behaviors of White men to the exclusion of women and African Americans, unless they tend to think in ways like White men (Lomotey, 2019; Sims & Carter, 2019). When research includes African American principals, it becomes important to look differently at leadership theories and the impact they make, particularly for African American children (Chase & Martin, 2021; Lomotey, 2019).

Over two-thirds of a century ago, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled racial segregation in public schools as unlawful and unconstitutional (Will, 2019). The momentous decision rendered in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* decision of 1954 was unanimous determining that segregated schools, established and maintained by the state, were inherently unequal (J. E. Lyons & Chesley, 2004). This historical literature review on the lives and work of African American principals focuses on two main areas: the pre-Brown era, which focuses on their leadership in segregated schools and communities, and the post-Brown era, which focuses on their employment status after the Brown decision was handed down (Tillman, 2004).

Pre-Brown

“The work of Black educators is a historical and cultural artifact” (Tillman, 2004, p. 282). Historians have contributed to most of the scholarship on the lives and work of African American principals who served in schools following slavery and into the early 1950s (Tillman, 2004). Though schools were segregated at this time, the African American community valued them highly (Siddle Walker, 2000). Traditions of excellence and dedication to educating Black children can be found as early as the 1860s (Watkins, 2001). “Black educators helped to build and operate schools, secure funding and other needed resources, worked with the Black community, and worked as advocates for the education of Black children” (Tillman, 2004 p. 282; see also T. Jackson, 2012)

Black principals were dedicated to educating Black students (Tillman, 2004). They collaborated with Black leaders to develop and maintain schools for Black children, oftentimes working under substandard conditions (Tillman, 2004). By the mid-20th century, African American teachers and principals served as community role models and were highly respected as leaders by community members (Henig et al. 1999). African American administrators served as representatives for the African American community and were considered the authority on educational, social, and economic matters. They were responsible for creating African American schools as the hub within the African American community.

J. D. Anderson (1988) explained that African Americans in southern areas became free at a time when education for Whites was becoming more formal and considered an important social institution. Public and private schools were developed for African American students. Considering the context of the times and hostility toward educated African Americans, these

schools were effective in educating African American students (J. D. Anderson, 1988). A persistent theme for African Americans during this period was the continued requirement to be a part of an educational system that would sustain freedom and provide access to democracy (J. D. Anderson, 1988).

Beginning in the 18th century through the 1950s, educated professionals like preachers, journalists, and politicians led efforts to educate African American children (Franklin, 1984, 1990). Throughout the period before the Civil War, African American ministers served in dual roles as educators and were critical in creating schools throughout the northern and southern regions of the United States (Franklin, 1984, 1990). They served as administrators or headmasters and strongly believed that though money, civil rights, and property could be taken from African Americans, education could not.

Savage (2001) investigated the agency of African American teachers and principals pre- and post-Brown to provide an account for the education of African Americans in four continuously operating schools in Franklin, Tennessee, from 1890–1967. Savage found African American principals did more with less in the context of providing education for African American students. Though lacking money or materials, African American administrators ran and maintained schools for African American students. Savage noted that Black principals operationalized agency in three ways:

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

Savage determined agency was a combination of powerful strategies aimed at fostering African American independence and pride and thwarting resistance to educating African American students. Through their agency, these school principals educated African American students under hostile working conditions. Additionally, these principals of all-African American schools improved the quality of teachers by recruiting qualified teachers from prestigious African American institutions (Savage, 2001).

African American women were also instrumental educators during the pre-Brown era (Alston & Jones, 2002). They opened schools in the North and South and served in multiple roles as teachers and principals. In these roles, they were responsible for introducing new teaching strategies and curricula, implementing pre-service programs, and serving as assistants to the county superintendent's office (Alston & Jones, 2002).

Historical literature on African American principals shows they were prominent leaders in segregated schooling and in the African American community (Siddle Walker, 2000, 2001). They connected the school to the community (Siddle Walker, 2000, 2001). In their roles as school leaders, they garnered parent support, raised funds, and served as professional role models for their faculty and staff (Siddle Walker, 2000, 2001). They served as school visionaries, supervised their staff, and communicated the vision and mission for their school to White philanthropists who could provide financial support (Siddle Walker, 2000, 2001).

In a liaison role, principals also worked with the White community to request money, materials, and other streams of support for their schools (Siddle Walker, 2000). African American principals often operated with an inordinate amount of authority and autonomy as White school boards and superintendents feigned indifference and ignored their existence (Siddle Walker, 2000). African American principals were the major decision makers at their school sites and had the ability to hire and fire, implement programs, and raise money for necessary resources.

African American principals understood the importance of education for African Americans and felt responsible for the progress of the African American students and adults who attended their schools (Siddle Walker & Archung, 2003). Principals in these segregated settings provided a counter education to the expectations of Whites and knew their advancement was inextricably tied to the academic, social, economic, and political progression of African Americans as a race (Siddle Walker & Archung, 2003).

Post-Brown

During the post-Brown era, African American administrators enacted efforts to desegregate schools and to educate African American students while continuing to encounter resistance (Tillman, 2004). F. Brown (2005) explained that after the Brown ruling, many African American principals in formerly segregated schools lost their jobs. M. D. Anderson (2016) stated

that for many African American principals, Brown had a devastating aftereffect. African American principals were routinely fired and demoted as school integration spread, which mirrored the fortune of African American teachers (M. D. Anderson, 2016). For example, from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, African American principalships in North Carolina went from 670 to 170, in Alabama from 250 to 40 and in Louisiana from 512 to 363 (Valverde & Brown, 1988).

Though it is difficult to identify empirical studies detailing the how and why these African American principals and educators were displaced or dismissed, multiple reasons have been hypothesized (J. E. Lyons & Chesley, 2004). As a result of many all-African American schools being closed, the principals were either dismissed or reassigned, often serving under less experienced White principals (J. E. Lyons & Chesley, 2004). Because most of the principals serving in integrated schools were White, preference was most likely given to White principals and teachers (J. E. Lyons & Chesley, 2004). Tenure laws and reduction in force (RIF) policies were not in place in most states given the mandate to desegregate, meaning African American principals and teachers had very little recourse to protest displacements or demotions (J. E. Lyons & Chesley, 2004). Furthermore, most school board members and superintendents in the southern states were White, so preference was most likely given to the retention and employment of White principals and teachers (J. E. Lyons & Chesley, 2004). Tillman (2004) explained the irony regarding how the Brown case negatively affected large numbers of African American administrators as they were dismissed or relegated to lesser school assignments. With their displacement, African American principals could not advocate for or act in the interest of African American children during the implementation of segregation (Tillman, 2004). Additionally, the loss of African American leaders contributed to negative stereotypes that African American leaders, schooling, and African American institutions were inferior (Karpinski, 2006).

The shortage of African American principals has direct ties to several issues, including a shortage of African American teachers, lack of access to mentoring for leadership opportunities, lack of recruitment and retention of candidates in leadership programs, and failure to prepare and appoint African American school administrators (M. D. Anderson, 2016; Foster, 2004). F. Brown (2005) explained that there was a major decline in the number of African American school principals immediately following Brown, though their employment began to stabilize and

in 1982 rose to 7.7% (approximately 3,320 principals). In the 1980s, the number of African Americans appointed to the principalship plateaued and then regressed (Valverde, 2003). As reported by the National Center for Education Statistics, because principals are typically promoted from the pool of teachers, teacher demographics such as race and ethnicity may influence principal demographics (M. D. Anderson, 2016). Today's African American principal is most likely to be found in large city districts and, as in the past, continues to work for the needs of African American children (Fairchild et al., 2012).

The Need for African American Principals

Sims and Carter (2019) argued that by the year 2026, a generation of adults will enter the workforce who will relate to multiple identities of gender, race, culture, and religion. Current research indicates there is a need to expand the racial/ethnic and gender diversity of school administrators as student demographics change (Karanxha et al., 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016). The rationale for increasing diversity in school leadership includes evidence that African American leaders positively influence a variety of outcomes for teachers and African American students (Fairchild et al., 2012; Fuller et al., 2019).

Specifically, African American principals tend to hire African American teachers who, in turn, have a positive impact on African American students (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019; Grissom & Keiser, 2011; Grissom et al., 2015; A. Miller, 2013). Positive results have occurred for students of color when the number of teachers of color at their schools has increased (Grissom et al., 2015). Schools have seen a reduction in differential disciplinary outcomes, increased placements in gifted programs, decreases in disproportionality in special education programs, increased graduation numbers, and an overall improvement in academic achievement (Grissom et al., 2015). It is also likely that instructional management will be strengthened by African American principals who are uniquely positioned to improve teacher retention rates, especially in schools that can be difficult to staff. African American principals are more likely to encourage minoritized teachers to pursue leadership, thereby increasing the diversity in school leadership (Myung et al., 2011).

Research continues to support the need for increased diversity in school administration positions and the lack of progress in growing the percentage of African American school leaders (Fuller et al., 2019). The diverse characteristics of principals are not commensurate with the

student diversity in student populations (Fuller et al., 2019). Public schools continue to have a need for African American leaders and teachers, as well as equal opportunities (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Smith & Lemasters, 2010).

African American Women and the Principalship

In many ways, African American women have made great strides in the United States (Nickens & Washington, 2016). In a study conducted by the Center for Talent Innovation, when compared to White women, African American women were 2.8 times more likely to desire a powerful role and position (Hewlett & Green, 2015). African American women have indicated their personal experiences with family, cultural influences, and spiritual backgrounds influence their leadership and prepare them early for leadership roles (Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015).

Pathway to the Principalship for African American Women

Today, the principalship continues to be more accessible to White men and White women (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; K. M. Brown, 2011; Burton & Weiner, 2016; Flores, 2018; Robinson et al., 2017). Data from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) indicated 80% of public-school principals are non-Hispanic White, 10% are African American, 7% are Hispanic, and 3% identify as another race or ethnicity (Hill et al., 2016). Of the 10% of African American school administrators in the United States, only 4% of are women (Horsford & Tillman, 2012). The continued historical sponsorship of White men for the principalship has come at the expense of women, particularly African American women, and also prevents some students from maximizing their educational opportunity (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Bartanen & Grissom, 2019; K. M. Brown, 2011; Lomotey, 2019).

The path to the principalship often takes far longer for African American women than White women (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Peters, 2012). For women, the usual path is teacher to elementary principal (Robinson et al., 2017; Vail, 1999). For men, it is teacher to high school principal (Robinson et al., 2017; Vail, 1999). Though more women are leading elementary schools, men are typically leading high schools, which results in higher salaries for men as well as increasing their presence in school superintendency positions (Angel et al., 2013; Gooden, 2009; Robinson et al., 2017; Vail, 1999). Guramatunhu-Mudiwa's (2015) research revealed that over a 10-year period, enrollment patterns in a school administration program showed women

outnumbered men 2:1, but despite women outnumbering men in educational leadership programs and in advanced degrees, women are not becoming high school principals.

On average, African American women teach longer than their White peers (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Jean-Marie, 2013). African American women usually wait longer to receive a promotion to an assistant principal position and once they are there, they wait longer for a promotion to become a principal (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Jean-Marie, 2013; Reed, 2012). When appointed to their first principalship, African American women are typically between the ages of 40–50 years old (Jean-Marie, 2013; Peters, 2012).

Where and How African American Female Principals Lead

African American women most often lead in urban elementary schools (Bass, 2012; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Dillard, 2005; Moorosi et al., 2018; Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015; Peters, 2012). African American female principals are often assigned to schools that are considered to be tough or are predominantly African American and they endure high expectations for their performance despite the lack of resources and systemic issues (Bass, 2012; Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015; Peters, 2012). Horsford (2012) referenced African American female principals as clean up women who are often assigned to schools with majority African American students, high levels of poverty, and a lack of resources (Peters, 2012). Additionally, African American women must consider the perceptions others may hold of them based on their gender, race, and ethnic or class-based stereotypes (Peters, 2012).

