Understanding the Impact of Racism and Sexism on the Transition Experience of Black Women Principals from the Classroom to the Secondary School Principalship

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UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF RACISM AND SEXISM ON THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCE OF BLACK WOMEN PRINCIPALS FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALSHIP

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership, P–12

by
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December 2018

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ABSTRACT

This study was focused on understanding how Black women currently serving as secondary school principals were able to obtain their positions and what supports they received and barriers they encountered during their transition from teacher to principal. The underlying purpose behind this study was to understand how racist and/or sexist practices within the educational system influenced their experiences in becoming some of the few Black women currently serving as secondary school principals. In this study, I drew upon Black feminist thought as my epistemological perspective and critical race feminism as my theoretical framework to understand this phenomenon.

To investigate this topic I conducted semi-structured interviews with six Black women high school principals. All of the study participants were from one state in the southeastern region of the United States. After the data was transcribed and coded, three primary themes emerged that represented supports to their transition experiences and one theme that was a barrier to their transition process.

In the final two chapters, I present the findings from my data analysis and provide a detailed discussion of those findings. The three supports that emerged from the data analysis were Black women being hardworking, being chosen, and being mentored or having someone to serve as an advocate for them. The barrier they had to overcome that I identified was the stereotype of the angry Black woman. The fourth theme was the necessity of Black women to stay focused on their professional goal of being school principal in lieu of circumstances outside of their control. The final chapter is a
discussion of findings centered on the practices or mindsets that reflected racism, sexism or both in the promotion process for the Black women.

I also provide implications for practice and recommendations for further research, which includes expanding the study population and geographic range. The recommendations also included the study of Black women teachers who aspire to the principalship, current and former Black women secondary assistant principals, and Black women who previously served as high school principals in future studies.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, my sisters, my daughter and my nieces and nephews.

To my mom for showing me strength.

To my dad for showing me how to dream.

To my sisters for showing me about forever friends.

To my daughter, my nieces, and my nephews for showing me how to love above and beyond without end from the very moment we met.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“You alone are enough. You have nothing to prove to anybody.”

― Maya Angelou

I would like to thank my husband and my daughter. They have been there through this whole process and have waited patiently (most of the time) for me to finish this program. This degree belongs to the family and I am proud to say that WE are done.

To my cheerleaders, thank you. My father had unwavering faith that I would graduate. He had enough faith sometimes for the both of us. Thank you to my Clemson friends who graduated before me because I needed an example to follow.

I would very much like to thank my committee members for their dedication to helping me through this process. Each of you were a valuable part of my journey and it would not have been possible without you. To Dr. Klar, thank you so much for allowing me to develop this topic and seeing where it would go. Your help and support was absolutely above and beyond.

To my students, past and present, thank you for pushing me to be the best teacher I could be. Thank you for giving me a reason to strive for greatness.

There was a moment towards the end of spring 2017 semester that I watched a documentary on Maya Angelou and she told someone in the movie, “You are enough.” That struck home for me.

I am enough. I AM ENOUGH. You are enough. What I have to offer the world is enough.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

“If we believe that Black women are overbearing, deceitful, lacking moral values, or incompetent, how likely are we to entrust them with teaching children, particularly children from White middle-class families?” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 94).

The above quote from Ladson-Billings (2009) is a reference to the way Black women are perceived and alludes to the barriers and pitfalls that these perceptions can cause in the educational system for Black educators. Women, in general, do not make up a large population of secondary school leaders, and there are far fewer Blacks than Whites in educational leadership positions (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Reed, 2012; Alston; 2012). One of the barriers that women, specifically Black women, face is not being seen equal to men in respect to leadership. For women holding leadership positions, other perceived barriers are time constraints, or perceived constraints, due to home and personal obligations, as well as overcoming glass ceilings. These and other barriers will be explored more in depth in the literature review.

Historically, the principal is the person in charge of running the school. Since the desegregation of schools, White men have been consistently appointed to leadership positions in education. This precedent remains in the educational system today, as minorities are unrepresented in educational leadership positions (Gupton, 2009; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). The National Center for Education Statistics (2017) published a report that provides information on the distribution of teachers and principals by race and
by gender. This report did not provide information on the intersection of race and gender, but some inferences can be made from the given data. The data showed that 11 percent of all principals were Black or African American and that overall 54% were female. The data from the report stated that 68% of those female principals were at the elementary school level. The second largest population was in combined middle and high schools, then middle schools, and lastly in traditional high schools. As these statistics illustrate, the intersection of those principals that are Black women secondary principals would be a fraction of the number that are White males.

Similarly, Tillman (2004) expressed that post-Brown v. Board of Education, positions for Black leaders and teachers were not only lost in the sense of quantity but also in terms of their significance. She stated, “there was a loss of a tradition of excellence, a loss of Black leadership as a cultural symbol in the Black community, and a loss of the expertise of educators who were committed to the education of Black children” (p. 113). As a result of the mass firing of Black teachers and administrators, students lost mentors and positive role models, and teachers lost the opportunity to receive mentoring and support from elder teachers and principals who would otherwise have been able to assist them in developing their careers. Immediately following the desegregation of schools, Black educators were negatively impacted due to the limited number of Black administrators available for tapping, mentoring, and sponsoring other Black educators.

To fully understand why it matters that there are no longer as many Black administrators in the schools systems of today, there needs to be an understanding of why
there should be Black administrators in the schools and how having them positively impacts the lives of Black and non-Black students. This is one of the goals of the first section of the literature review when I discuss the necessity of Black women leaders. This section is dedicated to discussing the fact that Black women as a whole, as well as Black women principals specifically, possess skills and attributes which Yosso (2005) calls community cultural wealth. Some of these traits are being able to navigate through various situations, being able to speak to and relate to various audiences, attending to group dynamics, and being resilient. Black women are also needed in school leadership positions because of the impact that they can have being like an “othermother” (Guiffrida, 2005) to students and caring about them in a way that a male administrator often cannot or will not (Bass, 2012; Newcomb & Neimeyer, 2015).

When there is an understanding of why Blacks are not in school leadership positions due to the lasting impact of desegregation on the Black community and Black educators, we can begin to determine there is a need to look at the experiences of Black women, which can ultimately help to make some changes to the current educational practices that hinder some people from being promoted over others with seemingly similar qualifications. In examining the transition experience of Black women administrators, there has to be an account of the impact of the glass ceiling that Black women face (Faniko, Ellemers, Derks, & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2017). A potential reality for Black women is that they must be able to adjust within an environment where barriers limit possible promotions. Black women must also create networking opportunities
within these structures to help navigate barriers. The literature review will intimately explore the established issues.

**Statement of the Problem**

There is currently very little research on the transition experiences of Black women secondary school principals. We do not understand how they are able to transition from being a teacher to being an administrator, nor do we understand what that experience is like in regards to the role of racism and sexism. In order to understand this problem further, I examined the transition experiences of six Black women who have been able to accomplish this level of promotion to determine if there are similar experiences that they had when they moved from classroom teachers into administrative positions.

In the field of education, the role of a principal is the most highly regarded within any school. However, the achievement method for this position is different based on race and gender. According to data provided by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) during the 2011-12 school year 8.8% of all secondary school principals were Black. The same report determined that 31.9% of all public secondary school principals were women. From this data, it can be concluded that Black women secondary school principals are underrepresented compared to other groups. My desire is to understand the experiences of Black women that currently serve as secondary school principals.

In the field of education, the role of a principal is the most coveted position within a school. However, the process for acquiring this position is different based on race and gender (Wilson, Sakura-Lemessy, & West, 1999). The process for one may require him
or her to overcome many unnecessary obstacles; whereas, the course for another is characteristically much easier because it is sprinkled with nepotistic practices of White men helping other professionals of their race and gender to accomplish their personal goals. Typically, Black people, and women in particular, have more barriers to overcome on their journey into leadership roles both within and outside of the field of education (Reed, 2012; Reed & Evans, 2008; Growe & Montgomery, 2000). Through this dissertation study I will examine the way that being Black and being a woman effected the participants’ experiences being promoted to the principalship.

**Purpose Statement**

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the transition experiences of Black women within the secondary setting in order to gain an understanding of each woman’s unique journey from the classroom to the role of principal. A secondary purpose of this research study is to further the limited body of literature that is available on the experiences of Black women principals in secondary education. Bloom and Erlandson (2003) stated that “the suppression of the ideas of African American women in research and epistemological knowledge construction remains a force that undermines the economic, political, and social revitalization within the Black woman’s world” (p. 341). Additionally, there is a sparse body of literature on Black female principals (Reed, 2012, p. 55). One of the goals of my study is to add to that body of literature a deeper insight into principals’ transition experiences from the perspective of the Black female principal. As Tillman (2004) pointed out, “there is limited evidence in the post-Brown educational literature pointing to the leadership styles, accomplishments, and lives of Black female
principals” (p. 125). My desire through my dissertation study was to begin filling the void of some of those lacking elements through the examination of Black women’s experiences with racism and sexism as they moved from being a classroom teacher to being a school leader.

As a doctoral student, one of my class assignments was to explain our research to someone in the class that we had never spoken to before. Upon explaining my topic with great enthusiasm and fervor, I was met with a look of “Oh.” and a remark of “Well… That’s an interesting topic.” The White female went on to tell me a little about how she never realized that there were few Black women in educational leadership. I listened, not appalled at her lack of recognition of something that had always been so obvious to me. More than anything else, I was again made aware of my Black womanhood and the issues that plague me and the lives of others. I believe after the assignment that classmate never again gave any thought to our conversation, although she, like I, is enrolled in an educational leadership degree program.

I use that story to bring into perspective a question that is not asked enough in the educational community as a whole: Where are the Black women leaders? The question is raised among Black teachers, Black administrators, even Black students and members in the Black community at-large, but the question is being raised in isolation from those with the influence and could make a change. The question needs to be asked among non-minority stakeholders. Several years ago, I began looking for mentors who were Black women principals and then expanded the search to Black women assistant principals.
within the school district where I previously worked. The more I searched, the more I realized that they were not there. Black women were missing.

As a Black woman educator, I have a unique draw to the plight of Black students, Black teachers and Black school leaders. I always had a sense of being an educator, long before I commanded the attention of my first group of students. As a child my aspiration was to be a teacher. It was probably during the middle of my first year teaching in a private school that I knew some of the practices, mindsets and implementation of policy needed to change. Even though I was new to the field of education and teaching, I was not new to helping people learn. I knew even then that there was an importance to the treatment of staff, the significance of fair treatment of students, and a value to the relationship between school and community. I also knew that certain operations needed to change in the administration that I was under in order for change to happen in the classroom. I was uncertain of what changes needed to be made or how but I knew things could not stay the same in order to positively impact the lives of Black students, Black teachers, and Black leaders.

The longer I taught and gained experiences as a teacher leader, the more I began looking throughout the district where I worked at the time, but I could not find Black women in upper leadership positions. At one point, I was able to serve under a Black woman superintendent but even below her, the number of Blacks was sparse. Initially, I thought it was coincidence but secondary principals left and others were hired, but none were Black women. As I recall, there was only one Black male hired, and that was as the replacement of a Black male who left. Through all of the changes in personnel I
witnessed, there remained only that one Black woman within the district. I thought that maybe there were more Blacks that served as assistant administrators (AAs) or assistant principals (APs). Though there were some, they were not proportionate to the other races, which furthered my desire to understand whether they did not aspire to become school principals or if there were systems in place that hindered their promotion processes.

As a teacher I knew Black women who did not have a desire to leave the classroom and those who desired to do something outside of the classroom, including being administrators, but knew that the road to assistant principalship was a difficult one, and chose other positions that they felt they could aspire towards.

That is the long story of how I arrived at this research topic. I wanted to know why Black women weren’t leading. I wanted to know what made it so difficult for Black women to leave the classroom. I wanted to know what factors made Black women who aspired to become principals remain as teachers when it seemed like others were moving out of the classroom all the time.

I wanted to know so much about these women, the AAs and APs who aspire to become principals, and the teachers who aspire to these leadership positions. I wanted to know all the stories of the women who held these positions and retired, who held the positions and moved onto something higher, and those who held it and walked away.