African American women in urban schools use their role as school leaders to create safe, effective learning environments for the students they serve (Bass, 2012; S. M. Brooks, 2009; L. Johnson, 2007; Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015). This includes using their leadership influence to interpret and administer school policies in a manner that best serves the interests of their students even when facing the demands of district mandates (Bass, 2012). Some African American female principals have also used their experiences to expertly unite and mobilize their stakeholders into action (Newcomb & Khan, 2014; Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015). Burton et al. (2020) added that advocacy approaches are used as a coping strategy. Advocacy strategies focus on providing help and support to students, families, and the community as a means of proactively addressing and solving community concerns (Burton et al., 2020).

African American female leaders have been known to lead differently than their White colleagues, both male and female, and this may be related to their exclusion from traditional power structures (Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015; Peters, 2012; Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014). African American female leaders use the skills they have honed in response to their unique life experiences, including barriers, challenges, and opposition (Newman, 2021a, 2021b). Studies of African American female leaders highlight the use of code-switching, cultivating workplace relationships, leading with a focus on community, an ethic of care (or othermothering), being driven by social justice goals, and the use of spirituality and other techniques that inform their leadership experience (Aaron, 2020; Bass, 2012; Dillard, 1995; Lumby & Azaola, 2014; Nelson et al., 2016; Sakho-Lewis, 2017).

Studies also show that in comparison to their mainstream and dominant-culture peers, African American female principals engage in cross-cultural leadership practices that are a result of their different filters of experience (Jean-Marie, 2010; Santamaria, 2013; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012). African American female principals can take the positive attributes of their cross-cultural differences and combine them with research-based practices to create different and often positive student outcomes (Jean-Marie, 2010; Santamaria, 2013; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012). These leadership skills and strategies are evidence of the efforts used by African American women to sustain themselves as leaders across industries and in different roles and positions (Newman, 2021a, 2021b).

Challenges for African American Female Principals

Race and gender discrimination continue to exist in school leadership (Burton et al., 2020; Jean-Marie et al., 2016; Muñoz et al., 2014; Shakeshaft, 1989). Though African American women have moved into leadership positions in the professional arena, to include education, many still deal with the double jeopardy of being African American and female, which creates the potential for discrimination based on gender and race (Burton & Weiner, 2016; Chase & Martin, 2021; D. R. Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Essed, 1991; Fuller et al., 2019; Jean-Marie, 2013). This dichotomy reduces access to leadership positions and generates some ambivalence toward their ability to lead (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Chase & Martin, 2021; D. R. Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Fuller et al., 2019; Jean-Marie, 2013; Peters, 2012).

An intersectional lens has been used in the study of African American women because the impact of sexism and racism cannot be viewed as separate components of their existence (Burton et al., 2020; Collins, 1991, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989).

Intersectionality calls attention to social identities that are consistently treated as marginal or invisible, because they are conceptualized as mere subsets of broader, larger, or more “significant” assemblages. Second, intersectionality points to the complex nature of power, undermining all reductive theories of oppression . . . Third, intersectionality points to the gap between social categorization and the complexity of intersubjective experience: the fact that no single social label-female, Black, bisexual, poor-can ever exhaust what it means for an individual to travel in the world, and therefore that no analysis or label is ever complete. (Harris & Leonardo, 2018, p. 5)

Issues related to race and gender are evident in the context of the larger society (Gooden, 2009; Reed, 2012; Sczesny, 2003). Women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions and once there, they face gender and race-related microaggressions, decreased self-advocacy, difficulty building consensus, and a lack of mentoring supports in their leadership role (Chase & Martin, 2021; Flores, 2018; Lomotey, 2019; Reed, 2012; Sims & Carter, 2019). Women encounter numerous barriers to entry into leadership positions with one being recruitment, which is often situated within informal networking structures where current principals identify and prompt teachers to apply for preparation programs (Flores, 2018; Fuller et al., 2019). In a study conducted by Myung et al. (2011), two significant findings emerged: (a) school leaders were 30% more likely to identify teachers of the same race for leadership programs, and (b) male teachers were most often selected over equally qualified female teachers. Mung et al. further stated that for African American female teachers, this informal pathway to leadership was greatly diminished.

These concerns substantiate the glass ceilings and cliffs African American women experience in educational leadership (Chase & Martin, 2021; Tillman, 2012). The glass ceiling is a term used to describe how women can only progress so far in their careers before they encounter barriers and the glass cliff refers to placing women in more precarious leadership positions than their male counterparts, thereby increasing their chances for failure (Chase & Martin, 2021; Cronin & Fine, 2010). In addition to ceilings and cliffs, African American women are believed to be affected by concrete or Black ceilings, which is a less studied phenomenon

where they cannot even imagine positions of leadership (Gaetane et al., 2009; Tillman, 2012). However, through their ability to code-switch, navigate corporate and diverse culture and tenacity, African American women demonstrate refined adaptive skills, innovation, creativity, and leadership abilities, all of which are beneficial to all organizations (Chase & Martin, 2021; Parker & Ogilvie, 1996; Sims & Carter, 2019).

Though African American women bring diversity and a unique set of skills to the principalship, several recent studies showed they feel they must behave differently to be successful (Lomotey, 2019; Reed, 2012). One reason African American women may feel the need to adjust their behavior is that they are more concerned with how they are perceived by their peers and supervisors and with being labeled and stereotyped (Byng, 2015). As a result, they modify their behavior to be perceived as professional, unthreatening, safe, and adaptable (Holmes, 2015). Contradictory findings in this area were reported by Nickens and Washington (2016), who found the African American participants in their study did not feel a need to alter their mannerisms, speech, or opinions to be accepted; easily exhibited behaviors and characteristics that might be considered aggressive or firm; and had achieved leadership positions and appropriate wages. Continued research is needed in this area to address this issue and how it relates to African American women (Lomotey, 2019; Nickens & Washington, 2016).

The Need for Research on African American Female Principals

The research conducted on African American women has aimed to move the experiences of African American women toward the center of organizational leadership research (Dillard, 2000; Lomotey, 2019). Dillard (2000) argued that considering the growing diversity in the nation's public schools, the literature on effective leaders must include the lived experiences of leaders who fall outside of the dominant cultural vision of schools and leadership (Moorosi et al., 2018; Robinson, 2014; Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014). Shakeshaft (1989) asserted research indicates there are differences in leadership practices based on gender and race (Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015; Peters, 2012; Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014). Research on the complex issues of intersectionality and the impact on African American female principals may enable practitioners and scholars to develop new and revise current strategies, which holds promise for benefiting the schools and students African American female principals lead (Lomotey, 2019; Reed, 2012).

The body of literature on the experiences of African American female principals helps to illuminate their experiences as school leaders (Peters, 2012). According to an exploratory review of the literature from 1993–2017, research on African American women appears most often in dissertations and to a lesser extent in journals and is typically narrow in focus (Lomotey, 2019). Lomotey (2019) indicated that at this time, African American women are significantly understudied.

Summary

African American female principals continue to live with the challenges of race and gender (Burton et al., 2020; Jean-Marie et al., 2016; Muñoz et al., 2014; Reed, 2012). The research literature revealed there are low numbers of African American women in school leadership positions (Reed, 2012). African American female principals most often lead in urban school settings, which are segregated and lack resources and the other supports needed for success (Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015). Such situations can create a unique set of challenges for African American female principals and affect their ability to thrive as school administrators (Aldrich, 2019). Though African American female principals acknowledge the work is hard and challenging, they love and find enjoyment out of being school leaders (Robinson, 2014).

The literature contains very little on the perspectives of African American women regarding their advancement to and experiences within the principalship (Flores, 2018; Reed, 2012). African American women present with a certain uniqueness as they intersect with two subordinate groups, by gender and race (Burton et al., 2020; Collins, 1991, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989; Reed, 2012). The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the perceptions African American female principals hold regarding the challenges and opportunities they experienced when seeking and holding administrative positions in the K-12 public school setting. This research study was designed to add to the literature related to African American women and school leadership.

Chapter III

Methodology

This chapter provides details of the methodology used to conduct this research study. It includes the purpose of the study, research questions, research design: methodology and justification, needed data, site/sample selection, data collection procedures, instrument design, instrument validation (and reliability), data treatment, data management, analysis techniques, and a summary.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the perceptions African American female principals hold regarding the challenges and opportunities they experienced when seeking and holding administrative positions in the K-12 public school setting. The researcher conducted interviews with six African American women who were currently serving as principals in K-12 public schools. Questions were posed to enable the researcher to gain insight into the perceptions the African American female principals held regarding challenges and opportunities as they sought and held administrative positions in K-12 public schools.

Research Questions

This qualitative study was designed to investigate the perceptions African American female principals held about the challenges and opportunities they experienced as they sought and held administrative positions in the K-12 public school setting. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the perceptions of African American female principals regarding the opportunities and challenges they faced when seeking an administrative position?
2. What are the perceptions of African American female principals regarding the challenges and opportunities they face in the principalship?

Research Design: Methodology and Justification

Qualitative studies are used to study a group or population, identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or give voice to those who have been traditionally silenced (Creswell & Poth, 2018; H. Z. Lyons et al., 2013). Qualitative research empowers individuals to tell their

stories, allows voices to be heard, and minimizes the power relationships that sometimes exist between researcher and participants in a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; H. Z. Lyons et al., 2013). A basic qualitative method provided the most beneficial structure with which to explore the perceptions held by African American female principals as they identified the challenges and opportunities they experienced in seeking and holding administrative positions in the K-12 public school setting.

The existing literature contains very little on the perspectives of African American women and their advancement to and experiences within the principalship (Loder, 2005a). African American women present with a certain uniqueness as they intersect with two subordinate groups, as they are both female and people of color (Reed, 2012). It has been noted that African American women lead differently than their White counterparts as they have been excluded from the established organizational power structures (Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015). This qualitative study was designed to add to the research literature by identifying the perceptions African American female principals held of the challenges and opportunities they experienced as they sought and held administrative positions in the K-12 public school setting.

Researcher Lens

Researchers serve as an instrument and have their own research lens or filter regarding data collection (Yin, 2016). The researcher conducting this study is an African American woman and has served as the principal of several elementary schools. This had the potential to introduce some biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding African American women in the principalship into the study. Though no lens is free of bias, the researcher provides readers with sufficient information they can use to make their own assessment of the potential (desirable and undesirable) effects of the researcher's lens (Yin, 2016). The researcher worked diligently to reduce her bias by following guidelines for selecting the sample and site. The participant sample was randomly selected and interviews were conducted on a Zoom platform based on participant availability. The semi-structured interview protocol was followed consistently for all participants. The researcher reported all views expressed by the participants regardless of her experiences with the topic. The researcher remained neutral as participants relayed their responses to the questions.

Needed Data

The researcher conducted interviews with each participant using a guided interview format (Lichtman, 2013). The researcher developed a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix D) to use consistently with each participant. The semi-structured interview protocol was developed in advance to provide the needed data on how African American female principals sought and held administrative positions in K-12 school settings. The semi-structured interview protocol questions were reviewed by university professors in advance of the interviews. The researcher collected data from six African American female principals serving in K-12 public settings. The interviews were recorded and the data were used to develop rich descriptive passages aimed at making the readers feel as though they were present at the interview (Yin, 2016).

Site/Sample Selection

The researcher used purposive sampling to select the participants for this research study. Purposive sampling is a method in which the researcher deliberately chooses who to include in the study based on their ability to provide rich data related to the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The primary goal was to select participants who would provide the most relevant and plentiful data based on the study topic researcher (Yin, 2016).