As I had to begin somewhere and that choice came down to which would have to the most direct help to those who aspire to be in that beautiful front chair and that is why I chose Black women who are occupying the position. I felt that if we can unpack and understand what they did, who heled them and what help they received, then perhaps we
could find patterns to make the experience more feasible, more desirable, more attainable for other Black women.

The typical follow-up question is: Why do we need Black women principals? What is significant about their leadership? To that I say, there is power in seeing a person who looks similar to you in a position above you (students to school leaders, or teacher to principals) and knowing that where you are is not where you have to remain. I speak more in-depth of the significance of Black women in educational leadership in chapter two.

**Research question**

Based on the scarcity of Black women secondary principals, the call of other researchers for a study of Black women in educational leadership, and my desire to learn more about the transition experiences of Black women from the classroom, I have chosen the following research question for my study: What roles do racism and sexism play in the transition experiences of Black women as they move from teacher to secondary school principal?

**Pilot Study**

In 2017, I completed a pilot study (Neely, 2017) to examine the understanding that one Black woman principal had of the impact of racism and sexism on her transition experience from the classroom to the principalship. In the pilot study, I examined how she saw herself in the larger picture of racism and sexism in her professional goals, and how she was able to gain access to mentoring and sponsorship which led to opportunities for promotion. The research question that guided the pilot study was: How did a Black
women secondary school principal understand the roles of racism and sexism in her transition from teacher to school principal?

The pilot study was conducted using data collected through a single semi-structured interview with a Black woman who had only recently stopped serving in the capacity of school principal. The purpose of the interview was to begin looking at the impact of racism and sexism from a single perspective to determine which questions would help to facilitate that conversation and provide the greatest opportunities to gain insight and understanding from participants in a larger study related to this topic. The results of the study indicated that the Black women had a minimal understanding and awareness of the roles of racism and sexism, and that she did not fully acknowledge some of the ways that racism and sexism impacted her journey.

As a result of the pilot study, I was able to revise the interview questions to potentially enable me to more deeply investigate racism and sexism with future study participants. My dissertation builds upon my pilot study by expanding the number of participants and utilizing revised interview protocols. The additional participants allowed for an additional opportunities to compare and contrast the journeys and perspectives of multiple Black women.

**Delimitations**

The delimitations for this research study are centered on my intentionality in giving a voice to Black women principals in secondary schools (high school) in regards to how they were able to transition from being a teacher to being a principal at the high school level. I only wanted their perspectives for this study, therefore, no other voices or
perspectives were included. As both a researcher and a practitioner, I am aware of the complexity of promotion decisions and wanted to know what the journey was like from the perspective of someone who had obtained a secondary school principal’s position. I tried to reach out to as many of the Black women principals in the selected state as possible, yet some were prohibited by their district from participating, and others opted not to be involved. Therefore, I know that the research that I am presenting may not give a voice to all the possibilities or the experiences that Black women may have moving from one level in the field of education to another.

**Significance of the Study**

There is a shortage of Black women in educational leadership, (Allen, Jacobson, & Lomotey, 1995) and if the scholarly community can increase knowledge of the Black woman’s experience transitioning to leadership positions, and can explore what changes may need to be made in order to make their experiences similar to those of other races, then the acquired information may lead to measures being taken toward lessening the gap between the number of Black female leaders and non-Black and non-female leaders.

Collins (2015) stated that when she came into education in the 1980s, the voice of African American women was missing as well as their “interpretations of [their] own and others’ experiences, actions and perspectives” (p. 2349). What existed in its place were stereotypical images and depictions of Black women such as the “all-welcoming black mammies, smiling domestic servants, hot-to-trot jezebels and field workers” (Collins, 2015, p. 2349).
There is a need for this study “because African American women lived heterogeneous lives, the dimensions of the world views that they expressed through books, testimonials, poetry, fiction, essays, songs, court cases, sermons and dissertations were similarly complex” (Collins, 2015, p. 2350) and must be researched in a similar manner. The research must be designed in a manner that tries to understand the complexities of their lives.

There is also a need for this research study because it answers the call put forth by Horsford and Tillman (2012) when they articulated there was research on the lived experiences of Black women at various levels from graduate school to faculty members, principals as well as school superintendents, however, there is limited research on the intersectional identities of Black women and how intersectional identities impacted their experiences. The results of this study may help to inform changes that need to be made in the promotion and selection process for Black women principals and assistant principals within school districts. The findings of this study may also help to spur conversations that bring changes to the dynamics of public school administration in schools in the southeastern region of the United States.

The implications of this study show that Black women’s promotion to the secondary school principalship is burdened with racial and gender biases that occur as they start to leave the classroom and still impacts them daily while they serve as principals. There is much needed dialogue about what can be altered in that transition experience to allow more Black women to transition from teacher to administrator in regards to having a sponsor to advocate for them. Black women can have a strong
mindset when it comes to meeting the professional goal of becoming a school principal, however, that may not be enough if there are not changes made to the practices within the field of education that allow for more diversity and a validation of the necessity of Black women as school leaders.

**Epistemological Perspective and Theoretical Framework**

This research study contains both an epistemological perspective and a theoretical framework. The epistemological perspective that is being implemented is Black feminist thought while the theoretical framework that is being implemented is critical race feminism. These are fitting for this research study as I aim to learn about Black women in their leadership capacity as school head as well as to gain an understanding of the institutional implications of race and gender in their experiences towards becoming a school principal.

**Black feminist thought.** Black feminist thought is attributed to the work Patricia Hill Collins (1989, 1991). Black feminist thought is based on understanding Black women’s experiences, perceptions, and perspectives. Black feminist thought centers on the need for examination and being able to articulate the lived experiences of Black women through an understanding of the impact and implications of their race, gender, and the intersectionality of race and gender. Collins (1989) concluded that Black women are “neither passive victims of nor willing accomplices to their own domination” (p.747) but through the implementation of Black feminist thought they have developed their own “self-defined standpoint” (p. 747) which is the overlapping of the two interwoven components.
When discussing the significance of Black feminist thought, Collins (1989) expressed that there are two main layers of knowledge for Black women. The first layer is the “everyday, taken-for-granted knowledge shared by members of a given group” and the second layer is the “more specialized knowledge furnished by experts who are part of a group and who express the group’s standpoint” (p. 750). This was the perspective that I implemented in this research study. I had a dual-perspective that was centered on being a member of the group that I was studying in regards to being a Black woman educator and yet an outsider as I have never occupied the position as a public secondary school principal.

Critical race feminism. The theoretical framework that I utilized for my dissertation study was critical race feminism. Critical race feminism derived from critical race theory when there became a need for a specialized focus on the intersection of race and gender for Black women and other women of color (Sule, 2013; Wing & Willis, 1999; Few, 2007). Alston (2012) stated that “critical race theory provides such a framework for the examination and discussion of racial issues, especially in the lives of Black female leaders who work in culturally incongruent racial settings” (p. 128).

Critical race feminism can be utilized to bring into focus the “sometimes complicated, everyday experiences of women of color in order to interrogate and enrich understanding about the relationship between social identity and power” (p.436). Using critical race feminism allowed me to closely examine how race, gender, and their intersection impacted the transition experiences of Black women secondary school principals as they moved from the classroom to the position of school principal.
**Research Design Summary**

My dissertation study is a qualitative research study designed to give an understanding of the transition experiences of Black women as they moved from being a classroom teacher to becoming a high school principal. Through this qualitative research study, I strove to give a voice to Black women’s experiences as educational leaders and to provide an understanding of how they were able to transition to the principalship in an effort to provide other Black women who desire to become educational leaders with an understanding of how their race and gender can have an impact on their desire for promotion. Merriam (1998) linked qualitative research and the desire to understand the perspective that the participants have to offer. This was one of the main desires of my study. I wanted to be able to understand what happened for and to these Black women principals, why and when it happened and if there were factors beyond their control based on their race and gender that came into play for them.

I determined that the most fitting methodological approach for this research study would be a hermeneutic phenomenological study as it would allow for the most suitable examination and interpretation of the data. Van Manen (1990) pointed towards the importance of phenomenological research being about how a particular event is experienced for a person as connected to the person’s level of awareness that the person has related to that experience. This was one of the key factors in the findings and discussion when I was connecting the events of the women’s journeys to racism and sexism.
**Participant selection and recruitment.** When I completed the initial selection of the potential participants in fall 2016, there were 28 Black women principals in the selected state. When I began the process of contacting school districts, 20 of the original 28 were still in their leadership position and one Black woman had been added as a replacement for another Black woman principal that was on the first participant list. To find these women, I went through a listing of each public high school website in the state and found information on each school’s principal. My original desire was to contact and interview each of those women, however, various restrictions prohibited that from happening, and the final number of participants in the study was six Black women secondary principals.

In regards to recruitment for the research study, I began by contacting each of the school districts where the Black women principals worked to gain district level permission to contact the women, which was required per Clemson’s Internal Review Board (IRB) due to the nature of my study. After I was granted permission through the district contact, one of three actions happened (1) I contacted the potential participants directly; (2) I was copied on an email between myself and the Black woman principal generated by the district representative or (3) the district representative contacted the Black woman principal(s) and contacted me after the principal agreed to participate. If the woman decided to participate in the study, we set a day and time for the interview. If a potential participant did not respond after a set number of follow-up emails and phone calls, she was removed from the list of potential candidates, and I went forward with contacting other potential participants.
**Instrumentation and data collection.** I collected data was collected through semi-structured interviews using an interview protocol that I developed. The interview protocol was designed to align the interview questions to the research question and also was designed to go from question types that were broad in nature to those very specific to the individual woman that was being interviewed. The questions were grouped into themes which included mentoring, racism, sexism and an overall understanding of her transition into leadership. The interview protocol followed Patton’s (2002) description of standardized open-ended interviewing. I wanted to be able to gain as much information from each participant during the interview as possible, and felt that open-ended interview questions were the best approach. A copy of the interview protocol can be found in Appendix D.

I conducted the six semi-structured interviews face to face (N=1), telephone (N=1), Skype (N=1) or Zoom (N=3), which allowed for interactions containing both sound and picture via a webcam. I conducted a single interview with each participant which ranged in time from approximately 55 minutes to 80 minutes. There were a few follow-up emails with some of the participants to ask clarifying questions and to collect some missing information from the Black women.

**Data analysis.** I started conducting the six semi-structured interviews on March 22, 2018 and concluded conducting them on May 16, 2018. Each of the interviews varied in their length and the depth of information collected. Each interview was recorded for the purpose of transcription later. I began at the beginning of March to reach out to the various school districts and I was given permission from a total of 17 school districts. Of
those 17 school districts, seven granted permission for me to speak with their principal. Those seven school districts comprised of ten Black women principals. Of the ten women that I contacted six consented and setup interview days and times; one consented but did not confirm a day or time and the other three women failed to respond to calls or emails. When I was ready to transcribe the data I started to do them completely by hand but as time went on I determined that it was not the most time effective manner of completing the task and enlisted an online transcription service. During the transcribing process, I was making physical and mental notes of the patterns and connections that I noticed between the interviews. For coding I began using commercial software (MAXQDA) but changed to Microsoft Word. During the coding process I was looking for patterns in the data as well as connections to racism and sexism.

An additional measure that I implemented to provide a thorough account of my actions, decisions and thought processes was the audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Halpern, 1983). I provide an example of an audit trail as related to my study in chapter three. The audit trail process documents connections between my journaling, memoing, interview field notes, as well as the interview transcriptions. As the sole researcher for this study, I created and analyzed all of those components by myself, though I discussed some components with my peer debriefers.

In addition to using audit trails as part of my data analysis, I also used hermeneutic circles. Part of completing a hermeneutic phenomenological study is the usage of these hermeneutic circles to help explain the thinking process of going from the part to the whole and from the whole to the individual parts (Schmidt, 2014). Debassey,
Nåden, and Slettebø (2008) stated that the constant examination and re-examination of the data is how new knowledge and findings occur during a hermeneutic study. During the data analysis, I was able to gain a deep understanding of what was presented by the women through examining and re-examining their respective stories. I was able to examine information that was alluded to but not specifically stated, as well as providing an overall meaning and comparison of the women’s experiences moving from classroom teacher to school administrator.