The researcher used purposive sampling to recruit six African American female principals currently serving in K-12 public schools in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States at all three school levels (i.e., elementary, middle, and high). The researcher worked to identify participants who could offer deep reflective perspectives on the challenges and opportunities surrounding seeking and holding administrative positions in the K-12 public school setting. Pseudonyms were used for each participant and school and participants' identities were kept confidential.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher sought and received approval through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study. The researcher completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training in the Fall of 2021 through Virginia Tech University (CITI certificate is located in Appendix A).

The researcher sent a letter of request by email to three organizations to solicit their assistance in recruiting potential participants for the study (Recruitment materials are located in Appendix B). The organizations included an African American sorority listserv, a local African American education organization, and a national African American education organization. The letter of request identified the researcher, the purpose of the study, and included an email for the organization to send to its members along with the Research Information Sheet (see Appendix C). Participants responded directly to the researcher regarding their willingness to participate in the research study. The researcher corresponded with the respondents to determine whether they met the criteria for the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in advance of the interviews. Informed consent was discussed with each participant before proceeding with the interviews.

Six participants agreed to participate in individual interviews. Interviews were conducted separately with each participant using the Zoom conferencing platform. The interviews lasted for about 1 hour and were recorded using the recording tools available on the Zoom conferencing platform. An additional recording device was used as a secondary recording tool.

Instrument Design

The semi-structured interview protocol used in the study was drafted by the researcher and reviewed by university professors who gave feedback regarding needed revisions. The final semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix D) resulted in three opening questions and 11 content questions. The 11 content questions were provided in an open-ended format. The open-ended questions allowed the participants to use their own words to engage in a topical discussion (Yin, 2016). The open-ended questions were designed to capture the perceptions of African American female principals regarding challenges and opportunities as they sought and held administrative positions.

Instrument Validation (and Reliability)

In qualitative research it is important to establish the validity and reliability of the instrument being used in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure the validity and reliability of the semi-structured interview protocol, two processes were used: expert review with Virginia

Tech professors and sample interviews with participants. The researcher developed a draft of the questions to align with the two research questions (see Table 1).

Table 1

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol Questions Aligned to Research Question 1 and 2

Research question	Semi-structured interview protocol questions
1. What are the perceptions of African American female principals regarding the opportunities and challenges they faced when seeking an administrative position?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who or what inspired you to become a principal? • What were the educational program requirements necessary for you to become a principal? • What educational experiences and skills do you feel were required for you to become a principal? • Who or what do you feel was most helpful in your obtaining a principalship? • What challenges, if any, did you face in obtaining a principalship? • What challenges, if any, were unique to being an African American female in obtaining a principalship • When you compare your experiences to your peers, do you feel there were differences in your experience?
2. What are the perceptions of African American female principals regarding the challenges and opportunities they face in the principalship?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you perceive as unique challenges and opportunities in serving as an African American female principal? • What do you do when presented with these challenges or opportunities? • When you consider the experiences of your peers in the principalship, do you feel you have experienced the same challenges and opportunities?

Drafts of the questions were submitted to university professors for review and final approval. Once final approval was obtained, the semi-structured interview protocol was developed (see Appendix D).

Two practice interviews were set-up with respondents from the email requests. These two participants were notified that they would be used for sample interviews. Based on these interviews, questions on the semi-structured interview protocol were further refined to ensure the

questions were clear and solicited the data being sought for the research study. Additionally, Virginia Tech professors read the research methods, de-identified (for confidentiality) data collection, analysis, and findings and provided feedback.

To ensure the credibility of the study's findings, the researcher collected and triangulated data from multiple sources to portray an accurate picture of the challenges and opportunities African American female principals experience as they seek and hold administrative positions. Interviews were conducted with six participants at different school levels and socioeconomic levels to produce credible findings. The themes reported in the study were based on the responses from at least three of the participants from the study. Member checking was conducted as an opportunity was provided for participants to read the transcripts and respond to any errors.

Data Treatment

A data organization plan was necessary for proper data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A password-protected laptop was used to maintain all files, including the dissertation and any digital files. Any other documentation, such as transcripts, emails, and notes, was maintained in a separate location. The researcher and dissertation co-chairpersons had access to the data. The names of all participants and organizations were represented by pseudonyms. A key was developed for the original names of participants and organizations along with the corresponding pseudonyms. This key was maintained in a password-protected area separate from the data. Deidentified data and transcriptions will be maintained for 3 years from the completion of the study. Recordings and identifiers will be destroyed as soon as no longer needed.

Data Management

Documentation for this case was critical to understanding the beliefs, experiences, and perspectives of the participants as they sought and held administrative positions. Interviews were conducted using the Zoom platform and a secondary recording was used. A note journal was kept by the researcher as the interviews were conducted. Interview recordings and transcripts were stored on a password-protected laptop. Any other documentation, such as emails, letters, and notes, was maintained on a password-protected laptop. The researcher and dissertation co-chairpersons had access to the data. Deidentified data and transcriptions will be maintained for 3

years from the completion of the study. Recordings and identifiers will be destroyed as soon as no longer needed.

Data Analysis Techniques

Once the interviews were conducted, the researcher read through the transcripts, noted specific details, and determined a sense of the interview. A memoing process was used to organize data into major ideas and themes. Codes and categories were used to develop descriptions, themes, and an interpretation of the information. Yin (2016) outlined the following attributes to comprehensively interpret the data collected: (a) completeness—an interpretation that has an identifiable beginning, middle, and end; (b) fairness—given the researcher’s interpretative belief, consider whether others with the same stance would draw the same interpretations; (c) empirical accuracy—ensure the interpretation fairly represents the data; (d) value-added—provide a new interpretation of the topic’s literature; and (e) credibility—present an interpretation of the information that peers in the field would critique or accept.

The data collected were analyzed to reveal the participants’ stories, a chronology of unfolding events and changing events or epiphanies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher used Ollerenshaw and Creswell’s method to collect stories that reflected the personal experiences of the African American female principals, retell their stories based on the narrative elements, and rewrite the stories in a chronological manner that included the setting or place of the participants’ own unique experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary

The purpose of Chapter III was to describe the methodology used to conduct this research study. A basic qualitative methodology was used to collect data on the perspectives of African American female principals regarding the challenges and opportunities they experienced when seeking and holding administrative positions in the K-12 public school setting. IRB processes and procedures were followed to obtain approval to conduct the research study.

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants for the study. Participants were solicited through three organizations. Individual interviews were conducted with the participants and informed consent was obtained in advance of the interviews. A total of eight participants agreed to participate in the study (two for sample interviews and six for content interviews). The

confidentiality of participants was protected as pseudonyms were used for participant names, school names, and any other identifying information.

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed by the researcher and reviewed by university professors, and changes were made to the protocol based on feedback to promote validity and reliability. Two sample interviews were also conducted with participants and further revisions were made to the protocol to promote validity and reliability.

Six content interviews were held with participants on the Zoom platform. A secondary device was used to record each interview. Transcripts, recordings, and pseudonym records were stored and will be destroyed when no longer needed. Deidentified data and transcripts will be kept on file and destroyed after 3 years.

The researcher analyzed the data collected to develop a picture of the participants' perspectives regarding the challenges and opportunities they experienced as they sought and held administrative positions. Thick descriptions and vignettes were developed to reveal the perspectives of the participants for the readers. Themes from the study were also identified and developed into findings and implications based on the data.

Chapter IV

Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the perceptions African American female principals hold regarding the challenges and opportunities they experienced when seeking and holding administrative positions in the K-12 public school setting. The researcher explored how the participants became principals and their experiences serving in the principalship. Ultimately, the results of this study help to expand the field of school leadership studies through the specific focus on the perceptions and experiences of African American female principals as they seek and hold administrative positions in K-12 public school settings.

The theoretical frameworks used for this study were an African American feminist epistemology and intersectionality. The African American feminist epistemology is rooted in the African American woman's standpoint (Collins, 2000; Jean-Marie, 2013; Peters, 2012). Intersectionality is used to examine the multiple aspects of a person's identity in informing their experiences (Curtis, 2017; Flores, 2018; Fuller et al., 2019; Peters, 2012; Reed, 2012). These frameworks helped illuminate the perspectives of African American women serving as school leaders as they seek and hold administrative positions in K-12 public school settings.

In this chapter, the context of the study is reviewed along with the school settings in which the participants worked. Next, the data collected from the interview questions based on the two research questions are presented:

1. What are the perceptions of African American female principals regarding the opportunities and challenges they faced when seeking an administrative position?
2. What are the perceptions of African American female principals regarding the challenges and opportunities they face in the principalship?

Participant Information

African American women currently serving as principals in K-12 public schools in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States were identified as potential participants for this study. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to select participants from a pool of potential respondents. From this purposeful sampling, 13 African American women emerged as possible participants. Of the 13 potential participants who responded to the email request, eight agreed to participate in the study. Two of the eight participants participated in sample interviews. The

remaining six participants participated in content interviews. The six participants for content interviews included two African American female high school principals, two African American female middle school principals, and two African American female elementary school principals. The participants’ professional experience in the principalship ranged from 4–10 years. Table 2 details the pseudonym for each participant and school and the number of years of experience each participant had served as a principal.

Table 2
Participant Information and Years of Experience (Total)

Participant	Name of school	Number of years of experience as a principal (Total)
Elementary School Principal 1 (ESP1)	Elementary School 1 (ES1)	10 years
Elementary School Principal 2 (ESP2)	Elementary School 2 (ES2)	4 years
Middle School Principal 1 (MSP1)	Middle School 1 (MS1)	8 years
Middle School Principal 2 (MSP2)	Middle School 2 (MS2)	6 years
High School Principal 1 (HSP1)	High School 1 (HS1)	4 years
High School Principal 2 (HSP2)	High School 2 (HS2)	5 years

The student populations of the schools ranged from 586 to 2,644 students. Two of the six schools were designated as Title I schools. Students receiving free/reduced meals ranged from 3% to 82% of the school population at the schools where the principals served. Table 3 details the number of students at each school, Title I status, and the free/reduced meal percentages of the schools.

Table 3
Participants and School Information

Participant	Name of school	Number of students	Title I school Y or N	Free & reduced meals
EP1	ES1	613	Y	82%
EP2	ES2	586	N	40%
MSP1	MS1	1,413	Y	82%
MSP2	MS2	908	N	57%
HSP1	HS1	2,022	N	3%

HSP2	HS2	2,644	N	38%
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Results

The following section presents results of the study beginning with the research questions.

Research Question 1

What are the perceptions of African American female principals regarding the opportunities and challenges they faced when seeking an administrative position? To interpret the findings, it is important to understand why and how the participants became school principals. The researcher accomplished this by asking the participants to reflect on their experiences as they sought opportunities to become a school principal. The researcher engaged in a dialogue regarding participants' motivation to become a principal and the educational preparation and skills needed to become a principal. Additionally, the researcher asked the participants to discuss their perceptions of their experiences related to becoming a principal in comparison to those of their peers. The following data represent the responses from the participants for each interview question. The following are the results from each interview question.

Who or What Inspired You to Become a Principal?

The six participants in the study were inspired in a variety of ways to become a principal. Table 4 outlines who or what inspired the participants to become a principal.

Table 4

Who or What Inspired You to Become a Principal?

Theme	EP1	EP2	MSP1	MSP2	HSP1	HSP2
Administrator/Supervisor	X				X	
Mentor	X	X				
District-sponsored leadership cohort program		X		X		
Nest step in career			X			X
Family member			X			

Two of the six principals stated they were inspired by an administrator or supervisor with whom they worked. Though EP1 was inspired by a principal in a positive manner, whereas HSP1 stated a negative experience with an administrator inspired her to begin her journey toward a principalship. Of her positive experience, EP1 stated regarding her principal:

She was a huge inspiration to me as a principal. She was gracious to me as a learner and gave me a lot of autonomy to make decisions and I was her partner in the work . . . over the years, she developed me and let me grow.

Of her negative experience, HSP1 stated:

I just remember the day that I found myself thinking, how was it that she could sit in that role, and in my perspective, not do the work but still have the job. I would do the job if I were to have it, so that's what moved me into administration.

Being mentored by other administrators inspired two of the six principals in becoming principals. They felt their mentors were a source of knowledge and encouragement and provided opportunities for them to become school administrators. EP1 stated:

Another person who I would call my leadership fairy godmother was an African American female mentor . . . she is why I am a leader . . . I was interviewing to be an assistant principal and I was not successful. I applied to get into the district-sponsored professional development cohort for administrators, and I didn't get it. Then, my AP connected me with a mentor . . . I reached out to her . . . and, she took me by my hand, and she called me up and gave me the opportunity. She saw my potential, gifts that I had, and she was willing to nurture that . . . I got told no again and she was like hold on. Five minutes later, I kid you not, I got an email telling me I got into the professional development cohort for administrators . . . I tell you she made that thing happen.

EP2 said, "I had an extraordinary opportunity to be mentored by another African American female principal."

Two of the six principals indicated they were inspired to become a principal because they applied for and were selected to participate in a district professional development cohort for administrators. This opportunity enabled them to obtain their principal certification. Of this experience, EP2 stated, "So, my inspiration really came from an opportunity through a district-sponsored leadership development cohort for administrators." MSP2 was a member of a district-sponsored licensure cohort and became "interested in having a more school-wide impact."

Two of the six participants felt becoming a principal was a natural progression for their careers. They had served as teachers and assistant principals and felt the next natural step was to become a principal. MSP1 indicated “it was the next natural step” and said she had “a passion for leadership.” HSP2 stated, “It was a natural step by step part of my journey.” Though she never planned to be a principal, she moved from the classroom to counseling, and finally to the principalship.

One of the six participants indicated she came from a family of educators and education was a second career for her. Additionally, she stated she was inspired by an uncle who was a principal and told her she would be an educator and a principal. MSP1 stated:

I come from a family of educators and I resisted for so long . . . my uncle would always say, “you know you’re going to be an educator . . . you’re going to be a principal” and so that’s how I ended up going into education and I ended up loving it.

What Were the Educational Program Requirements Necessary For You to Become a Principal?

To become a principal of a public school, one must be licensed in school administration. Table 5 outlines the educational program requirements the participants felt were needed to become a principal.

Table 5
Educational Program Requirements to Become a Principal

Program requirement	EP1	EP2	MSP1	MSP2	HSP1	HSP2
District-sponsored licensure cohort				X	X	X
Master’s degree in school administration	X	X	X			

The six participants in the study were licensed and earned their licensure either through a district-sponsored licensure program or by earning a master’s degree in school administration from a university. Three of the principals in the study earned a master’s degree in school administration. EP1 stated, “I have my master’s degree in school administration.” EP2 stated, “I had to get my administrative endorsement in school administration, and I got it at through a local university program.” MSP1 stated, “I went through a local university’s educational leadership

program and that program met the licensure requirements. If you finished two additional courses, you could earn a master’s degree in educational leadership.”

The remaining three principals earned their licensure through a district-sponsored licensure cohort. Of this experience, MSP2 stated, “The district-sponsored licensure cohort was the equivalent of a master’s and had all of the steps to get the administrator’s license for the state requirement.” HSP1 stated:

I was actually taking classes at a university and the county started the licensure cohort . . . the county had a number of programs and the certification cohort was like the crown jewel and it satisfied all of the state requirements for licensure.

HSP2 stated:

I went through the district-sponsored licensure program and we were the first cohort . . . It gave me an opportunity to get that concentrated training in a year. It was free and had everything I needed to accelerate the process. The district-sponsored licensure program was one of the most impactful professional development opportunities in my career.

What Educational Experiences Do You Feel Were Required For You to Become a Principal?

To become a principal, certain educational experiences are required. Internships may be a required component to obtain a license in school administration. Though an internship was required for the district-sponsored licensure cohort and for the master’s degree in school administration, four of the principals did not mention these experiences. Table 6 outlines the educational experiences the principals felt were required to become a principal.

Table 6

Educational Experiences Required to Become a Principal

Educational experiences	EP1	EP2	MSP1	MSP2	HSP1	HSP2
District-sponsored licensure cohort internship	X			X		
University-sponsored internship	X					
District-sponsored professional development cohort for APs				X		
Teaching experience			X			X

Two of the principals talked about their internship experiences with the district-sponsored licensure cohort, one of which also commented on her university-sponsored internship. EP1 stated:

The university's master's program required an internship. I was a summer school, AP intern. I worked on the operational pieces, logistics with transportation, student placements, mailings and hiring . . . The district-sponsored leadership development cohort was for one full school year. I learned testing, safety and security procedures, discipline, teacher observation processes, and I did it alongside the principal.

Regarding the district-sponsored licensure cohort, MSP1 said, "We had internship hours, so we worked for a summer and then did some additional hours over time."

One of the participants indicated that to apply for a principalship, she was required to complete a district-sponsored professional development program for assistant principals. She stated:

It was an excellent experience for me to complete the district-sponsored professional development program for assistant principals because it really forced me to reflect on where my leadership gaps were. Once I did it, I was able to see where I needed more experience, and I was able to ask for opportunities from my principals or from central office leadership.

Two of the six principals commented on the importance of having teaching experience to become a principal. MSP1 stated, "You must have a teaching license in order to move into an assistant principalship." HSP2 stated, "I feel that you need to be a classroom teacher to be an effective school level principal. The skills that you garner and the knowledge that you have about classroom instruction is foundational."

What Skills Do You Feel Were Required For You to Become a Principal?

The six participants spoke candidly about the skills they felt were required to become a principal. Table 7 outlines the skills the participants felt were required to become a principal.

Table 7*Skills Required to Become a Principal*

Skills	EP1	EP2	MSP1	MSP2	HSP1	HSP2
Good judgment	X					
Listening skills	X					
Communication skills		X				
Building relationships		X	X			
Instructional leadership		X	X			X
Exposure to different experiences/Perspectives		X	X		X	
Managing adults		X	X			X
Dedication to children	X	X				X

The participants outlined eight skills they felt were required to become a principal: good judgment, listening skills, communication skills, building relationships, instructional leadership, exposure to different experiences and perspectives, managing adults, and dedication to children. Good judgment and listening skills were mentioned by EP1, who commented:

You must have good judgment, listen for understanding and have the insight to really listen to people, hear what they are saying, read between the lines, look at what is actually happening and know what needs to be done. Sometimes there's not alignment between what is said and what needs to be done.

When asked what skills were required to be a principal, EP2 indicated, "Being a communicator, not just your verbal, but your nonverbal and written communication skills, are important."

Two of the six participants indicated building relationships was an important skill for principals. EP2 stated, "I think it is a skill to know how to engage with people." MSP1 stated, "Relationships are very important when it comes to students, staff, and families. You must find different ways of connecting."

Three of the six participants felt instructional leadership was a necessary skill for principals. Regarding instructional leadership skills, EP2 said, "I think the skill of knowing how to organize a school instructionally is important. I know what it looks and sound like and I've been able to model and communicate that and my school has responded." MSP1 said, "Being an

instructional leader is a top priority.” HSP2 stated, “My staff appreciates that I can talk instruction to the bone with any teacher, parent, stakeholder or the central office.”

Three of the six principals indicated exposure to different experiences and perspectives were skills needed to become a principal. EP2 explained that as a special area teacher, she was part of a new district initiative that provided her with exposure at the district level and with different types of leadership opportunities. EP2 said, “It was an opportunity for me to grow in my leadership because I was a part of those conversations and some of the presentations. I had to do a lot of meetings to grow the program.” MSP1 spoke to the importance of working with diverse school populations and having different school experiences. She stated:

Now, most schools are very diverse, so you must know how to handle diverse populations. I feel that principals these days must have a broad range of experiences and while you may not use every aspect of that tool or toolkit all of the time, you are using different aspects of it at different times.

HSP1 explained that “you grow and develop when you can see multiple perspectives.” She felt having an administrative experience at more than one school prepared her for the principalship.

HSP1 stated:

First, I thought people were placating me by saying you need a different experience, but within 1 week of being at another high school, I got it. I recognized and understood the need to be able to understand and relate and move within different cultures and to be able to learn different lessons based upon the school.

The ability to manage adults was cited as an essential skill by three of the six participants. The participants indicated it was important to know how to handle upset adults, manage conflicts, and engage in difficult conversations. EP2 stated:

It’s a skill to be able to deal with people when they are upset, emotional or going through something. It is a skill to be able to engage with them and still try to get the best you can out of them so they can be impactful.

MSP1 spoke to the importance of being able to manage conflict: “You must know how to skillfully manage conflict so that the adults walk away from difficult situations feeling respected.” HSP2 explained that she had used her counseling skills to support students and staff members: “I’ve been more of a counselor in the last 2 years than I’ve been a principal. I have to

have difficult conversations, understand a person’s mindset and help them through coaching conversations.”

Three of the six participants identified the importance of being dedicated to the children they served. Having a commitment and heart for children and a student-centered focus were important to these participants. EP1 stated, “You must have an unwavering vision, which is dedicated to children.” EP2 said, “I have a heart to do good things for kids.” HSP2 indicated, “If you’re not clear on the line that you draw in the sand as a leader, where your passion lies and remaining student-centered, you can get taken off track.”

Who or What Was Most Helpful in Obtaining a Principalship?

The participants indicated a variety of factors as most helpful in becoming a principal, including prior work experience, job process, past and present supervisors, mentors, networking, family and friends, and faith. Table 8 outlines who or what they felt was most helpful in obtaining a principalship.

Table 8

Who or What Was Most Helpful in Obtaining a Principalship?

Most helpful in obtaining a principalship	EP1	EP2	MSP1	MSP2	HSP1	HSP2
Work experience			X			
Job process					X	
Past and present supervisors				X		X
Mentors	X	X	X			
Networking				X	X	X
Friends and family	X	X				
Faith		X				

MSP1 was strategic to ensure the school she applied for matched her passion for transforming and turning around schools and her prior administrative experience. MSP1 stated, “I got this position based on my previous experience at a high school.”

HSP1 felt that changes to the principal selection process were a benefit to her when she applied to become a principal. HSP1 said:

I think it was because the county leveled the playing field and it was no longer based on being tapped. There was a protocol in place. The plan was equal for everyone and it was no longer based upon certain people having favorites.

Two of the six participants stated past and present supervisors assisted them in obtaining their principalship. MSP2 said, “Principals I worked for and my superintendents were incredibly helpful. I would call and ask about certain schools and they helped me with fit and match.” Similarly, HSP1 shared that her principals and directors guided her. She added that her supervisors were also helpful in getting her appointed as principal. HSP1 said, “My supervisors were extremely supportive in helping me with both of my principalships.”

Three of the participants felt mentors were critical in helping them to become principals. EP1 stated, “A superintendent and two principals helped me down the path to the principalship.” EP2 reflected on being mentored and stated:

I have been greatly mentored since the moment I walked into this county and I stand on the shoulders of some good Black educational leaders. A principal took me under her wing and showed me the ropes and gave me feedback and encouragement.

MSP1 had two types of mentors. MSP1 said:

I have mentors that are close and mentors that I watched. There were principals who I watched and modeled myself after and there was a central office leader and I tried to get all the knowledge I could from her.

Three of the six principals cited networking as an important skill for a school principal. Each participant expressed the importance of networking to become a principal and how it continued to be an important part of their experience as a principal. MSP1 indicated she “works very hard at building professional relationships.” HSP1 stated, “I reconnected with a program director and was able to pick his brain and he has helped me to find ways to grow myself.” HSP2 stated, “You have to make those connections too and volunteer to do things at the central office level.”