**Trustworthiness, credibility and validity.** To establish trustworthiness, credibility, and validity in my research study I implemented member checking, utilized debriefers and worked to maintain a high level of rigor throughout the study. Once I finished transcribing all six interviews, I e-mailed each participant a copy of her interview transcript to review. Some of the women did not respond to this email but they were all given the opportunity to verify that what was stated during the interview reflected their true and accurate experiences and feelings which establishes credibility in a research study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Creswell and Miller, 2000).

I also met several times in person as well as via telephone with my two peer debriefers (Shenton, 2004; Creswell and Miller, 2000; Creswell, 1994). One of those debriefers was a fellow Black woman graduate student and the other was a fellow Black woman educator. The educator was an assistant principal at a high school with almost 20 years of experience as an administrator and over 30 years as an educator. Through those conversations, I was able to gain new perspective of the data as well as to validate some of the themes and patterns that I was seeing. Lastly, one of the points Shenton (2004)
described for credibility, trustworthiness and transparency in a research study is the usage of thick-rich description. This is something that I strove to achieve throughout my study.

**Limitations**

The small sample size was one the major limitations for the research study in addition to the participants all coming from the same selected southeastern state. Those combined factors contributed to the limited nature of the data and the generalizability of the findings. Also being a single person collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data was a limitation of the study. To combat this single perspective, I implemented the usage of debriefing with my two peers to help provide additional perspective and broaden my lens. Future studies could account for a composite of perspectives from Black women principals from multiple states and regions of the United States. The broadening of the sample size and states covered in the sample opens the study to greater depth of experiences.

**Definition of Terms**

Throughout this study, I will utilize the term Black to reference the portion of the American population that are of Shemetic (Shem) and Hamitic (Ham) origins (Bryant, 1967; Reader’s Digest, 1990). In my study, none of the participants identified as anything other than Black or African American, none identified as being from any country of Africa or the Caribbean. The term African American will only be used when directly quoted or referenced in other research studies or literature. Culture will be defined as “behaviors and values that are learned, shared and exhibited by a group of people” (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). Collins (2000) defined racism as
A system of unequal power and privilege where humans are divided into groups or ‘races’ with social rewards unevenly distributed to groups based on their racial classification. Variations of racism include institutional racism, scientific racism and everyday racism. In the United States, racial segregation constitutes a fundamental principle of how racism is organized. (p. 321)

Another key term that is essential to the research study and literature review is transition. Schlossberg (1981, 1990) described a transition as “an event or non-event [that] results in a change in assumptions about one’s self and the world” (pg. 5). She went further to explain that a transition causes people to alter or change their “relationships, routines, assumptions and roles” (Schlossberg, 1990; Flowers et al., 2014). The Black women principals involved in this dissertation study transitioned from classroom teachers into lead teachers and/or assistant administrative positions and then moved into the position of school principals. To fully grasp their transition experiences is to gain a deeper understanding of what occurred to them professionally and personally as they sought various promotions within the education system. The terms administrator, school leader, and school principal will be used interchangeably to represent the person holding the highest position of authority within an individual school. I chose the transition experience as the focus point of the study due to the limited extant research on it, and because I believed it would be useful in understanding how racism and sexism influence Black women in that journey.
Organization of the Study

This research study is presented in five chapters. I begin in chapter one, by providing the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, details of the pilot study, delimitations, significance of the study, epistemological perspective and theoretical framework, research design summary, limitations, definition of terms, and the assumptions of the study. In the second chapter, I present a review of the literature relevant to Black women principals and the various factors that impact their transition from teacher to administrator. The three primary sections are understanding the necessity of Black women principals, understanding what is required for Black women to become principals and finally, the barriers that can impede Black women in the promotion process. In the third chapter, I describe the methodology that I will use for my dissertation study. Within the methodology section, I describe the data collection and data analysis procedures. In chapter four, I provide an analysis of the findings. The analysis is presented based on four themes derived from the initial 16 themes that I created. The final chapter of my dissertation mid the presentation of my discussion of the data analysis findings. The basis of the discussion is to relate the themes discussed in chapter four to racism, sexism and the intersection of racism and sexism. Included in the discussion chapter will be implications for future research and recommendations for practice.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a review of literature pertaining to Black women leaders and the multiple facets comprised within the complex role of the high school principal. The goal of the literature review is to highlight the fact that Black women are valuable leaders in the educational community, and that they are willing and able to fulfill those positions. Yet, they also have to overcome obstacles that stand in the way of them being able to accomplish the goal of becoming educational leaders, especially secondary school principals. Some of those barriers include, but are not limited to, racist and sexist practices, glass ceilings, a lack of mentorship, and exclusion from social circles. With this in mind, the literature review is broken into three major sections: the necessity of Black women leaders; the path to becoming a principal; and, lastly, the barriers to advancement. Each section is designed to walk more intimately through understanding why Black women should lead, what it generally takes to lead, and some of the barriers that can hinder Black women from becoming leaders. The literature review ends with an explanation of my epistemological and theoretical frameworks as well as a call to research and an understanding of why this literature is important.
The Necessity of Black Women Leaders

Being both Black and a woman simultaneously is a unique and complex realism that is difficult to understand. The two cannot be simply cut apart and defined separately. Black women have spent decades trying to get the same levels of equality that are given to Black men and White women. In this section, I discuss Black women as historically portrayed in the media, how the roles of women are defined within the corporate or business structures, and the educational opportunities available to them.

Understanding the Intersection of Race and Gender

Black women have a unique experience through which they view the world-lenses of race and of gender, which McClellan (2012) described as “lenses of interlocking forms of domination” (p. 91). Black women have to deal with both racism and sexism in all that they do. This is a form of intersectionality. Crenshaw (1991) described intersectionality as “the various way[s] in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s employment experiences” (p.139). Yet, Collins (2000) defined it as “forms of intersecting oppressions” (p. 18). This phenomenon is only true for minority females.

White women and Black men do not experience this double form of discrimination in the same way Black women do as they only feel one sense of being a minority, their race or their gender, but not both. Black women are not able to isolate either one of these forms of identity. This does not mean that either groups do not have their own struggles, just that their struggles are based on a single form of oppression, whereas Black women are simultaneously oppressed by race and gender. When one
thinks of the intersection of race and gender, there may or may not be a thought to the burden that this “double whammy” (Andrews, 1993) has on the daily lives of Black women specifically and all women of color generally. Tatum (1993) a Black woman herself, expressed that we “Black women cannot isolate our Blackness from our femaleness. We are always both simultaneously” (p. 1). Intersectionality not only impacts employment, it also affects the “politics of survival for black women” (Jordan-Zachery, 2007, p. 256). Intersectionality touches every sector of Black women’s lives, including those of Black school leaders.

**Understanding Their Critical Leadership**

The racialized and gendered perspective that Black women have provides a unique leadership viewpoint that can positively impact the learning and personal development of students. There are many ways that a principal serves his or her school. For a minority leader, or a principal serving a minority population, one of those ways is through being a critical leader. Black women leaders serve as a bridge or advocate for others, particularly marginalized young people (Bass, 2012; Horsford, 2012). This is because their race and gender affect their perceptions and the manner in which they carry out roles within schools (Reed & Evans, 2008). Reed & Evans (2008) highlighted this as something that is especially true for Black women who work at urban high schools or schools where the majority of the students are predominately Black.

In alignment with the tenets of Black feminist thought, not all Black women who serve at urban or predominately minority schools have a desire to serve as critical leaders. Yet, each Black woman brings a unique perspective, background and set of personal
beliefs with her to the principalship, and those factors can contribute to the type of leader that she develops into.

Gender and race affect more than just the idea of having to advocate for students. According to Reed and Evans (2008), there is a function to be served by having same-race affiliation between teachers, students, and school administrators. None of the benefits include serving as a role-model, advocating, and being someone who is aware of the challenges faced by Black students (Reed & Evans, 2008). Black women have an exceptional standpoint that allows them to see multiple oppressions, and through those lenses they are able to provide more unique solutions and strategies for transforming institutions and schools (Collins 1990; Walker & Byas, 2009; Walker & Snarey, 2004). The ability to see multiple oppressions and create solutions to the problems in the schools where they serve makes the leadership of Black women valuable to the Black and other students of color that they serve.

Based on the unique roles that Black women take within a school, there is a need for their presence and leadership qualities. Reed (2012) determined that “Black women’s activism has shaped the advancement of Black children in ways that may not always conform to traditional notions of activism” (p. 44). She referred to these Black women who take on advocating for Black children as tempered radicals. They do what needs to be done in order to best serve their student population, and at times have to get creative in the ways they complete these tasks to possibly navigate current policies that have been implemented by the district. Reed concluded that “within educational leadership, the characteristics women principals bring to their leadership practice are typically
undervalued” (p. 41). Reed went on to express that “women school leaders have been described as being able to display their emotional and compassionate sides within their leadership…. [and] have also been described as being able to cultivate important relationships, while navigating difficult circumstances to bring about change” (p. 41).

Advocating for students, being a leader for students, and finding ways to overcome the hurdle of being unappreciated by supervisors and/or the community is a burden that Black women take on when they become school leaders.

Although they may have a common goal of being an advocate for students, the role of a Black woman principal in a school that has a minority as the majority than it would be for a Black woman principal at a school that is not urban, or predominately White. Each school setting has its own unique dynamics, and the interactions between the principal and the students may require different actions and mannerisms from the Black woman principal based on the student population. Typically, in a majority-minority school setting the principal is expected to be more of a critical leader, as discussed later in the literature review, whereas at a predominately White school, she may not have any programs in place specifically for Black students. (Bass, 2012).

Understanding Their Cultural Wealth

Black women, and Black people as a whole, bring from their homes, communities, and educational background certain forms of capital. According to Yosso (2005), “the assumption follows that people of Color ‘lack’ the social and cultural capital required for social mobility” (p. 70). For Blacks and other people of color, cultural capital is understood to be “the sense of group consciousness and collective identity…aimed at
the advancement of an entire group” (Franklin, 2002, p. 177). Blacks, as a group of people, have a sense of interconnectedness and share their cultural capital among the shared community.

Yosso (2005) argued that the society’s perceived lack of accepted capital for Blacks and other people of color hinders students in the classroom. She stated that the disadvantaged students are seen as having limited “knowledge, socials skills, abilities, and cultural capital” (p. 70). This same perceived lack hinders Black women teachers from being able to gain equitable access in their pursuit of becoming a school leader. Yosso (2005) expressed that “the main goals of identifying and documenting cultural wealth are to transform education and empower people of color to utilize assets already abundant in their communities” (p. 82). This empowerment can help to focus on those “unacknowledged or unrecognized” (Yosso. 2005, p. 70) attributes Black women principals bring to the role and how it can be beneficial to the schools and communities where they serve. The unacknowledged forms of capital serve as a means of countering the deemed “cultural deficiencies” (p. 70) for Blacks and other minorities. Having more Black women principals could serve as an example to counteract these stereotypes and assumptions.

Yosso (2005) presented in her research in six forms of community cultural capital, “aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistance” (p. 77). These six forms of community cultural capital can be used in a similar manner to Bourdieu’s (1977) or Oliver and Shapiro’s (1995) theories of cultural capital, which suggest that the value that a person can offer in terms of financial wealth is limited either
from birth or by their ability to obtain wealth over the course of a lifetime. Franklin (2002) confirmed that researchers like Bourdieu use cultural capital to refer to the financial advantages that are given to those of particular social classes due to their ability to obtain wealth and education, as well as the ability to influence popular culture. The forms of cultural wealth are not fixed or mutually exclusive, they are fluid and build upon each other (Yosso, 2005).

**Aspirational capital.** Aspirational capital refers to the “ability to maintain hopes and dreams” in spite of the barriers, real or perceived, that a person of color has to face (Yosso, 2005, p. 77-78). Yosso (2005) pointed to aspirational capital as a form of resiliency that gives a person the ability to dream and imagine a future even if they are not able to create a plan or vision for obtaining that goal or dream. Aspirational capital overarches all other forms of community cultural capital.

**Navigational capital.** Navigational capital refers to the ability to maneuver through various social situations, organizations and institutions, typically not designed or created for the inclusion of Blacks or other people of Color (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). These places could contain a level of racial hostility or levels of underlying racial prejudice.