Two of the six participants felt support from friends and family helped them in becoming a principal. They explained that friends and family provided them with support and encouragement. EP1 stated, “My friend and I were interns together and she got a principalship before me. She practiced with me and was my sounding board. My husband was my biggest cheerleader and supporter the whole way.” EP2 talked about the role of friends and family: “I

had teacher friends and specialists who were on this journey at the same time, and we inspired each other to go for opportunities and we encouraged each other.” EP2 also talked about support from her family: “My family is so supportive, and my husband has been tremendously supportive and encouraging and he has helped me study.” Additionally, EP2 commented on the importance of her faith in helping her to become a principal: “Most of it is that it was just my season and God just moved people and situations and parts into place so that it could just happen for me.”

What Challenges, if Any, Did You Face in Obtaining a Principalship?

The participants commented on whether they experienced any challenges in obtaining a principalship. Table 9 outlines the participants’ perceptions of the challenges they faced in obtaining a principalship. Though two of the six participants indicated they did not experience any challenges in obtaining a principalship, whereas the four remaining participants noted the following challenges: politics, gender, racism-stereotypes, and not being connected.

Table 9

Challenges in Obtaining a Principalship

Challenges	EP1	EP2	MSP1	MSP2	HSP1	HSP2
Politics	X					
Gender	X					
Racism-stereotypes					X	X
Not being connected		X				
No challenges in obtaining principalship			X	X		

EP1 stated politics and gender were challenges in her administrative journey. She explained that in one instance, references for her application were a barrier for her. EP1 said, “I received a not so stellar recommendation from someone, because I was friends with people who she felt were below my position and that I should not be friends with them . . . so it’s the politics.”

EP1 also commented on competing against male candidates. EP1 said, “It’s really hard to compete against a man because often, especially in an elementary school, they are starstruck by men because they don’t see them very often.”

HSP1 and HSP2 both commented on encountering challenges related to the perceptions of others and negative stereotypes about Black women. HSP1 stated, “The biggest one is other people’s perceptions about what they think they know about you.” HSP2 stated:

People automatically assume that we are not qualified or highly qualified. They do not see us as highly educated, or as leaders. They see us as being aggressive, intimidating, and angry when we assert our position, skill, knowledge, or ability.

EP2 stated she felt it was a challenge to know the right people when she was pursuing a principalship: “I would hear other people say that they knew this person or that person and that they were kind of a shoe in for the principalship.”

MSP1 and MSP2 did not feel they encountered challenges in obtaining a principalship. MSP1 stated, “I don’t think I’ve faced any challenges, but I feel like I’ve had to really, really work for it.” MSP2 stated:

It was the only school I applied for, and I was passionate about the position. The people I interviewed with were people I had worked with before, who knew the work I had done and the impact I had, so that helped.

What Challenges, if Any, Were Unique to Being an African American Female in Obtaining a Principalship?

Five of the six participants expressed that they faced challenges they felt were unique to being an African American woman in obtaining a principalship. Table 10 outlines the participants’ perceptions of the challenges unique to being an African American woman in obtaining a principalship. Like the challenges listed in Table 9, some participants believed they faced stereotypes and racism.

Table 10*Challenges Unique to Being an African American Female in Obtaining a Principalship*

Challenges unique to being an African American female	EP1	EP2	MSP1	MSP2	HSP1	HSP2
Stereotypes about African American women	X		X		X	
Racism						X
Providing diversity/Token		X				
No unique challenges in obtaining a principalship				X		

One participant felt being an African American woman worked to her favor in that she was a diverse interview candidate; however, it also created feelings of being a token or pawn. One participant did not feel she faced any challenges unique to being an African woman in obtaining a principalship.

EP1 felt a unique challenge facing African American women was stereotypes about African American women. EP1 stated:

There’s an unfortunate stereotypical expectation of women of color that we are angry Black women or that we are difficult to work with. I think sometimes these stereotypes that people have about women of color can sometimes jade how they hear you or how they perceive you. For example, in my internship I was treated unfairly and poorly and when I advocated for myself, it was like I was an angry Black woman.

HSP1 expressed that a unique challenge she experienced in obtaining a principalship as an African American woman was questioning her ability to be a principal. HSP1 stated, “I don’t know if people saw me in the principalship even though I had checked every box that the county had. I think if my packaging had looked different, I probably would have gotten a principalship a lot sooner.” MSP1 also indicated her abilities to lead were questioned as people asked, “Can she do it or is she prepared to do it.”

HSP2 indicated racism was a unique challenge to obtaining a principalship. She stated, “There are times when race keeps you from getting appointed to a principalship.”

EP2 indicated a unique challenge she faced was the benefit of being a diverse candidate and obtaining an interview; conversely, she felt it was a barrier because it made her feel like a pawn. EP2 stated:

You felt like it might have been a benefit because it sometimes got you an interview because they needed diversity. But, sometimes depending on who was around that table, you just didn't know if you were being heard or taken seriously. One interview, there was no diversity on the panel. Everyone on the panel had some type of relationship with the other candidate. Sometimes, you are at the table so that people can check the box. The people already know what they want, and it is not you. Being a Black woman, you sometimes feel like the barrier is that you are a pawn and that is not a good feeling.

One of the six participants indicated she did not “connect to there being any unique challenges to obtaining a principalship as an African American female.”

When You Compare Your Experiences to Your Peers, do You Feel There Were Any Differences in Your Experience in Obtaining a Principalship?

One of the six participants indicated she was unsure whether her experience in obtaining a principalship differed from that of her peers. The remaining five participants indicated they felt their experiences in obtaining a principalship were different in comparison to those of their peers. Table 11 outlines the participants' perceptions of differences in their obtaining a principalship in comparison to their peers.

Table 11
Same or Different Experiences in Comparison to Peers

Experiences in comparison to peers	EP1	EP2	MSP1	MSP2	HSP1	HSP2
Same experience as peers						
Different experience than peers	X	X		X	X	X
Unsure			X			

EP1 believed her experience was different from that of her peers. She felt some of her peers had an advantage and obtained a principalship more easily. She stated, “For other friends and assistant principals, getting a principalship was a lot easier. They got there with fewer interviews, less experiences than me and they moved forward quickly, where it took me longer.”

EP2 indicated she believed her experience was different from that of some peers. She felt it depended on the personality of the candidate or who they knew. She stated, “For some people it was because of who they knew and some because they had a really gregarious personality.”

Though MSP2 agreed that her experience was different in comparison to that of her peers, she attributed this to applying for only one school and securing the principalship at that school. MSP2 stated, “In the sense that I got the one I applied for. I know that has not been the experience for a lot of my colleagues.”

MSP1 said she was unsure whether her experience was different in comparison to her peers. She found it difficult to compare her experience to external hires and because her district was small in size. She felt she could only “speak for the growth that she had to do and the road she had to travel” to the principalship.

HSP1 felt her experience in obtaining a principalship was different than that of her peers. She expressed that some of her peers were “being groomed” and an African American AP told her, “they hire us, but they grow them.”

HSP2 stated she felt her experience was different from her peers. She stated that when she was applying for the principalship, “the good old boy network was alive and thriving and that they all knew each other and supported each other.”

Research Question 1 Summary

The participants provided a variety of perspectives regarding seeking a principalship. The participants were inspired by a variety of factors to become a principal, including (a) other administrators/supervisors, (b) mentors, (c) district leadership development cohort, (d) next step in their career, and (e) family. All participants agreed that a license was a program requirement to become a principal and they achieved this through a district-sponsored license development cohort program or by obtaining a master’s degree in school administration.

The participants explained that various experiences were needed to become a principal, including (a) district-sponsored licensure cohort, (b) university-sponsored internship, (c) professional development cohort for APs, and (d) teaching experience. Additionally, they outlined the skills they felt were required to become a principal: (a) good judgment, (b) listening skills, (c) communication skills, (d) building relationships, (e) instructional leadership, (f) exposure to different experiences/perspectives, (g) managing adults, and (h) dedication to

children. The principals explained that their work experience, hiring processes, past and present supervisors, mentors, networking, friends and family, and their faith were most helpful in obtaining a principalship.

As for challenges, the participants indicated politics, gender, racism, negative stereotypes of Black women, and not being connected were challenges to obtaining a principalship. Some participants felt they had no challenges in obtaining a principalship. When asked about the challenges unique to being an African American woman and obtaining a principalship, participants indicated stereotypes, providing diversity/tokenism, and racism were unique challenges they faced as African American women. Some participants felt there were no unique challenges for them as African American women in obtaining a principalship. In comparison to their peers, most participants felt their experiences were different and the differences created barriers to them obtaining a principalship.

Research Question 2

What are the perceptions of African American female principals regarding the challenges and opportunities they face in the principalship? To interpret the findings, it is important to understand the participants' perceptions regarding the unique challenges and opportunities related to serving as an African American female principal and what they did when they were presented with these challenges and opportunities. Additionally, the researcher sought to understand whether the participants felt they experienced the same challenges and opportunities as their peers. The researcher accomplished this by asking the participants to reflect on the unique challenges and opportunities related to serving as an African American female principal and how they reacted to those challenges and opportunities. Additionally, the researcher asked participants to reflect on the experiences of their peers and whether they felt they experienced the same challenges and opportunities. The following is an analysis of the data regarding Research Question 2.

What do You Perceive as Unique Challenges in Serving as an African American Female Principal?

The participants believed there were several challenges that were unique to serving as African American female principals, including unrealistic expectations for their performance,

that their work was not acknowledged, stereotypes about Black women, they had to be intentional about equity and being inclusive of all students and staff, they were unable to be their authentic self, and there was an impatience with the change that needed to occur. Table 12 outlines the perceptions of the unique challenges related to serving as an African American female principal.

Table 12

Unique Challenges Serving as an African American Female Principal

Challenges	EP1	EP2	MSP1	MSP2	HSP1	HSP2
Intentional about equity and inclusion for staff & students			X			X
Unrealistic expectations for performance	X					
Not acknowledged for their work	X				X	
Stereotypes about African American women			X		X	X
Being authentic self		X				
Impatience				X		

EP1 felt she was expected to “fix things that are broken differently, faster and quicker.”

Three of the six participants expressed that they were not acknowledged for their work.

EP1 stated:

Your successes are not acknowledged. When I was reassigned to this school, nobody ever sat me down and said, “The reason we want you to do this is because of your body of work. We are confident you’re going to be able to move this school forward.” Nobody had that conversation with me.

HSP1 felt her work went unrecognized: “There is frustration when no one is recognizing or remembering the work you have done for example to revamp departments and take them to the next level.”

Two of the six participants indicated it was a unique challenge for African American female principals to face stereotypes. MSP1 indicated that as an African American woman, she needed to ensure she was equitable and inclusive of everyone she serves. She stated, “I must

always be mindful of ensuring that I am equitable in reaching everyone. I make it a point to let everyone know that I'm here to serve everyone." HSP1 stated, "The biggest challenge for me is having to deal with people's misconceptions and beliefs based on who I am, the package that I am." Similarly, HSP2 stated:

One of the challenges that I struggled with early on was establishing who I was with my staff and school and helping them understand that I'm for all students. Just because I am a woman of color it does not mean I only care about kids of color and teachers of color.

One of the six participants expressed, "You must be very careful about what you say and that you cannot always communicate your full truth." She stated:

You can't always say things with the same levity that other people do. People in my circle will say, "You know we can't talk like that." I don't think people really understand how Black women think and our why. You constantly have to explain or give people a sense of reference. You make decisions based on your experiences, the things that you value, the things that make you concerned or afraid, the things that are happening in this world or because of racism.

One of the six participants struggled with feelings of impatience. She described her impatience with "doing things the way that we have always done them and not recognizing the inequities in the processes we have in place."

What do You Perceive as Unique Opportunities in Serving as an African American Female Principal?

The participants felt there were unique opportunities related to serving as an African female principal. Table 13 outlines the perceptions of the participants as they reflected on the unique opportunities related to serving as an African American female principal. They shared that there were opportunities to influence student achievement through their leadership, to create understanding around stereotypes, to be a representative and role model, to assist the school, to and advocate for the needs of their students and school.

Table 13*Unique Opportunities Serving as an African American Female Principal*

Opportunities	EP1	EP2	MSP1	MSP2	HSP1	HSP2
Student achievement	X					
Representation		X				X
Create understanding					X	X
Assist the school			X			
Advocacy				X	X	

One of the six participants shared the impact she had on student achievement. EP1 spoke to student achievement as she “took a school that was status quo and pushed it to do better.”

EP2 reflected on the importance of the representation of African American women in leadership roles. EP2 stated, “It is an opportunity that I get to represent and show African American kiddos and others that someone like them can do this work.” HSP2 spoke to representation and how her experiences as an African American influenced her work. HSP2 stated:

It is an opportunity to represent and be an example for all my students and their families. It provides me with an opportunity to speak from a place of experience to challenge my staff to look at equitable outcomes and access for students in their classroom. I get to talk from a place of being that kid who had those experiences and a teacher of color trying to give those experiences to all kids too.

HSP1 and HSP2 expressed the importance of helping people to expand their understanding of an African American female leader. HSP1 stated, “It’s been a lot of giving people space to learn. I am still helping people to learn and expand their understanding.” Similarly, HSP2 indicated it was important to “give people opportunities to understand who I am and to give personal time with me so they can see that I am who I say I am.”

One of the six participants expressed that her school benefited from the partnerships formed with African American organizations and community groups. She felt the school benefitted because “a lot of Black sororities and fraternities reach out in a variety of ways to be a part of our school and provide service to our school.”

One of the six participants shared that a unique opportunity as an African American female principal was to serve as an advocate. MSP2 stated, “An important role is to be an

advocate who serves as a link between the principal and the community, the principal and the board and the principal and the leadership team.” HSP1 also felt a responsibility to “use her voice to bring the work to the county level.” HSP1 further stated: “I feel like it’s my responsibility and moral imperative to bring innovations to the conversations and push within conversations to not just say okay or take no for an answer.”

What do You do When Presented With Challenges?

Each participant answered in different ways when asked how they responded when presented with challenges. Table 14 outlines how the participants responded when presented with challenges. When presented with challenges, participants felt they became problem-solvers, had to decide whether to take on the challenge, maintained awareness, became vocal, created understanding, or collaborated with others to problem solve.

Table 14

When Presented With Challenges

Challenges	EP1	EP2	MSP1	MSP2	HSP1	HSP2
Problem-solver	X					
Decide whether to take on the challenge		X				
Maintain awareness			X			
Become vocal				X		
Create understanding					X	
Collaboration						X

EP1 said she loved a challenge and was a problem-solver. She stated she immediately thought, “How can we solve this?” EP2 felt she had to decide whether to take the challenge on or not. She said, “Sometimes I fold, you know, and sometimes you are able to rise to that challenge.” MSP1 talked about the importance of being aware of the challenge of equity and inclusion: “I’m always consciously aware of making sure that I am meeting the needs of everyone in conversations and interactions.” MSP2 expressed that she “has become pretty vocal and has earned street credibility to try new things.” HSP1 believed “it’s challenging the stereotypes that people have about African American female leaders.” HSP1 stated she “has to be mindful of ego and check myself when there are times when I feel the hackles rise and I have

to ask myself is it my ego or something that I really need to address.” HSP2 said her “best strength is working with others collaboratively to solve challenges and get other people’s input.”

What do You do When Presented With Opportunities?

When presented with opportunities, participants felt they took advantage of them to create opportunities for their students, provided representation, created understanding, and used their voice to advocate. Table 15 outlines how the participants responded when presented with opportunities.

Table 15

When Presented With Opportunities

Opportunities	EP1	EP2	MSP1	MSP2	HSP1	HSP2
Take advantage of opportunities	X	X	X	X	X	
Representation		X				
Advocacy		X				X

Four of the six principals took advantage of opportunities to create opportunities for their students. EP1 stated, “We became a Blue-Ribbon School; I opened a center and supervised an addition to the facility.” EP2 emphasized the importance of building relationships “so that they can help my school and it can be an exchange.” MSP1 spoke to how she took advantage of opportunities and how the assistance from different organizations “has benefited the children at her school.” MSP2 felt she held herself to a higher standard for hiring a diverse staff because she “served a population of Black and Brown students and free and reduced lunch population.” MSP2 stated she “walked into a really great situation and I’ve tried to continue that because I feel like I have a responsibility to, and I’ve hired an administrative team that feels the same way.” HSP1 said she took advantage of the opportunity to challenge traditions when she first arrived at her school:

When I was told, “we’ve always done this practice this way since the building opened in 1965,” I challenged them by saying, “This practice will be revisited as I am not sure what other practices are still being employed from 1965.” I had to think of a different way to address this so I asked them to think about it in terms of medicine and if a doctor were to

say to you, “Well, we’ve treated cancer this way since 1965 would that be okay with you?”

EP2 emphasized the importance of representation as an African American female principal. She said, “I really take a lot of pride in being a Black principal who represents her community and is a voice and advocate for the community.”

HSP2 reflected again on advocacy. She felt it was important “to use my voice to bring the work county level, remember all students and to innovate.”

When You Consider the Experiences of Your Peers in the Principalship, do You Feel You Have Experienced the Same Challenges and Opportunities?

Five of the six participants did perceive that the challenges and opportunities they faced were different from those faced by their peers. Table 16 outlines the participants’ perceptions of their challenges and opportunities in comparison to their peers. One of the six participants was unsure and felt it depended on the peer. None of the six participants felt they experienced the same challenges and opportunities as their peers.

Table 16

Same Challenges and Opportunities Compared to Peers

Experiences in comparison to peers	EP1	EP2	MSP1	MSP2	HSP1	HSP2
Same opportunities and challenges as peers						
Different opportunities and challenges as peers	X		X	X	X	X
Unsure		X				

EP1 felt “very few of my peers have my experience” as very few of her peers were reassigned to a school. EP2 stated it was very individual. She went on to say, “Some people have opportunities because they are constantly pursuing opportunities.” MSP1 stated her peers had very different experiences:

The perception is that a school that is White is better than a school that is largely minority like mine even though we outperform them. There are different perks offered to the

principal. It's very different economically and they advocate differently for the school and it's different how they talk about the principal.

MSP2 spoke about how some principals were selected to present to their peers at leadership meetings and she wondered how they were selected and why she did not have the same opportunity. MSP2 stated, "I always wondered; how did those people get selected to present?" HSP1 expressed that her opportunities and challenges were not the same as her peers. HSP1 stated: "They were either tapped or they leave the schools that we can have and so that is a challenge." HSP2 agreed that the challenges "do not look the same and they never will." HSP2 further stated, "You have to accept the reality and accept the fact that reality may never change while saying we are going to be different."

Research Question 2 Summary

The participants provided a variety of perspectives regarding serving as an African American female principal. When asked what the unique challenges were in serving as an African American female principal, participants responded by discussing unrealistic expectations for performance, a lack of acknowledgement for their work, stereotypes about African American women, being their authentic self, and impatience. The participants also shared their perspectives on the unique opportunities related to serving as an African American female principal. They felt student achievement was influenced by their leadership, creating understanding for others, providing representation, supporting the school, and advocacy were unique opportunities for African American female principals.

When presented with challenges, the participants stated they problem-solved, decided whether to take on the challenge, maintained awareness, became vocal, created understanding, and collaborated. All participants felt they took advantage of opportunities as they emerged, and some indicated they felt it was an opportunity to provide representation and advocacy for their students and school community.

The participants were asked to reflect on whether they felt their opportunities and challenges in serving as an African American female principal were the same as those of their peers. Most of the participants indicated they felt their opportunities and challenges were different from their peers with one participant being unsure.

Summary

The African American female principals in this study all had a strong commitment to the schools and communities they served. Their reflections provided intimate knowledge of an African American female principal's challenges and opportunities when seeking an administrative position and experiences while serving as a principal. The participants were engaged, caring, passionate, serious, and optimistic about their leadership for their schools and representation of their communities. The participants demonstrated a profound understanding of the complex issues related to school leadership for African American female principals.

The data presented in Chapter 4 provided a foundation for understanding the challenges and opportunities of African American female principals as they sought a principalship and served as school principals. The experiences reflected in the interviews showcased participants' perspectives and beliefs regarding the challenges and opportunities in seeking and serving as an African American female principal. Results demonstrate that these individuals were committed to the process required to become a principal, willing to take advantage of the opportunities, and were resilient when facing the challenges related to serving as an African American female principal. These participants understood the social, political, and economic impacts of their service as African American female principals on the students, schools, and communities they served.

Chapter V

Findings, Implications, and Future Research

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the perceptions African American female principals hold regarding the challenges and opportunities they experienced when seeking and holding administrative positions in the K-12 public school setting. The data also reflect how the participants became principals and their experiences in the principalship. The semi-structured interview protocol is listed in Table 17.

Table 17

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol Questions Aligned to Research Question 1 and 2

Research question	Semi-structured interview protocol questions
1. What are the perceptions of African American female principals regarding the opportunities and challenges they faced when seeking an administrative position?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who or what inspired you to become a principal?• What were the educational program requirements necessary for you to become a principal?• What educational experiences and skills do you feel were required for you to become a principal?• Who or what do you feel was most helpful in your obtaining a principalship?• What challenges, if any, did you face in obtaining a principalship?• What challenges, if any, were unique to being an African American female in obtaining a principalship?• When you compare your experiences to your peers, do you feel there were differences in your experience?
2. What are the perceptions of African American female principals regarding the challenges and opportunities they face in the principalship?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do you perceive as unique challenges and opportunities in serving as an African American female principal?• What do you do when presented with these challenges or opportunities?• When you consider the experiences of your peers in the principalship, do you feel you have experienced the same challenges and opportunities?

Summary of Findings

The six principals who took part in this study served in elementary, middle, and high schools located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. They had a range of experience

serving as a school principal from 4 to 10 years. The participants served in a variety of schools with both diverse and homogenous student populations.

The six participants demonstrated their commitment to becoming a principal as they underwent additional certification requirements, graduate-level coursework, and internships. They sought and took advantage of mentorships, networked, and gained administrative experience to obtain their principalship. As principals, they had worked and continued to work through challenges and took advantage of opportunities to provide representation as African American female leaders and to advocate for the communities they served.

Discussion of Findings

After reviewing the responses and themes that emerged from the analyzed data, a number of findings were identified. The findings are presented and discussed in this section.

Finding 1

The participants were inspired in a variety of ways to become a principal. When asked who or what inspired them to become a principal, the six participants responded in a variety of ways with some participants providing more than one answer (see Table 4). Two of the six participants (EP1 and HSP1) indicated they were inspired by another administrator or supervisor. Two of the six participants (EP1 and EP2) stated they were inspired by a mentor. Two of the six participants (EP2 and MSP2) were members of a district-sponsored leadership development cohort and were inspired to become principals as they participated in leadership development courses. Two of the six participants (MSP1 and HSP2) indicated becoming a principal was the next natural step in their career. One of the six participants (MSP1) said she came from a family of educators and had an uncle who was a principal and these family connections inspired her to seek the principalship.