One of the factors Yosso (2005) identified related to navigational capital was resiliency. Resiliency and the perception of being able to endure challenges is a quality that has long been attributed to Black women (Toyokawa & Mcloyd, 2011; Paul, 2003; Yetunde, 2017). Resiliency for Black women can begin to manifest at an early age when they have to take on roles that are traditionally considered adult roles such as helping around the home or raising younger siblings as well as through experiences with teen

Black women in academia have to have a resilient mindset just as with all other aspects of their lives. In their study, Shavers and Moore (2014) looked at resiliency strategies for African American women in doctoral programs at predominately white institutions. One of the findings was that Black women have a “unique experience” in that they are “routinely ignored and excluded” (p.15). However, they are able to graduate in spite of these challenges and obstacles. Lastly, Yosso (2005) made a connection between navigational capital and the ability to connect to social networks to allow an individual to operate within the judicial and healthcare systems in addition to schools and the job market.

**Social capital.** Social capital is about building and utilizing social networks, contracts and community resources for all people of color. Social capital is used to help gain access to various institutions as well as to provide emotional support within these organizations and institutions. For a Black woman principal, social capital may be manifested through the mentoring relationship as well as in the application, interview process, and the securing of a potential promotion.

**Linguistic capital.** Linguistic capital is the concept of people of color having or using multiple languages and/or communication skills. One way linguistic capital can be manifest for Black women principals is through code-switching. The way Black women communicate with their close families and friends or with the other Black educators and
how they communicate with other school stakeholders may not be the same. The change in dialogue is a form of code-switching. Researchers have looked intensely at all of the ways that codeswitching has been described, and there is not a firm definition or consensus of the word, but one way of describing code switching is that it is a language variety, change in style, dialect, language or syntactic for a person between one or more languages (Nilep, 2006). Koch, Gross & Kolts (2001) stated that speech patterns or how a person speaks the language of the “positively viewed in-group” can impact whether a person is accepted or rejected from various social situations including but not limited to potential hiring opportunities or networking circles. Interestingly, Houston (2000) stated that “any explanation of African American women’s communication must, in some way, account for the heterogeneity of black women’s lived experiences suggested by multiple jeopardy and multiple consciousness” (p. 11). For Black women, this variety of language can happen from one moment to another and can be a completely flawless transition between language styles. This ability to transition between the languages is one of the attributes of Black women as leaders.

One way to describe the way Blacks modify Standard English (SE) is called Black English (BE). Houston (2000) identified “an informal African American speaking style” (p. 14) as an example of Black English. She went on to discuss the way that the participants in her study recognized a need to “switch styles” and that the language that is marked as Black or woman is “inferior, lacking in prestige and social power” (p. 14). Houston (2000) also identified the positive aspects of the way that Black women speak and the power that it has to express the thoughts and emotions they possess as well as
being “intimate, deep caring and highly intuitive” (p. 14). Many Black women principals may not possess the ability to speak multiple languages, but they may be able to navigate various environments through the ability to adapt their language.

**Familial capital.** Familial cultural capital is the sense of belonging that comes from relationships with immediate family (parents, siblings, spouses, and children), extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins), and close friends. According to Yosso (2005), familial capital helps to develop a sense of “emotional, moral, educational, and occupational consciousness” (p. 79). Familial capital builds on “communal bonds… funds of knowledge…and pedagogies of the home” (p. 79) which are the result of a sense of commonality and shared experiences that connect people of color. The bond that binds Blacks is also a means of reminding individuals that they are not unique in their experience.

**Resistance capital.** The last form of cultural capital is resistance capital. Resistance capital is the ability to “engage in behaviors and maintain attitudes that challenge the status quo” (Yosso, 2005, p. 81). Resistance capital comprises a cultural awareness of institutional and structural racism and a desire to alter those oppressive structures. Yosso (2005) emphasized that to reach a level of resistance capital means that an individual has achieved or surpassed other levels of community cultural capital. One point that Yosso (2005) highlighted from a study of mothers and daughters was that “young women use their bodies, minds, and spirits in the face of race, gender and class inequality” (p. 81). Resistance capital manifests through various strategies to the systems of oppression present in society.
Understanding Their Work Ethic

Work ethic is an understanding of the positive impact of valuing hard work and having a positive attitude towards diligence in completing a task and resolve to working hard (Arslan, 2001; Lee, Padilla, & McHale, 2015). For Black people in general their work ethic comes from the times of slavery in the United States (Lee, Padilla, & McHale, 2015; Morgan, 2016; Walker, 2009). The days of slavery in the United States was built on the long work hours and endless amounts of work on behalf of Black people.

Post-emancipation Blacks still hold tight to the notion of having to work hard, and tie that hard work to the possibility of success and obtaining what others have. Fast-forward a few decades, Lee, Padilla, and McHale (2015) presented a study that ties work ethic for African-American families to the father as the role model. Lee et al. (2015) reported that the most impactful role model for Black families in a two parent home was the father, and that he more than the mother has greater influence on the oldest sibling and the oldest sibling in turn, has the greatest effect on the work ethic of younger siblings. Lerner et al. (2005) showed evidence that developing a strong work ethic as a child or a young adult can help young people avoid potentially negative circumstances while promoting positive future outcomes.

For most Blacks, being a hard-worker and feeling it necessary to work harder than those of other races has become the norm. Linking the learned behavior of a strong work ethic, which manifests as being hardworking, can lead to fulfilling personal goals as an adult. Gay (2014) detailed the common belief among Blacks that they must work twice as hard as those of other races in order to obtain the same level of success. The American
standard is that success is available to all, and that “anyone can make it financially by working hard and tugging on their proverbial boot-straps” (Hamilton, Darity, Price, Sridharan, & Tippett, 2015). Yet, the reality is not the same as the belief. Hamilton et al. (2015) reported that making the “right choices don’t equal all the right outcomes” for Blacks and other people of color. They discussed spending vast amounts of time studying, trying to achieve by obtaining credentials, and investing large amounts of time and effort into one’s job is not a guarantee of success for Blacks, and, if success is obtained, it is not equal to that of Whites.

Summary

Having Black women in leadership roles is not simply about having diversity in the staff, but about having their traits and qualifications present in the lives of students. Black women through their community cultural wealth and desire to be critical leaders bring with them a particular skill set that others do not innately possess. The unique characteristics that Black women possess are what makes their leadership a necessity, because it could not only create positive outcomes for both male and female Black students, it could also be beneficial for students of other races. Black women are hard workers. They give much of themselves to accomplish the tasks that are set before them, and dedicate themselves to do it to the best of their abilities. In the subsequent section, I explain what it means to be a school administrator, specifically a school principal as well as what it takes for a Black woman to walk that particular path.

The Path to Becoming a Principal
The principal has always been the person responsible for making the majority of the decisions for a school. The term principal comes from the history of the role being fulfilled by the principal teacher or headteacher (Bush, 2011a, 2011b; Crow, Day & Møller, 2017; Horsford & Tillman, 2012). According to Brown-Ferrigno (2003), in order to move from being a teacher to becoming a principal, the teacher has to be willing to let go of being a teacher and be willing to experience all of the discomfort and uneasiness that comes with moving into a new and unknown role (p. 470). Bush (2011b) described the path from teacher to headship (principalship) as one that should slowly decrease in the number and amount of teacher related responsibilities and gradually increase in administrative or managerial duties and tasks. He also went on to state that this transition, although it requires an additional degree or certification, may have teachers moving from a position where they are trained and familiar with the tasks to tasks for which they may or may not be prepared.

Throughout the last few decades, the role of the principal has changed to meet the current needs of schools and students from a managerial position to a more instruction-focused position. According to Crow, Day and Møller (2017), “a key function of principals is to create, develop, and work with school culture and promote and nurture teachers’ motivation, well-being and job satisfaction and fulfillment” (p. 269). The principal is in charge of overseeing many day-to-day maintenance roles for the school; these tasks may be primarily overseen by one of the assistant principals if there are enough in the building to help with the task. He or she is also responsible for ensuring the safety of the building, hiring competent teachers and being a part of the instructional
management of the student learning (Cosner, Kimball, Barkowski, Carl & Jones, 2015). The principal may have multiple assistant principals working with him or her in addition to other administrative positions within the school’s leadership team, but the principal is instrumental in the vision and progress of the school reform efforts. Leone, Warmimont, & Zimmerman (2009) expounded on the need for principals to “be aware of pressing social issues in the community” and to also

be involved in addressing those issues and bringing solutions to the school setting.

Principals can do this by being an active community member and speaking out about how important issues affect the community’s children and future. (p. 90)

The role of the principal is very multi-faceted and requires the person fulfilling the role to also be multi-faceted. The principal has to be someone who not only has a vision and knows the direction of the school, but he or she also has to have the skills to help others see the vision and create a willingness in them to work towards the set vision.

Within the field of education, men are the primary group holding leadership positions. Gupton (2009) stated that “men continue to dominate in the most coveted leadership positions throughout the profession of education” (p. 3). In the state in which the study is taking place the majority of school leaders are male, and White. Gupton (2009) stated “secondary and middle schools have the fewest number of women principals, while elementary school principalships are about equally divided between women and men today” (p. 4). The most recent set of data that is available on the demographics of school leaders provided by National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2016) showed that 8.8% of all public high school principals are Black, and only
30.1% are women. According to a RAND report, the majority (58%) of female principals reported in that data analysis were elementary school principals (Gates, Ringel, Santibanez and Chung, 2003, p. 11). The NCES does not report any intersectional data such as the number of Black women principals.

The NCES (2016) report stated that “during the [1987-88 to 2011-12] time period, the percentage of Black principals did not change significantly” (p. 6). The majority of Black leaders were seen in urban high schools “that are underfunded, have scarce resources, significant numbers of uncertified teachers, and student underachievement” (Brown, 2005, p. 587). Due to the struggles of working in urban high schools, Black principals face different challenges compared to their counterparts who serve in school settings, as urban high schools, which typically have a lower overall socio-economic level, higher numbers of students with free and reduced lunch, and other academic challenges.

**Understanding the Constraints**

One challenge commonly encountered in school districts is the shortage of high quality candidates applying for leadership positions. Eckman and Kleber (2010) stated that there is a shortage of qualified persons to fill the many positions for educational leaders that will become vacant in the coming years. However, this shortage could be due to the less than desirable qualities of the principalship (Eckman & Kleber, 2010; Howley, Andrianaivo & Perry, 2005; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Bass (2012) highlighted some of the stresses of the job, such as “increased stress and time commitment, isolation, fear of failure, as well as discouragement from family and friends” (p. 24). Chirichello (2003)
added “pressures of accountability for student success; insufficient salary; and a lack of
time for a personal life” (p. 356). When potential candidates look at the benefits as
compared to the frustrations and time obligations they may opt not to apply.

At the secondary level, women are not seen as school leaders as regularly as men
are. Women are underrepresented in the educational administrative arena as compared to
the percentage of women that hold teaching positions (Gates et al., 2003; DeAngelis &
O’Connor, 2012). Pounder and Merrill (2001) noted women are an underutilized
population of potential teachers; even though, women earn half of the administrative
degrees and certifications to become an administration.

It was not always the case that White men dominated the leadership positions in
education. Walker (1996) provided examples to show how Black men were the ones in
charge of the schools that served the Black population. This changed after integration
when tens of thousands of Blacks (both school leaders and school teachers) lost their jobs
(McCray, Wright, & Beachum, 2007; Fairclough, 2004). Similar to Walker, Brown
(2005) stated that over the course of history “African Americans have been
underrepresented in school administration. Prior to the 1954 Brown decision (Brown v.
Board of Education, 1954), the majority of African American students attended
segregated public schools that were supervised by African American administrators” (p.
586). Brown (2005) went on to attribute this loss of positions to the Brown v. Board of
Education decision (p. 586) where “many African American principals in formerly
segregated schools lost their positions” (p. 586).
There is a current shortage of Black men and women in education. This shortage could be linked to multiple reasons, some of which could be a shortage of Blacks desiring to enter or entering the potential candidate pool, limited mentoring opportunities, failure to recruit Blacks for leadership programs or certification, and, lastly, failure to promote Blacks to available leadership positions (Foster, 2004; Brown, 2005). Black administrators have been suffering since Brown to reach the level of power and influence in the educational system that they had during the time of segregated schools.