EP1 and HSP1 were inspired by an administrator/supervisor, which is a long-standing tradition within the African American community. By the mid-20th century, African American teachers and principals served as community role models and were highly respected as leaders by community members (Henig et al., 1999). It is not unusual that EP1 and EP2 were inspired by a mentor. According to Bailes and Guthery (2020), women's leadership styles are "empirically associated with school improvement including collaboration, relationship-building and effective

mentoring of emerging educators” (p. 3; see also Robinson et al., 2017; Urick & Bowers, 2014). EP2 and MSP2’s inspiration for becoming principals is an example of how women usually prepare for the principalship, which is through education and instructional experiences (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). MSP1 and HSP2’s career progressions almost followed the normal path for women, from teacher to principalship (Robinson et al., 2017; Vail, 1999); however, women most often become elementary principals. MSP1 and HSP2 became principals of secondary schools. MSP1’s inspiration is typical for many African American women who state that their personal connections with family, cultural influences, and their spirituality influence who they are as leaders as well as prepares them early for leadership (Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015).

Finding 2

The participants indicated there were educational program requirements to become a principal. When asked about the educational program requirements required to become a principal, all six participants indicated they had to complete coursework to obtain their licensure (see Table 5). Three of the six participants (MSP2, HSP1, and HSP2) completed a district-sponsored professional development licensure cohort, whereas the remaining three participants (EP1, EP2, and MSP1) completed a master’s degree program at a local university to obtain their school administration license.

As stated by Grissom, Mitani, and Blissett (2017), states’ principal licensure systems serve as a major means of guaranteeing a certain level of leadership quality by identifying minimal requirements for new school leaders. As indicated by the six participants, state systems require prospective school administrators to complete a state-approved school administration preparation program, earn a master’s degree in educational leadership or a related field of study, and have 3–5 years of teaching experience (Grissom, Mitani, & Blissett, 2017).

Finding 3

The participants indicated they felt instructional leadership, exposure to different experiences/perspectives, managing adults and dedication to children were skills required to become a principal. When asked what skills they felt were required for them to become a principal, at least three of the participants listed the importance of instructional leadership, exposure to different experiences/perspectives, managing adults and dedication to children (see

Table 7). Three of the six participants (EP2, MSP1, and HSP2) indicated instructional leadership as a skill required to become a principal. Three of the six participants (EP2, MSP1, and HSP1) stated exposure to different experiences and perspectives was a requirement to become a principal. Three of the six participants (EP2, MSP1, and HSP2) felt managing adults was a critical skill for principals. Three of the six participants (EP1, EP2, and HSP2) explained the importance of having a dedication to children as a required skill for becoming a principal.

The Wallace Foundation (2011) indicated principals today are expected to be instructional leaders and change agents who ensure all students perform at high levels. Principals are challenged to move beyond school management to become instructional leaders who can develop a school organization that provides high-quality instruction (The Wallace Foundation, 2011). Furthermore, the Wallace Foundation outlined five key principal responsibilities, one of which was working effectively with people. Researchers are also investigating the ability and capacity of educational leaders to lead and manage diversity in schools and school communities (Horsford, 2012). Swiftly changing demographics of the U.S. population have resulted in a culturally and linguistically diverse student body requiring a change in the practices of school leaders (Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014). Several researchers highlighted an ethics of care or othermothering within the leadership of African American women (Aaron, 2020; Bass, 2012; Dillard, 1995; Lumby & Azaola, 2014; Nelson et al., 2016; Sakho-Lewis, 2017), which ties to the requirement of dedication to children noted by EP1, EP2, and HSP2. Bass (2012) further indicated that though some traditional leadership theories may not support caring as a leadership characteristic, her study showed caring was a powerful and effective force for positive change and one to which children and adolescents respond positively.

Finding 4

The participants stated a mentor or networking were helpful in obtaining a principalship. When asked who or what they felt was most helpful in obtaining a principalship, three of the six participants indicated it was having a mentor (EP1, EP2, MSP1) and the other three (MSP2, HSP1, HSP2) stated it was networking (see Table 8).

Mentoring is mentioned in the literature and is critical to advancement into leadership roles. Researchers indicated the shortage of African American principals has direct ties to several issues, including shortages of African American teachers, a lack of mentoring of African

American teachers for leadership positions, a lack of recruitment and retention of African Americans into preparation programs for leadership, and a lack of preparation and appointment of African American leaders (M. D. Anderson, 2016; Foster, 2004). Mentoring and networking are critical to successful leadership (Robinson, 2014).

Finding 5

The participants indicated stereotypes about African American women were a challenge unique to African American women in obtaining a principalship. When asked what challenges, if any, were unique to African American women in obtaining a principalship, three of the six participants (EP1, MSP1, HSP1) cited stereotypes about African American women as challenges (see Table 10).

African American women do what they can to be perceived as professional women who are unthreatening, safe, and adaptable (Byung, 2015; Holmes, 2015). Several studies have documented that,

stereotypes, stereotype threat, overt discrimination and more covert cases of discrimination, such as exposure to daily microaggressions, can make the road to leadership fraught with potholes, pitfalls, and impediments for women and individuals possessing non-dominant identities or multiple minority statuses. (Chase & Martin, 2021, p. 2; see also Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Martin, 2018; Rodela et al., 2019)

Finding 6

Five of the six participants expressed that they perceived their experience was different from that of their peers in obtaining a principalship (see Table 11). EP1, EP2, HSP1, and HSP2 felt it was easier for their peers to obtain a principalship and that they were provided with more support. MSP2 felt her experience was different from that of her peers because she only applied for one school and obtained the principalship there.

Research indicates the principalship continues to be more accessible to White men and White women (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; K. M. Brown, 2011; Burton & Weiner, 2016; Flores, 2018; Robinson et al., 2017). The continued historical sponsorship of White men for the principalship has come at the expense of women, particularly African American women, and also prevents some students from maximizing educational opportunity (Bailes & Guthery, 2020;

Bartanen & Grissom, 2019; K. M. Brown, 2011; Grissom, Rodriguez, & Kern; 2017; Lomotey, 2019). African American women usually wait longer to receive a promotion to an assistant principal position and once they are there, they wait longer for a promotion to become a principal (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Jean-Marie, 2013; Reed, 2012).

Finding 7

The participants perceived that stereotypes about African American women were a challenge unique to serving as an African American female principal. When asked what they perceived as unique challenges in serving as an African American female principal, three of the six participants (MSP1, HSP1, HSP2) felt stereotypes about African American women were a unique challenge for African American female principals (see Table 12).

According to Chase and Martin (2021), though there has been progress, women in leadership positions must think about how they are perceived based on their gender, race, ethnicity, and stereotypes based on class. Despite K-12 education being a predominantly female profession, leadership continues to be dominated by men and, similar to the views expressed by MSP1, HSP1, and HSP2, women in leadership must work to disprove negative beliefs about their capabilities (Mendez-Morse et al., 2015).

Finding 8

The participants agreed that they took advantage of opportunities when presented. When asked what they did when presented with opportunities, five of the six participants (EP1, EP2, MSP1, MSP2, HSP1) stated they took advantage of opportunities to provide leadership, provide representation, provide for the needs of students, advocate for students and the community, and create better understanding (see Table 15).

EP1, EP2, MSP1, MSP2, and HSP1 indicated they took advantage of opportunities to serve their students and community. Their beliefs are reflected in how effective leaders use their power as principals to promote safe, effective learning environments for students and use their leadership to influence the interpretation and administration of school policies in a manner that best serves their students and communities (Bass, 2012).

Finding 9

The participants agreed that they experienced different opportunities and challenges as an African American female principal in comparison to their peers. When asked if they felt they experienced the same challenges and opportunities in the principalship as their peers, five of the six participants (EP1, MSP1, MSP2, HSP1, HSP2) said they felt they had different opportunities and challenges in comparison to their peers (see Table 16). These participants perceived that in comparison to their peers, they were not given leadership opportunities, they were assigned to more challenging schools, and there were negative perceptions of them and their schools.

Researchers have identified the challenges African American female leaders experience in comparison to others in leadership roles. Horsford (2012) referenced African American female principals as clean up women who are often assigned to schools with majority African American students, high levels of poverty, and a lack of resources (Peters, 2012). Race and gender discrimination continue to exist in school leadership (Burton et al., 2020; Jean-Marie et al., 2016; Muñoz et al., 2014; Shakeshaft, 1989). Though African American women have moved into leadership positions in the professional arena, to include education, many still deal with the double jeopardy of being African American and female (Chase & Martin, 2021; D. R. Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Essed, 1991; Fuller et al., 2019; Jean-Marie, 2013). The double jeopardy hypothesis indicates that when race converges with gender, a double standard dichotomy emerges for African American women (Curtis, 2017; Fuller et al., 2019). This dichotomy reduces access to leadership positions and generates some ambivalence toward their ability to lead (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Chase & Martin, 2021; D. R. Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Fuller et al., 2019; Jean-Marie, 2013; Peters, 2012).

Summary

Findings from this study show African American female principals have a variety perspectives in seeking the principalship and as they serve as principals in K-12 public school settings. African American women are inspired in a variety of ways to seek the principalship. The participants indicated they were inspired by other administrators or supervisors, mentors, a licensure cohort program, the natural progression of their career, or being from a family of educators. All participants agreed that there were educational program and licensure requirements to become a principal. Some met these requirements by completing a master's

degree in school administration, whereas others completed a district-sponsored licensure cohort. In addition to these requirements, some participants felt instructional leadership, exposure to different experiences and perspectives, and dedication to children were required skills to become a principal. Some participants indicated a mentorship or networking were most helpful in obtaining their principalship. Stereotypes about African American women were considered a unique challenge for African American women in obtaining a principalship. Some of the participants felt their experiences were different from those of their peers in obtaining a principalship.

In serving as principals, the participants felt the stereotypes held by others were a unique challenge for African American female principals. When presented with opportunities, participants indicated they took advantage of them. Participants perceived that they experienced different opportunities and challenges in comparison to their peers.

Implications for Practice

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the perceptions African American female principals hold regarding the challenges and opportunities they experienced when seeking and holding administrative positions in the K-12 public school setting. Based on the findings of this study, there are two primary implications for discussion related to the current literature and future leadership studies: (a) increasing opportunity and access for African American women as they seek administrative positions, and (b) improving the experiences of African American women as they serve as principals.

Implication 1

School district leaders can encourage African American women to pursue the principalship through effective relationships with other administrators and supervisors, mentorships, and district-sponsored leadership programs. This implication is associated with Finding 1. The participants were inspired in a variety of ways to become a principal. Relationships with their direct supervisors and mentorships were cited as sources of inspiration. District-sponsored leadership programs are avenues that can support African American female principals in completing the requirements necessary to become principals and build leadership capacity.

Implication 2

School district leaders can support African American women in completing licensure requirements by making them aware of university programs and offering district-sponsored licensure cohorts. This implication is associated with Finding 2. As a school administration license is required to become a principal, district leaders can support African American women by building awareness and supporting them in enrolling in university programs and by developing district-sponsored cohorts, which will assist in completing licensure requirements.

Implication 3

School district leaders can support African American women by providing opportunities to gain the skills needed to obtain a principalship, which include instructional leadership, exposure to different experiences and perspectives, managing adults, and dedication to serving all children. This implication is associated with Finding 3. School district leaders can provide experiences to build instructional leadership, provide exposure to different experiences and perspectives, and gain experience with managing adults. School district leaders should cultivate a culture based on dedication to serving all children.

Implication 4

School district leaders can support African American women in pursuing the principalship by developing and supporting effective mentorship programs and providing opportunities for networking. This implication is associated with Finding 4. Mentors are critical in providing support to African American women. They serve as role models and encouragers and can provide guidance and leadership to potential African American female leaders as they pursue the principalship. Networking opportunities should be provided to support African American women as they seek and serve in the principalship.