**Understanding the Selection Process**

Myung, Loeb, and Horng (2004) reasoned that one of the most important ways teachers are promoted through the leadership ranks is the process of being tapped. Myung et al. (2004) described the tapping process as an informal selection process where a principal, assistant principal or peer identifies characteristics within a teacher that would be beneficial at the administrative level, and encourages that person to apply for available positions. The emphasis of their research was to “assess the extent to which current teachers are being approached by school leaders to consider leadership and whether this tapping prompts these teachers to consider pursing leadership positions” (p. 697). The purpose was to explore how teachers are being promoted and, in some cases, promoted because of the increased concern for a potential shortage of qualified candidates to fill leadership positions made vacant by the retirement of the generation of “baby boomers.” The possible shortage could be due to misconceptions about teachers’ interests in becoming administrators or perceived daunting challenge that comes with becoming the school administrator (DeAngelis & O’Connor, 2012). The combination of how teachers
are selected and the perception of what it takes to become a school leader could be a potential reason why more Black teachers are not applying for or being selected as school principals.

Tapping varies in terms of what it looks like and how impactful it is. According to Myung et al. (2004) the interaction between principals and teachers can range from a casual conversation to the principal providing time during the school day for the teacher to engage in leadership opportunities that could prepare the teacher for administrative positions. Myung et al. found that there are particular characteristics and behaviors that lead to teachers being tapped, such as the race of the teacher as well as the race of the principal. This was shown when Myung et al. stated that teacher gender and race are significant predictors of being tapped, even after controlling for teaching position, school leadership experience, preparation for school leadership responsibilities, job satisfaction, and interest in becoming a principal in the future. (p. 710)

Another finding from their study on tapping was that white principals were more likely to tap teachers than principals of other races, particularly Black or Hispanic principals. Additionally, Myung et al. pointed out that teachers are more likely to be tapped by someone of the same race. Myung et al. (2004) stated that “male teachers are almost twice as likely to be tapped as female teachers, and Black and Hispanic teachers are 66% and 33% more likely to be tapped than their White colleagues, respectively” (p. 710). The benefit of being tapped is that it leads to “meaningful opportunities to learn about the role and become oriented toward the principalship before ever assuming the
role” (p. 698). From the findings of Myung et al. (2004) we can see the importance of tapping to the potential for being promoted as well as seeing who has the greatest likelihood of being tapped. If the majority of principals are white males and the tendency is to tap those with the same race, Black women teachers are less likely to be tapped, which could be a potential barrier for them on their pursuit of promotion.

**Mentoring and sponsoring.** When looking at how those seeking promotion are able to gain access to additional skills and information about positions the two primary forms of doing so are mentoring and sponsorship.

**Mentoring.** Two of the practices that assist teachers in the transition process from teacher to school administrator are mentoring and sponsorship. Mentoring is a process “where one person provides individual support and challenge to another professional” (Bush, 2009, p. 379). Mentoring is typically provided by a senior or more experienced person or leader to a junior. Recently, there has been greater focus on the pairings for mentors and mentees when they are chosen by the institution or company (Bush 2009; Tillman, 2001). However, this is not common practice in the educational leadership pipeline.

Pocklington and Weindling (1996) argued that “mentoring offers a way of speeding up the process of transition to headship” (Bush, 2009, p. 379). Mentoring provides job experience that makes the transition from teacher to leader a little easier. Likewise, Growe and Montgomery (2000) stated “in order for women to succeed in acquiring administrative positions in education, mentoring must occur” (p. 6). While women may need mentoring in order to gain promotions, seeking those mentoring
relationships may cause inner turmoil as they struggle between seeking a mentor and being seen as weak because of the desired mentoring.

Growe and Montgomery (2000) presented four rationales of why mentoring is beneficial for women. They are:

(a) Mentoring can significantly enhance income and promoting possibilities for individuals experiencing these relationships; (b) mentoring can meet the needs of both women and institutions, and it can also assist in attracting and retaining women and minority professionals in the academic work environment; (c) mentoring of younger workers reduces turnover, helps mentees deal with organizational issues, and accelerates their assimilation into the culture; and (d) the mentees (those women being mentored) benefit because someone cares enough to support them, advise them and help interpret inside information. (p. 6)

Tillman (2001) presented five key dimensions to the mentoring relationship: (1) mentor-protégé pairs; (2) phases of the mentor-protégé relationship; (3) mentor functions; (4) benefits of the protégé; and (5) race and gender in the mentoring relationship (p. 296). Tillman also pointed to literature that stated same-race matches are the most successful relationships in mentoring. She stated that race can influence how much trust and support is shared between the mentor and the mentee (p. 299). However, in her study she found that race did not have a large impact on her study participants, as 9 of the 10 had a mentor of a different race and the mentees reported that it did not hinder their ability to cultivate a relationship. These components serve as examples of the need for mentoring for Black
women teachers who have a desire to come out of the classroom and move into administrative positions.

Despite Tillman’s (2001) findings, there are clear benefits to women having a mentor that is the same race and gender as themselves. Growe and Montgomery (2000) highlighted that women quite often have mentors that are men. However, there are benefits to being able to gain those experiences from another woman. Having those interactions and shared experiences with other women and the knowledge they can bring to the position from a woman’s perspective can be invaluable to a person with aspirations. One of the reasons that males are not as successful as mentors is that they are not connected in the sense of encouraging women to reach the highest leadership positions (Gilbert & Rossman, 1992; Growe and Montgomery, 2000). There are benefits for women when learning from another woman.

**Sponsorship.** A sponsor is someone who serves as an advocate for possible job opportunities (Allen, Jacoson & Lomotey, 1995; DeAngelis & O’Connor, 2012). DeAngelis and O’Connor (2012) summarized studies on the impact of sponsorship or endorsement to show the positive influence that sponsors can have on a teacher’s desire to seek administrative positions (p. 479). In general, the sponsor may simply encourage the person for whom he or she is advocating. Sponsoring is a little different from the mentoring relationship as “mentors help motivate people to move toward their ultimate goals, [while] sponsors enable them to attain them” (Allen et al., 1995, p. 420). There are instances where the sponsor and the mentor may be the same person, but the sponsor and the mentor fulfill two different roles in the promotion process.
Women have a greater sense of need for mentoring and sponsorship relationships than their male counterparts (DeAngelis & O’Connor, 2012). The need for these relationships for women could be tied to the innate nature of men promoting and advocating on behalf of other men, or women feeling that they need someone to help them move through the pipeline due to few mentors and role models being available (Growe & Montgomery, 2000; Myung et al., 2004). Having a mentor or sponsor is a way for women and Blacks to be able to access job opportunities that may not have otherwise been available to them.

**Understanding Their Role**

Some Black women in educational leadership positions have difficulty with the new role that they are undertaking as a school principal, as their experiences are framed by their male counterparts (Horsford, 2012). Reed (2012) expressed that “at the school level, issues of race and gender are critical within the leadership ranks” (p. 39). One of the issues at the leadership level is that “school districts often assign Black principals in general and Black female principals in particular to schools that are largely Black, poor, and under resourced” (Horsford, 2012, p. 13). The environment that Black women work in has an impact on the way they are perceived and how well they thrive. However, Beibly (2012) expressed that Blacks who are working in environments where they are not the majority may receive less support than their counterparts in regards to mentoring and social networking (p. 21), which leads to the notion that Black principals may struggle to get the proper support they need to lead effectively.

**Summary**
The path to becoming a principal is not the same for any two people regardless of race or gender, but there are some similarities in those experiences based on race and gender. In this section I also furthered an understanding of what it means to be a principal in general and a secondary (high school) principal in particular. I highlighted some aspects that help ease the process of transitioning into the principalship for teachers, such as mentoring and sponsorship. Mentoring and sponsorship can ease the promotion process by the applicant having the desired experiences prior to starting a new position and through having an advocate to open doors that someone cannot access by themselves. Highly tied to mentoring and sponsorship was the idea of tapping and the potential of tapping to change a person’s professional trajectory. In the next section, I introduce the barriers that Black women can potentially face when they are seeking promotion in educational leadership.

**The Barriers to Advancement**

**Understanding Advancement for Black Women**

Although the majority of teachers are women, women have limited opportunities to move out of the classroom. Alston (2012) found that “as with many feminized professions, women faced restrictions in leadership opportunities. While many possessed strong leadership skills, only a few found their way to positions of leadership inside and outside of education” (p. 128). This phenomenon is true for women in general as well as for Black women specifically.

The conditions that keep Black women from being promoted or obtaining the highest position within a company structure are described as either a glass ceiling (Jean-
Marie, Williams & Sherman, 2009) or a concrete ceiling (Cullen & Luna, 1993), and many Black women must work to overcome, shatter, or breakthrough these barriers. According to Reed (2012),

given our societal perception that women are less than the men, it becomes a struggle for some to see women in leadership roles and for women to even see themselves effectively in leadership. In many cases, women who are deemed effective leaders are also perceived to behave more like men leaders. (p. 40)

Growe and Montgomery (2000) resonated a similar notion, stating that “since gender is a hindrance to women leaders, some [feel] compelled to lead in the manner that is considered the norm; that is, the way that men lead” (p. 2). In order for women to be successful as leaders, they have to understand the value of being a female leader, have the determination to show that their leadership matters, and be able to help others understand the necessity of the work that they do.

One of the issues that Black women face once in leadership positions is a degree of isolation. This isolation is seen through being the only, or one of only a few Black women in the particular leadership positions, or through having limited opportunities to advance to those positions. Bielbly (2012) summarized racial isolation as a problem when the “dominant group forms tight social networks that have control over resources” (p. 22). This is what sociologist Tilly (2003) defined as “opportunity hoarding” (p. 34). Bielbly (2012) went on to say that

social science research shows that African Americans and other persons of color in predominantly white work settings receive less support in the form of
mentorship and professional development and are more likely to be socially isolated and excluded from informal workplace social networks than their white peers (p. 21).

Since Blacks are socially isolated in the workplace, they may try to find social networks among themselves to fill this void.

One of the support networks that Blacks can create is through social and professional organizations. However, while networks can provide useful emotional support, they can also impede the upward mobility of their members. Wilson, Sakura-Lemessey and West (1999) argued that Blacks can place themselves in social circles that limit their ability to advance. Wilson et al. (1999) stated that “segregated networks limit opportunities to demonstrate job-relevant personal qualities to prospective employers (p. 169). These social or professional circles may serve particular purposes, but could also create a limiting effect on advancement since Black professionals may rely solely on their friendships for upward mobility and/or fail to branch into more racially diverse groups.

Black women can limit themselves by relying on job networking opportunities provided through Black only or Black women only professional organizations (Wilson, Sakura-Lemessey & West, 1999). Wilson et al. (1999) stated that joining raced or raced and gendered social and professional organizations disproportionately happens with Blacks. This tendency can further disadvantage Black women as the majority of control lies within White social circles and networks that Black women do not tend to belong to, and are possibly not allowed to join.

Understanding Societal Depictions of Black Women
In regards to Black women in society, Ladson-Billings (2009) stated “rarely do we find depictions of Black women as model teachers and mothers” (p. 89). Though Ladson-Billings specifically spoke of how these portrayals impacted classroom teachers, I would like to expand the notion to also account for the impact that the depictions could have on Black women as school leaders. If Black women are not regarded as proper educators, making the transition into leadership roles become even more challenging because there is a lack of value associated with what Black women bring to the table as school leaders.

The depiction of Black women in society impacts women in education as well as other careers in their ability to lead as these depictions become the lens that Black women are seen through. Black women have to battle against how they are portrayed in the media to be seen as skilled, knowledgeable and experienced in the workplace. The depictions of Black women tend to fall into three categories: the caregiver, the mean woman, and the hypersexualized woman (Collins, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Ladson-Billings (2009) described these three categories in her portrayals of black women which include the “Mammy,” the “Jezebel,” and “Sapphire.” The Mammy represents the caregiver. The Mammy is not seen as someone who warmly and lovingly takes care of her family, she is instead “the brutal reality of slavery” who was “coerced into caring for and raising the children of [her] slave master” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 89). Ladson-Billings (2009) went on to explain that “rather than admire the sacrifice of such women, the popular re-articulation of Mammy positions her as cold and callous, even neglectful to her own children and family while simultaneously overly solicitous toward Whites” (p.
Collins (1991) described the Mammy as a “faithful, obedient servant” (p. 71). That is, someone who is used to represent the desired relationship between the white family and the black female, and someone who knows and accepts the role of subordinate that she has. The Mammy is seen as a “grossly overweight, jolly, unattractive, dark complexioned woman who is asexual- living only to serve the master, mistress and their children” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 89). The Mammy was the nurturer. Nurturing in itself is not a bad trait to have as a leader, particularly in education, however Black educators want to be seen as more than someone who is there to be a second parent to the students.

The second figure presented by Ladson-Billings was the “Jezebel” model of a “physically attractive and seductive woman” (p. 89). The hypersexualized figure, Jezebel “is synonymous with promiscuity, and insatiable sexual appetite and someone who uses sex to manipulate men” (p. 89).

The final category of portrayals was the Sapphire character. Sapphire is “stubborn, bitchy, bossy and hateful” (p. 89). She is also “spiteful and difficult” (p. 89). According to Ladson-Billings (2009), “Sapphire became the archetype of Black womanhood and the reason for enmity between Black men and women” (p. 89). These views of Black women are repeatedly emphasized by media outlets and personified by the usage of social media today.

Along with the idea of Sapphire as a mean-spirited Black woman is the link to education and the perception that Black women teachers and leaders are mean. The negative perceptions of Black women educators are not limited to P-12 education, but
also extend to educators in higher education. Redmond (2014) stated, “being a black academic is an uphill battle” (para. 9). When questioned about her beliefs on authority for Black women and how to earn it, Redmond stated that society forgets “that white privilege gives certain groups (in particular white men) immediate merit and authority. No one questions their authority or whether they deserve their status,” but that is not the same for Black women, “even after earning a doctorate and being hired in a very competitive academic market” (Redmond, 2014, para. 11). Often times Black women are called angry or mean when that is not the case. Of all the depictions, the mean or angry Black woman is one of the most commonly used phrases.

Black women must prove their merit. For women and minorities, it is a frustrating process. It creates feelings of not having the same status as their counterparts, which creates distance between them and their colleagues and their students. This distance can be perceived as meanness, being cold, or even anger. Redmond (2014) stated that some of her students questioned whether she deserved to be in charge of the classroom. She detailed how she would ensure that she was prepared for each class and would do her best to make sure that the students did not have grounds to question her authority. That is something that is felt by many minority leaders, especially minority women leaders. Redmond went on to explain that she saw “the benefit of going mean. It creates a distance that inhibits questioning a professor’s authority or devaluing that person” (para. 16). Black women in leadership positions are often hindered or obstructed if they do not appear to be warm and friendly (Collins, 1991), but the reality of maintaining that jovial or pleasant demeanor is not always a simple task.
Understanding Strength

I previously discussed the depictions of Black women in American society. In this section, I discuss one of the ways Black women see themselves, and highlight some of the lessons Black women learn and internalize as children, and how those can affect their mental and physical state as they move into adulthood.

As children, Black women learn the necessity of being strong, the importance of self-worth and the requirement of working hard for anything they want to obtain. Brown, Haygood and McLean (2010) highlighted this very notion as one of their “MAMAsisms” (lessons Black women learn from their mothers) when they stated “nothing worth having comes easy,” “you have to work twice as hard as everyone else to get anywhere,” and “you are worthy and deserving of having the best of everything” (p. 7). Standing alone, the individual statements may not reflect a significant component of the Black woman’s mindset, but collectively the statements speak to the experiences that Black mothers want to prepare their daughters for when they leave the home and try to pursue their goals. Collectively, the statements give voice to the systemic racism and sexism that Black women encounter. Black women have to learn early and from a loving place that they matter and that the journey to success is going to be long and arduous.

Nelson, Cardemil, and Adeoye (2016) brought out the idea of superwoman or being a “Strong Black Woman” (SBW) (p. 551) in their discussion of how the concept of being strong and exhibiting strength is impacting Black women and how the internalization of this “strength” standard that Black women are setting for themselves is affecting their lives and overall well-being. According to Beaubiou-Lafontant (2009),
strength is considered one of the defining qualities of Black womanhood. Nelson et al. (2016) went on to explain that “strength has been posited as a culturally specific coping mechanism critical for the survival of women [of] African descent” (p. 551). This means that not all women of color are struggling with this archetype.

This SBW notion is unique to the Black woman, therefore it may be difficult for others to understand and identify with the weight that comes with it as well as understanding the impact that it may have on other areas of the Black woman’s life. The ideal of the strong Black woman “requires an invulnerability that often results in a disconnect between the Black woman and others” (Holmes, White, Mills, & Mickel, 2011, p. 74). Having this disconnect between herself and others could not only impact her personal life, but also her professional life and ability to convey to others that she is the best candidate for the job.

When thinking of the embodiment of a strong Black woman being a coping mechanism for racism and sexism in American society (Holmes et al., 2011; Nelson et al., 2016), it is important to look at how Black women have been historically framed for their ability to endure difficult situations. For Black women principals, their difficulties could lie in the job that they have obtained, the manner in which they have been able to obtain this position, and the complications and sacrifices that they have had to make. Harris-Lacewell (2001) supposed that Black women have been “reduced by a racist and patriarchal society to caricatures of their true selves, African American women have consistently fought to define their actual existences within the constraints imposed by these external images” (p.2).
In their study of 30 Black women and their understanding of the superwoman role or Strong Black Woman perception, Nelson, Cardemil, and Adeoye (2016) stated that “although historical accounts of enslaved Black women emphasize strength, it is important to acknowledge that enslaved Black women were considered and treated as property” (p. 55). When Black women slaves are referenced in historical accounts, a connection is frequently made between all that she went through for her family and how she managed to endure those actions through her personal strength and knowing that she needed to take care of her family. The stories of women such as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Rosa Parks serve as examples of historically strong women. The historical accounts of these women have been used to emphasize the societal and cultural standard that has been set for Black women. Each of these women endured tough situations and were able to come through as triumphant in one manner or another.

Through their overcoming a task that most would not fathom, they became a standard for other Black women to emulate. Though these are not the only examples, it may be an unhealthy connection to link the standard for behavior and emotional health for Black women to the actions of an enslaved person, a “person who labored at great personal expense” (Nelson et al., 2016, p. 553). Connected to the examination of the historical perception of strength, Beauboef-Lafontant (2009) argued that “to assert the idea of strong Black women during slavery, segregation or contemporary institutional racism and intra-racial sexism is to maintain a reassuring conviction: that personal actions and agency trump all manner of social abuse” (p. 3). Therefore, the strong Black woman archetype may simply be serving as a means to “defend and maintain a stratified social
order by obscuring Black women’s experiences with suffering, acts of desperation and anger” (Beauroeuf-Lafontant, 2009, p. 2) and does not promote a healthy mindset or ideal for Black women to model in their lives. Black women principals in most cases are considered to be very strong women. They are doing to the a very important job within the school. They are the leaders and the school as a whole is dependent on them for guidance, vision, support and direction. For Black women principals, they have a unique stance in being strong as they may not be able to get the same level of support that they need as they may see it as a being weak or not being suited for their job.

**Drawbacks of being strong.** Holmes, White, Mills, and Mickel (2011) stated that women who identify with the Strong Black Woman archetype “generally have unsatisfying relationships [and that they] try to be all things to all people and do not ensure that their needs are being met” (p.77). This level of self-sacrifice ultimately affects the Black woman’s mental and physical health as she does not spend as much time dedicated to her well-being as she should and also because visiting with mental health specialists may be seen as a sign of weakness (Beauroeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Holmes, White, Mills, & Mickel, 2011; Watson & Hunter, 2016). An anonymous author characterized the experience of the Strong Black Woman in the poem, “Death of the Strong Black Woman” when he expressed:

> While struggling with the reality of being a human instead of a myth, the strong black woman passed away… she died from: being silent when she should have been screaming, milling when she should have been raging, being sick & not wanting to know because her pain might inconvenience them…She died from the
lies her grandmother told her mother & her mother told her about life, men & racism…She died from myths that would not allow her to show weakness [without] being chastised … she was stomped to death by racism and sexism.

The author of the poem is in agreeance with the presented literature in regards to the notion that the strong Black woman stereotype is unhealthy.

Black women often put the needs of others before themselves, but self-identification as the strong Black women is not all bad. Harris-Lacewell (2001) stated that “in many ways the strong black woman is an affirming symbol. She has a superhuman capacity for facing the challenges imposed by her race, sex and class” (p. 2). Watson and Hunter (2016) tried to provide a balanced perspective of the strong Black woman schema through their research. Watson and Hunter felt that the research on the SBW ideal was either to support it or to discuss the negative impacts that it can have on Black women. However, they strove to blend the two vantage points to talk about how the SBW ideal can have both impacts on Black women. In their findings, Watson and Hunter presented three “tensions for the SBW race-gender schema” (p.433) as they related to the 13 women in their study. Those tensions were: (1) be psychologically durable yet do not engage in behaviors that preserve psychological durability; (2) be equal yet be oppressed; and (3) be feminine yet reject traditional feminine norms” (p. 433). All of their findings show how being a strong Black woman has a positive impact on Black women, but, when taken to the extreme, it can become harmful to the overall mental and physical health. The symbolism of the Strong Black Woman allows the Black woman to be “a comfort to black men, a role model to black children and a champion of
her community” (Harris-Lacewell, 2001, p. 2). Typically, Black women principals fulfilled that role for the students, teachers and communities that they serve.

**Understanding Racism**

In order to fully understand the experience of Black people in the American South, there must be a discussion of systemic racism and how it plays a part in the undercurrent of all that Blacks perceive and how it may potentially impact choices made in their professional lives. This discussion will begin here with some background of the history of racism in the South and how that historical perspective impacts the educational system today. Understanding racism is an experience that is both individual and collective (Collins, 1990; Felgar, 2015). In this section, I explain racism from the vantage of the collective and not the individual.

To understand racism as a cultural norm in the United States, I begin by presenting information beginning with slavery and move from there into the current state of racism and its impact on society, specifically the education system. Slavery in the United States lasted for over four hundred years. Those that are currently known as the Blacks (not the same as those who self-identify as Africans but possibly the same as some of the people brought to the Caribbean Islands) in the United States were brought here via the transatlantic slave trade. The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 was written and signed into law to free all enslaved Blacks in Confederate states only as a means of allowing those slaves to join the Union army (Felgar, 2015). There are differing opinions on when the practice of slavery officially ended within all states after the Emancipation Proclamation. However, the 13th Amendment (1865) is the official
declaration that ended slavery in the United States, while the 14th Amendment (1868) allowed equal status (Felgar, 2015). Ending slavery and giving Blacks equal status did not, however, end racism in the United States.

The ending of slavery ushered in almost 80 years of segregation in the American South. This period became known as the “Jim Crow Era” and lead to the Civil Rights Movement, and the questioning of the separate but equal ruling from Plessy v. Ferguson notion that governed society in the South including the educational system. Though the impacts of racism in education will be discussed more thoroughly in a later section, it is important to acknowledge that not all that was done in the segregated schools was negative. A lot of the learning experiences that Black students had, as well as the support and encouragement that was available to Black teachers and administrators from the Black community allowed Black students to thrive in those learning environments. The issues were primarily centered in the inadequate structures and resources that the students had.

Racism and racial discrimination touch all aspects of the lives of people of color in America, especially Blacks. Shams (2015) listed some of those specific areas to be: housing, income and wealth, the workforce, health, law, and education. One of the most vital areas of impact is on the healthcare that Black people have access to, as it impacts all other facets of the person’s life. According to Peek, Odoms-Young, Quinn, Gorawara-Bhat, Wilson and Chin (2010), racism can affect the healthcare that Blacks are able to obtain. Peek et al. (2010) examined the impact of “mistrust of white physicians, negative attitudes and internalized racism” influence the healthcare that Blacks with diabetes
receive. Feagin and Bennefield (2013) looked at the impact of systemic racism on the overall health care of Blacks. In their article, Feagin and Bennefield provided additional examples of how Black women have been mistreated and abused through the medical professional such as involuntary hysterectomies, eugenics, and the testing of several birth control brands. Feagin and Bennefield (2013) stated that “unjustly inherited white resources and continuing discrimination restrict access to many Americans of color to better jobs, quality education, healthy neighborhoods, quality healthcare, and political power” (p.8). The restricted access that Blacks have to those resources can have limiting effects for generations to come.