Implication 5

School district leaders should consider that stereotypes may be a challenge for African American women as they pursue and serve in the principalship. This implication is associated with Findings 5 and 7 as participants indicated stereotypes about African American women were a challenge to obtaining and serving in a principalship. Some traditional hiring practices and

structures may reinforce these challenges for African American women as they pursue the principalship. African American female principals may need a forum for voicing concerns regarding stereotypes and developing solutions as they serve in the principalship. School district leaders can consider their practices and put in place structures that will decrease this challenge for African American women who are pursuing and serving in the principalship.

Implication 6

School district leaders can consider the experiences of African American women in pursuing the principalship and promote the use of equitable hiring practices, procedures, and requirements across all candidates. This implication is associated with Finding 6 as participants expressed it was easier and quicker for their peers to obtain a principalship when compared to their experience. Hiring practices and structures can be examined and changes made to promote equitable hiring practices for all candidates.

Implication 7

School district leaders can consider how African American female principals take advantage of the opportunities available to them as models of leadership. This implication is associated with Finding 8, as all participants took advantage of opportunities to benefit their school community. This can be recognized, encouraged and utilized as a model of leadership.

Implication 8

School district leaders can consider the difference in opportunities and challenges for African American female principals in comparison to their peers. This implication is associated with Finding 9, as participants felt their opportunities and challenges in the principalship were different from those of their peers. District leaders can examine the experiences of their African American female principals and identify ways to increase opportunities and reduce challenges

Suggestions for Future Studies

One suggestion for a future study is to increase the sample size, as only six participants were involved in this study. More participants may result in findings that can be generalized across populations. Another suggestion would be to spend more time with the participants using focus groups. Bringing the participants together to discuss their experiences in pursuing and

holding the principalship may result in greater understanding of the feelings, ideas, and opinions of African American female principals. Additional topics for future research would be to explore how participants felt an intense need to be a role model and representative for the students and communities they served, how networking is a necessary tool for obtaining a principalship, and how African American women effectively cope with the challenges they face while serving in the principalship.

Summary

Findings from this study showed how these African American female principals pursued and were currently serving in the principalship. These African American women were inspired to become principals through their supervisors, mentors, district-sponsored programs, and family members. Mentorships were most helpful to them in obtaining a principalship. The participants in this study felt they faced challenges such as racism and stereotypes in obtaining the principalship and that their experiences were different from those of their peers in obtaining the principalship.

The African American women in this study expressed that the stereotypes held by others were challenges for them in serving as principals. Advocacy was expressed as an area of opportunity in serving as an African American female principal. When presented with opportunities, these African American women took advantage of the opportunities. As they reflected on their opportunities and challenges in the principalship, the participants felt their experiences were different from those of their peers.

Several recommendations were made for district leaders regarding how to assist African American women as they seek and hold the principalship. This can be done by making African American women aware of the opportunities for obtaining their licensure and by examining and making changes to hiring processes that create barriers to obtaining the principalship for African American women. District leaders should also be aware of the challenges African American women face as they hold the principalship. Support programs and mentorships can be used to support African American women as they serve in the principalship.

This study was designed to examine the perspectives of African American female principals as they sought and held the principalship. Suggestions for future study in this area are to include an increased sample size and focus groups to increase the knowledge of the

perspectives African American women hold related to seeking and holding the principalship. Researchers can explore how African American female principals feel about being a representative for the students and communities they serve, the importance of networking as they seek and hold positions, and how African American female effectively cope with the challenges they face in the principalship.

Personal Reflections

The African American female principals in this study successfully completed the requirements to become a principal and are continuing to navigate the challenges and opportunities of the principalship. This study provided an opportunity to hear how they became principals and how they currently are serving in this role. It was evident that the principals in this study were passionate, committed, and dedicated leaders to the students and communities they served.

With awareness, intentionality, and transparency, school district leaders can support African American women as they seek and serve in the principalship. District leaders should identify and develop structures that will support African American women as they seek and serve in the principalship.

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Appendix A
Citi Certificate



Completion Date 26-Oct-2021
Expiration Date 25-Oct-2024
Record ID 33295638

This is to certify that:

Terri Edmunds-Heard


Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Social & Behavioral Research
(Curriculum Group)
Social & Behavioral Research
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.



CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w0fcc9e02-b588-46c2-9bca-3a083a59441f-33295638

Appendix B
Recruitment Materials

Letter of Request to Organization-Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. Distribution List of
Alfred Street Baptist Church

Letter of Request:

Line: Participation in Research Study on Experiences in the Principalship for African American Women & Information Sheet Attachment (IRB #21-918)

Body of Email Message:

My name is Terri Edmunds-Heard, and I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Tech. I am conducting a research study into the perspectives of the challenges and opportunities of African American women as they seek to obtain the principalship and as they serve as school principals. I am working to recruit participants for my study. I am writing to ask your assistance to send my recruitment email and information sheet attachment to members of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. distribution list of Alfred Street Baptist Church.

Below, please find the recruitment email message with required subject line to send to members on the distribution list. Attached to this email, you will find the required information sheet to attach to the email being sent to members on the distribution list. members. The email and information sheet outline my study and include my contact information. Thank you for considering my request.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Terri Edmunds-Heard
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Tech
terrie@vt.edu
704 968 6782

Recruitment Email Message:

Subject Line: Participation in Research Study Experiences in the Principalship for African American Women & Information Sheet (Attachment) (IRB#21-918)

My name is Terri Edmunds-Heard, and I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Tech. I am conducting a research study into the perspectives of the challenges and opportunities of African American women as they seek to obtain the principalship and as they serve as principals. As an African American female principal, I am interested in your perspective and would welcome the opportunity to interview you. Interviews will be conducted over the Zoom video conferencing platform and will take approximately 60 minutes. Interviews will be recorded with your permission.

Attached is an information sheet explaining your rights and any risks regarding this study. Your participation is completely voluntary. **If you are interested in participating in the study or have questions, please contact me directly via email at terrie@vt.edu or feel free to call me at (704) 968 6782.** Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Terri Edmunds-Heard
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Tech
terrie@vt.edu
704 968 6782

Letter of Request to Organization-Black Women's Educational Alliance (BWEA)

Letter of Request:

Subject Line: Participation in Research Study on Experiences in the Principalship for African American Women & Information Sheet Attachment (IRB#21-918)

Body of Email Message:

My name is Terri Edmunds-Heard, and I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Tech. I am conducting a research study into the perspectives of the challenges and opportunities of African American women as they seek to obtain the principalship and as they serve as school principals. I am working to recruit participants for my study. I am writing to ask your assistance to send my recruitment email and information sheet attachment to members of the Black Women's Educational Alliance (BWEA).

Below, please find the recruitment email message with required subject line to send to BWEA members. Attached to this email you will find the required information sheet to attach to the email to BWEA members. The email and information sheet outline my study and include my contact information. Thank you for considering my request.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions. Thank you for your assistance!

Sincerely,

Terri Edmunds-Heard
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Tech
terrie@vt.edu
704 968 6782

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Body of Message:

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Attached is an information sheet explaining your rights and any risks regarding this study. Your participation is completely voluntary. **If you are interested in participating in the study and/or if you have questions, please contact me directly via email at terrie@vt.edu or feel free to call me at (704) 968 6782.** Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Terri Edmunds-Heard
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Tech
terrie@vt.edu
704 968 6782

Letter of Request to Organization-Fairfax Association of Black School Educators (FABSE)

Letter of Request:

Subject Line: Participation in Research Study on Experiences in the Principalship for African American Women & Information Sheet Attachment (IRB#21-918)

Body of Email Message:

My name is Terri Edmunds-Heard, and I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Tech. I am conducting a research study into the perspectives of the challenges and opportunities of African American women as they seek to obtain the principalship and as they serve as school principals. I am working to recruit participants for my study. I am writing to ask your assistance to send a recruitment email and information sheet attachment to members of Fairfax County Association of Black School Educators (FABSE).

Below, please find the recruitment email message, with required subject line to send to FABSE members. Attached to this email, you will find the required information sheet to attach to the email being sent to FABSE members. The email and information sheet outline my study and include my contact information. Thank you for considering my request.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions and thank you for your assistance!

Sincerely,

Terri Edmunds-Heard
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Tech
terrie@vt.edu
704 968 6782

Recruitment Email Message:

Subject Line: Participation in Research Study Experiences in the Principalship for African American Women & Information Sheet Attachment (IRB#21-918)

Body of Message:

My name is Terri Edmunds-Heard, and I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Tech. I am conducting a research study into the perspectives of the challenges and opportunities of African American women as they seek to obtain the principalship and as they serve as principals. As an African American female principal, I am interested in your perspective and would welcome the opportunity to interview you. Interviews will be conducted over the Zoom video conferencing platform and will take approximately 60 minutes. Interviews will be recorded with your permission.

Attached is an information sheet explaining your rights and any risks regarding this study. Your participation is completely voluntary. **If you are interested in participating in the study or have questions, please contact me directly via email at terrie@vt.edu or feel free to call me at (704) 968 6782.** Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Terri Edmunds-Heard
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Tech
terrie@vt.edu
704 968 6782

Appendix C

Research Study Information Sheet for Participants

Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jodie Brinkmann

IRB# 21-918 and Title of Study: Experiences in the Principalship for African American Women

You are invited to participate in a research study. This form includes information about the study and contact information if you have any questions.

➤ WHAT SHOULD I KNOW?

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an *interview*. *As part of the study, you will be asked to share your perspective of the challenges and opportunities of serving as a principal as an African American woman. The questions in the interview are related to obtaining a principalship and serving as a principal. The interview will be conducted and recorded via zoom.* The study should take approximately 45-60 minutes of your time. We do not anticipate any risks from completing this study.

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

➤ CONFIDENTIALITY

We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of the information we gather from you, but we cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality. At the beginning of the interview, you will be asked to identify yourself as a principal of a rural, suburban, or urban school district and to use a pseudonym as a "rename" on the zoom site. Thus, your responses are coded so that no one can associate your answers back to you. Please do not include your name or other identifying information in your responses that can identify you.

Any data collected during this research study will be kept confidential by the researchers. Your interview will be recorded using the zoom platform and then transcribed. The researchers will code the transcripts using a pseudonym (false name) which you will have chosen at the time of the interview. The recordings will be uploaded to a secure password-protected computer in the researcher's office and destroyed after transcription.

➤ WHO CAN I TALK TO?

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact **Terri Edmunds-Heard** (terrie@vt.edu) or **Carol Cash** (ccash48@vt.edu). You are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies because you participate in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact the Virginia Tech HRPP Office at 540-231-3732 (irb@vt.edu).

Please print out a copy of this information sheet for your records.

Appendix D
Semi-Structured Interview Protocol
African American Female Principals

Introduction:

I want to begin by thanking you for meeting with me today. I am excited and honored to learn more about your experiences serving as an African American female principal in K-12 schools.

Start Recording

Opening Questions

1. State your name
2. Describe your current role to include school level and geographic location.
3. How many years of experience do you have as a principal?

Content Questions

1. Who or what inspired you to become a principal?
2. What were the educational program requirements necessary for you to become a principal?
3. What educational experiences and skills do you feel were required for you to become a principal?
4. Other than educational and experience requirements, what other things do you feel helped you in becoming a principal?
5. Who or what do you feel was most helpful in your obtaining a principalship?
6. What challenges, if any, did you face in obtaining a principalship?
7. What challenges, if any, were unique to being an African American female in obtaining a principalship?
8. When you compare your experience to your peers, do you feel there were any differences in your experience in obtaining a principalship?
9. What do you perceive as unique challenges and opportunities in serving as an African American female principal?
10. What do you do when presented with these challenges or opportunities?
11. When you consider the experiences of your peers in the principalship, do you feel you have experienced the same challenges and opportunities?