As I move into the next section to examine the impact of racism on the educational system, it is important to remember that racism is still with us today in all aspects of daily life. Racism is not simply about looking at how life is unfair for Blacks and other people of color. It is important to remember that slavery in the United States established a great deal of wealth for Whites that they have been able to sustain and increase over the centuries while excluding Blacks from opportunities at financial stability (Feagin, 2006). Racism must be understood as a social structure, that it is purposefully designed to create division between groups of people, and that it is engrained in all that the society does and how it operates.

**Understanding racism in education.** Bonilla-Silva (1997) defined racism as a threelfold structure. The three components are (1) that racism is a set beliefs or ideals that govern a body; (2) that those beliefs develop prejudices or bias for one group against another through negative attitudes; and lastly (3) that the beliefs or ideals around racism
can cause related actions due the mindset. Those actions can come in the form of discrimination. In the educational system, the most discussed actions related to racism and racial discrimination are the treatment of Black students in the classroom and within the schooling system as a whole.

The discussion of education for Blacks in the US most commonly start with a how slaves were typically uneducated during slavery. Though an exception, Bly (2013) provided examples of slaves in Virginia being educated to read but not how to write. Bly (2013) stated that slave masters were forbidden by law in some states to educate their slaves beyond basic reading skills. During the post-slavery period, schools in the South were still segregated, and education for Blacks was not equal to that of their White counterparts. McDonald (2009) noted that the school segregation was “an integral part of an extraordinary edifice of racial segregation, and dismantling it proved to be an onerous, time-consuming task” (p. 88). However, not all were in agreement with the notion that the segregation of schools was the issue as much as the lack of resources and funding that was available for Blacks students, teachers, and schools in general.

At the time of Brown v. the Board of Education, Blacks were educating themselves and providing an opportunity for their children to learn while the Black community shouldered the cost of that education (Anderson, 1988; Siddle-Walker, 1996). The belief among Whites in the South was “that blacks should be politically disenfranchised and fitted for the physical drudgery of unskilled farm and domestic labor” (Anderson, 1988. p. 40). Fast-forward several decades and Black students are still struggling to be successful in the classroom. It has been noted by many that students who
do not do well academically are being setup for a life of financial struggle (Books, 2004; Hagan, 1993). Shams (2015) went further in her discussion to explain that teachers “unintentionally perpetuate existing inequalities by awarding the already privileged (wealthy White students) and penalizing the already oppressed (poor Black students)” (p.286). This interaction with teachers is happening without the teacher acknowledging that he or she is acting in a racist manner (Shams, 2015). This type of interaction relates primarily to White teachers’ treatment of Black students in the learning environment. The effects of segregation and the resistance to integration in schools is still felt by students in today’s classroom as the education system was used as a tool of Americanization” (Carroll, 2016) and that tool is used to “empower or disempower” certain groups (Carroll, 2016, p. 78). Blacks are the victim of disempowerment within schools.

The bulk of racial issues in schools were thought to be resolved through the integration of schools in the hopes that it would benefit students and provide equal access to education. Yet, according to Smrekar, Honey, and Williams (2016), a decrease in the mixing of races, or integration, has occurred in schools since the 1990s and one of the areas of the most rapid growth is the US South is called re-segregation. Scheel (2016) noted that desegregation is used to describe “social patterns in housing and schools when the level of segregation is increasing, or, alternatively, as the rates of exposure of students of color to white students in schools is decreasing” (p. 273). The current trend toward the re-segregation of schools is, in theory, reversing the positive benefits of school integration.
Understanding the impact of race in leadership. While there is no longer an official system of segregation in America, there are still many lasting impacts of it. Nelson, Cardemil and Adeoye (2016) underscored how the impact of “the enslavement of African women in the United States continues to affect the lives of Black women today” (p. 551). Nelson et al. (2016) went on to explain how the actions related to slavery in the United States affects the continuation of racist, sexist, and classist thinking in within American society. Black women are still not seen as equal in the workplace. Black women are still finding ways to create equality in their professional lives to help bring some element of balance to all that they are taught as a child about how they are less than others.

One of the tips that Brown, Hagood and McLean (2010) gave to Black women is to think positively. Positive thinking and positive self-talk is one way to become a great leader. Brown et al. (2010) stated that “negative self-talk can lower your expectations, and do damage to your self-confidence and leadership ability” (p. 9). Black women should not allow racism to become an excuse, but rather to use racism as a means of motivation to work harder to accomplish their goals (Brown, Hagood & McLean, 2010). Within the field of education, racism is just as present as in other fields. In conducting this study, I was able to closely examine the ways that racism present itself to the women who participated in the study.

Understanding Sexism

To begin to study the ways that sexism can impact the lives of Black women secondary school principals, it is necessary to begin by looking at the history of sexism in
the United States. Sexism, as with racism, can be defined as a set of behaviors or actions exhibited towards a person or group of people that have the same sex, by another person or people (Attenborough, 2013). Sexism includes bias or discrimination based on the gender or sex of a person. At its simplest, the assumption with sexism is that women or men are less capable of certain roles, behaviors, or jobs based on their sex, but sexism and the embedded gender roles in American society are very complicated. For women desiring secondary educational leadership positions, sexism could hinder their promotion as women are not seen as suitable for that position.

Sexism has a long history, which I briefly describe before getting to ways of identifying it and perceptions associated with sexist behaviors. A second definition of sexism is “a set of attitudes that are institutionalized, a pattern that is established through use, such that it can be reproduced almost independently of individual will” (Ahmed, 2015, p. 10). The definition provided by Ahmed, as opposed to the first definition given, exhibits the ingrained nature of sexism within society as a whole and also within the individual person, to the degree that it may be subconscious. Some of the definitions of sexism are problematic as they do not speak to all of the complexities of the word.

One of the ways to begin dissecting and understanding sexism is to view it as a problem with a name. Sexism, unlike some other societal woes, has a name, and by giving an issue a name, you can begin to look at, examine, and, in theory, find solutions to the problem (Ahmed, 2015). Todd and Huey (1975) provided an understanding of how a problem is perceived and stated directly impacts how the problem is reasoned. Sexism is not accepted by all as a necessary truth to discuss. Sexism is seen as an issue that exists
only for those who are looking to see it. Ahmed (2015) articulated that “sexism is often denied, because it is seen as a fault of perception; something is sexist because you perceive it that way: you perceive wrongly when you perceive a wrong” (p. 8).

Black women principals, like women in general, face sexism on the job and in their promotion process. Black women principals historically have not spoken out about the sexism that they face in the position of school head as there is not a present voice in the literature. It would take a level of acknowledgement for a women still working as a principal to speak out for herself about the sexism that she faces. Therefore, what I strived to do through this research study was to give them a place where they could speak about situations around sexism that have impacted their journey to their current position and how it may have hindered their future promotion process.

One of the important points that Ahmed (2015) went on to empathize is that calling a situation or event sexist does not create a situation that did not previously exist, you are requiring a modification to the meaning of an event and questioning the status quo which is not going to be unchallenged by others. One of the benefits of being able to name sexism as an event in the lives of people, predominately women, is that naming sexism is a way of exposing the injustices that it brings with it. Calder-Dawe (2015) stated that this naming forces people who would often forget to “recognize systems, ideas, and practices as sexist disturbs and threatens many of those implicated within them” (p. 90). She went on to point out how acknowledging sexism is uncomfortable and that the person “who points sexism out is the visible source” (p. 90). There has to be
someone within the organization or institution who is willing to point out the existence of sexist practices and norms.

There must be an understanding of how harmful sexism can be and how to begin the conversation about speaking out. Calder-Dawe (2015) stated that “when sexism is routinely presented as harmless, its harms become difficult to see and speak of, even as they accumulate around us” (p. 90). In 2011, Gill called for a revitalization of sexism both in word as well in the associated dialogue around the word. Gill (2011) felt that due to misuse and shame associated with discussing and identifying sexism, the conversation around the topic went silent. In the call for a revitalization was the understanding that sexism was in many ways seen as a dirty word and that it is virtually unspeakable.

In agreement with Gill, Calder-Dawe (2015) contributed that “the ‘unspeakability’ of sexism is more than an absence of talk: it is a structured silence” (Calder- Dawe, 2015, p. 91). Sexism has become difficult to talk about in the workplace but there is a necessity for the conversation as it not only impacts the women who face these hurdles and overcome them, but also impacts the women who wish to be promoted but are not able to because of the systems in place (Ahmed, 2015; Gill, 2011). For Black women principals, having the conversation about sexism, and the impact that it has on the workplace and their promotion opportunities is perhaps an important component in helping other Black women reach the principalship.

Oftentimes the framing of the discussion of women and sexism is centered on White women and their plight from homemaker to employed. Rosie the Riveter is undeniably one of the most iconic images depicting the necessity of women in the
workforce during World War II. According to Berg (2009) during WWII “six million women were recruited into the labor force” (p. 3). Approximately sixty percent of them were married women, and large numbers of them had small children in the home. These women went into the workforce to fill a void in the industry vacated when their sons, brothers, and husbands were called to active duty in the United States armed forces (Epstein, 2014; Friedan, 2013). The fight for women’s rights and equality gave the right to vote in 1920s, but the fight for equality on other fronts continued and are still going on today.

Though women in general face the glass ceiling, Black women specifically have an even greater burden when accounting for both race and gender. For a Black woman in the world of academia there are greater hurdles with promotion to tenure positions. In education, fewer Black women are heads of school and even fewer are school district superintendents. The role of women in the workplace in the 1960s had women in “low-paying, low-status positions- secretaries, waitresses, sales clerks, nurses” (Berg, 2009, p.22). Berg (2009) went on to give the example of want ads that separated jobs between men and women.

To understand the fluidity of sexism is to see it as “an agile, dynamic, changing, and diverse set of malleable representations and practices of power” (Gill, 2011, p. 62). One of the leaders moving sexism forward as a movement was Betty Friedan. Her 1963 work, The Feminine Mystique, served as a critique of the American society of the time. Freidan helped to propel the conversation about allowing women into the workplace even though she mentioned very little about Black women and their needs within the work
setting. Friedan (2013) sought to point out the impact of boredom for women due to being refrained from the workforce and restricted to the life of a wife and mother. *The Feminine Mystique* centered on women asking the question of themselves and society of whether motherhood and being a good wife is all that she is supposed to be and whether there is not something greater and more fulfilling that she can do with her life.

**Sexism in the workplace.** Sexism in the workplace has a long history. The way that sexism manifests today is different than years priors. Sexism as an organic system of American culture does remain the same, it changes and morphs over time. Berg (2009) detailed the male mindset during the early 1960s when she discussed the lack of desire from men to have to compete with women in the workplace. Berg went on to talk about men’s desires to keep women within certain confines by “limiting the number of hours a woman could work, not allowing her overtime, denying her promotions if she married, and firing her when she became pregnant” (p. 23).

Although women have more protection today from firings or discrimination based on gender, they are not completely free of the consequences of gender in hiring and promotion practices. As an example, an employer cannot refuse to hire a visibly pregnant woman based on the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) as pregnancy is seen as a temporary disability or medical condition. The employer however, can say that someone is more suited for the job if he or she sees the pregnancy as a hurdle that he would have to temporarily accommodate. Another example is that some jobs prefer women to not have small children in the home. While an interviewer would not be able to directly ask a question about children in the home, if it were mentioned by the woman during the
interview, it could be a contributing factor of not obtaining that position. This findings is supported by anecdotal conversations I have had with previous colleagues who felt male job applicants were more desired for these administrative positions as the hours are long and men were perceived to have fewer obligations within the home.

One of the interesting notions that Calder-Dawe (2014) discussed in her findings from research about the interactions of young people in Auckland, New Zealand had with sexism through their daily activities and engagements with others was the concept of sexism being more indirect or in a manner that would be easy to deny. Calder-Dawe (2015) described it as a person demonstrating “sexism while plausibly denying that anything genuinely sexist had taken place” through the usage of determined maneuvers and actions, which Williamson (2003) called “sexism with an alibi” (para 7).

Looking at the ways that sexism does or does not appear in the workplace is a way of understanding how men, women and society as a whole view sexism. This notion of behaving in a particular manner, and feeling that you are able to get away with your actions creates a work environment that makes the sexist actions harder to identify as sexist and even harder to discuss or report.

**Understanding Racism and Sexism**

Sexism and racism are both forms of oppression. Frye (1983) extracted the word “press” from “oppression” and went on to expound eloquently that “something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict or prevent the thing’s motion or mobility. Mold. Immobilize. Reduce” (p. 2). This definition of oppression captures the desire of any
person who is racist or sexist, that is, they have a desire to hold others within certain confines. Frye (1983) presented another relevant example through her bird and the birdcage metaphor. She compared a system of oppression within the workplace to that of a birdcage, and the bird to a woman who is trapped within the “network of systemically related barriers, no one of which would be the least hindrance to [the bird’s] flight, but which, by their relations to each other, are as confining as the solid walls of a dungeon” (p. 5).

When compared to the systems within the educational system for Black women principals, the system is just as complex as that holding the bird inside. Perhaps more so, because, even if a Black woman is able to make it to the level of principal, she may not be able to move further if she aspires.

Consistent with the previous discussion regarding the depiction of Black women in society, Frye (1983) explained that the bird in the cage is not seen an individual but more a group of people that are “systemically reduced, molded, immobilized” (p. 8). Connected to those depictions to Black women, Frye (1983) related that for an oppressed person to have “anything but the sunniest countenance exposes us to being perceived as mean, bitter, angry or dangerous” (Frye, 1983, p. 2). Farmer (1990) vocalized that racial and sexual biases dictate that the African American woman administrator be all things to all people. If she does not allow herself to be treated in this manner, she is considered cold, unapproachable, antisocial, and not a team player (p. 204).
This statement reiterates the burden that the oppressed person has to carry, and speaks to the potential impact that oppression can have in the workplace if a person is perceived in a particular, negative manner.

Racism and sexism are not the same as they were in the past, but that does not mean that they are gone from American society, or that they are not present with the systems at play within corporations, in this regard, the school system. Racism and sexism are ever evolving and changing. Racism and sexism are more concealed and disguised than they used to be; they are perhaps much less overt. In the preface of his book on the changing values in American business, Fernandez (1941) noted that his book was designed to make women and minorities “recognize that even before they were allowed to become corporate managers, the corporate-employment processes were unfair. Thus, they must carefully distinguish between racist and sexist acts of the corporate-employment system and the general unfairness of the system” (p. xxi). Fernandez went on to explain that the book “should help make these distinctions clearer. In addition, it will assist them in understanding, coping and overcoming their oppression” (p. xxi).

Almost 80 years later, these words are just as true as they were when they were originally written. Women and minorities are still fighting to be a part of a system that is not as willing to accept them and allow them to be a part of it.

**Systemic and institutional issues of racism and sexism.** Racism and sexism are ingrained systems within the United States. And both racism and sexism impact the daily lives of Black women leaders. In their discussion of what it takes for a Black woman to lead, Brown, Hagood and McLean (2010) articulated two types of prejudice that Black
women have to confront, individual and systemic racism. Feagin and Bennefield (2013) argued that the terms “bias or prejudice” are not strong enough to express the depth of the problem in American society and rather words such as “systemic racism, white discriminators, white racial framing” should be used to provide the proper framing of the “racial realities” (p. 8). Systemic racism is the term that is used to describe the longstanding, “well-entrenched” (Feagin, 2006, p. 1) tradition of racial oppression of Blacks in the United States. Feagin professed that systemic racism, more than simply racial intolerance or prejudice racism, is an all-encompassing ideology that includes “attitudes, emotions, habits, actions and institutions” (p. 2). Feagin described five dimensions of racism: (1) the racial hierarchy; (2) the White Racial Frame; (3) discrimination; (4) the social reproduction of racial oppression; and (5) institutional racism (p. 21-48). Using these five dimensions helps to provide the framework to understanding how America has maintained a system of “white privilege…and racialized institutions” (Feagin & Bennefield, 2013, p. 7). “White privilege” creates a system of imbalance in the American culture that other races are not able to access nor are they fully able to understand the extent of this social mechanism.

Where systemic racism is about the traditions and practices embedded in society as a whole, institutional racism is more specifically about the practices that happen within a particular organizations, businesses or social entities. Scheurich and Young (1997) described institutional racism as occurring “when institutions or organizations, including educational ones, have standard operating procedures (intended or unintended) that hurt members of one or more races in relation to members of the dominant race” (p. 5).
Institutional racism can also extend to the organization’s “culture, rules, habits, or usage of symbols” (Scheurich & Young, 1997, p. 5). An example of institutional practices that could be deemed as institutional racism are norms in place that would hinder a Black woman from being promoted to principal because she is a Black person. Additionally, this circumstance could also be institutional sexism if there were practices, norms and perceived cultures in place that would hinder her on the basis of her gender.

Examination of the systemic and institutional racist and sexist practices in the United States can be easily connected to the reflexive tenant offered through Black feminist thought (Collins, 1991). Moore (2012) stated that failure to center discussions on systemic racism through a reflexive lens leads to the overlooking of many “important aspects of racial dynamics of power. Using the usage of Black feminist thought as my epistemological perspective, I am called by Collins (1991) to examine the matrix of domination, the connections between myself and the topic that I am studying, and the manner in which multiple factors converge into the social knowledge that I am striving to produce.

**Understanding the Good Ol’ Boys**

One of the more frequently discussed notions of why certain groups of people cannot move through certain social circles or gain promotions is because they are not a part of the “Good Ole Boy Club.” That is, they are not a part of the tight-knit circle of influence that determines who can be promoted and who cannot. In her examination of the stories of 10 African-American women in upper level management positions, Byrd (2009) began highlighting the issues of exclusion from the “good ole boy” social
network. Byrd defined the “good ole boy social network” as a “system that allows racial prejudice to linger and endure and as a result create a social stratification usually across racial lines” (p. 591). Byrd explained that this particular social network is designed to “keep a barrier in place that excludes African American women leaders from social circles where opportunities may exist to advance” (p. 591). One of the points that McQuaid (1991) made was that the concept of the “Good Ole Boy” club is still an active notion in the business world. In his article, McQuaid (1991) described a woman who, stated that although things are much better for women, also acknowledged that she worked in a male-dominated environment and that she could feel tinges of competition and jealousy from her male counterparts. One of her colleagues was even cited in the article providing evidence of the chauvinism that existed in this specific business domain. Black women principals would need to be allowed into these social circles in order to ensure promotion. However, they typically are not allowed in.

The concept of the “Good Ole Boy” network or collective is steeped in the notion of homophily, which is the need to be with others like ourselves (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Brown, Hagood and McLean (2010) stated that “people tend to do more favors for those they know and those they feel to be like them; people who share their nationality, social class, and perhaps religion, race, employer, or alma mater” (p.13). The notion of the Good Ole Boy group is different from Black social circles and professional groups in the essence of the power that it has. Black groups do not have the power to aide or hinder the promotion process for others in the same way that the “Good Ole Boy” network does.
Summary

In this section of the literature review, I illustrated the obstacles that lie ahead for Black women who strive to reach the secondary school principalship. The totality of barriers that they face were summarized as institutional and systemic racism and sexism. All of the barriers they face from social depictions, including strength, and the impact that it has on Black women, to the social circles that they are not allowed into, are centered on either their race, their gender or the intersection of their race and gender. In this section I provided an essential understanding of Black women’s transition experiences and the factors that limit the number of Black women in secondary leadership positions. Not all Black women will face all of these barriers but most will encounter them in some form or fashion. I concluded this section with the literature on understanding why Black women should be educational leaders, what it means to be an educational leader, and the barriers of leading schools for Black women. In the subsequent section I discuss my epistemological perspective and the theoretical framework that I implemented in my research study. In the final component of chapter two I discuss the necessity of this literature and link it to extant research calling for more research in this area.

Epistemological Perspective and Theoretical Framework

The epistemological perspective and theoretical framework that were implemented for this research study were Black feminist thought and critical race feminism, respectively. They were chosen because of the connections that they strive to make between what it means to be a woman, what it means to be Black, and, ultimately,
what it means to be a Black woman. The rationale behind why Black feminist thought and critical race feminism were chosen to represent my epistemological perspective and theoretical framework was the intersectional identity of what it means to be a Black woman, and what it means to live without the inability to be just Black or just a woman. Understanding that inability to dwell in just one identity was essential to understand who these Black women principals are and how they were able to obtain the privileged position of school head.

**Black Feminist Thought**

The ideas related to race, gender, class, and sexuality can be traced back to the “Combahee River Collective in 1977” as well as to “Sojourner Truth’s query ‘Ain’t I a Woman?’ which “foreshadowed the important contributions of Toni Cade Bambara, Angela Davis, Beverly Guy Sheftall, Bonnie Thornton Dill, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and many others who carried expansive understandings of the core ideas of black feminist thought into the academy (Collins, 2015).

Black feminist thought, while used by many scholars, is attributed to Collins (1991). Black Feminist Theory (BFT) derived from the need for a critical perspective to explain experiences related to race and gender for Black women. McClellan (2012) stated that “Black women have articulated and responded to lived experiences through Black feminist epistemologies. Our unique standpoint stimulates discourse and lays the foundation for providing a roadmap to creatively resisting oppression and domination” (p. 90). According to Alinia (2015), Black Feminist Thought “uses intersectional analysis to shed light on the relationships between the structural, symbolic and everyday aspects
of domination and individual and collective struggles in various domains of social life” (p. 2334). The core themes of Black feminist thought are: (1) the way that Black women know and are cannot be separated from their experiences or the historical experiences from Black women as a whole. (2) The impact of oppression and resistance creates a commonality for Black women. Yet, (3) not all Black women know and experience in the same manner therefore there are differences among Black women. Some of those differences are attributed to age, religion, socioeconomic background, geographic location, and sexual orientation. Lastly, (4) although Black women have a particular perspective it does not mean that they see the oppression, that they appreciate the experiences they have, that they agree with it or that they see a need to change it (Alinia, 2015; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Collins, 1991).

Alinia (2015) stated that when intersecting oppressions exist, no single group or movement is able to gain power without oppressing another group. She believed that the struggle of Black women “is not an isolated phenomenon detached from greater struggles for social justice” (p. 2337). She also communicated that beyond the oppression is the opportunity for Black women to be empowered through BFT, as it allows them a space to highlight their resiliency, resistance, activism, and the politics of being empowered (Alinia, 2015, p. 2334). Lastly, Black feminist theory allows Black women to be “agents of knowledge as well as agents of change” (McClellan, 2012, p. 91).

Critical Race Feminism

The central notion of critical race feminism is “the concept of intersectionality—the dynamic interaction among marginalized identities such as race and gender” (Sule, 2013,
p. 435). Through a lens of intersectionality, I am looking for a cross between race and gender in the lives of the Black women that are included in this study. Intersectionality, as introduced by Crenshaw (1991), is used to “denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s employment experiences” (p. 1244). One of the goals of intersectionality is to show that race, class, and gender alone are not the sole factors of oppression in our society, but that it is the working together of these factors that leads to the oppressive system that creates inequality in the lives of Black women (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991).

Black womanhood is not able to be examined through only one lens, both must be examined simultaneously through the lenses of race and gender. Sule (2013) mentioned that race is intertwined in other forms of identity, that those identity experiences cannot be considered as independent of each other, and that CRF “asserts that the experiences of women of color are not adequately conceptualized within race or gender only theories and social movements” (p. 435). Wing and Willis (1999) explored the notion that the experiences of Black women and other women of color are about more than simply looking at the experiences of White women and adding the factor of race or looking at the experiences of Black men and adding a layer of gender to the equation. To understand what it means to be a Black woman must be seen through the unique lens of the Black woman and not projected through the lens of the Black male with a layer of gender or through the White woman’s perspective with a layer of race. The Black woman has a unique vantage point that must be acknowledged and appreciated.
By using CRF and BFT, I was able to critically examine the narratives provided by the participants. These were befitting theories for my study because they both allowed for the examination of the intersecting identities that Black women face in both their personal and professional lives. Through the critical examination of their narratives, I had the opportunity to both describe and interpret their transition experiences. Through this careful and deliberate examination of aspects of racism and sexism, the conversation around how race and gender impacted their transition experience was enhanced.

**The Need for This Research**

The shortage of literature on Black women and their experiences in education provides an area for continued research and learning of the inequality and oppressive nature of American society. One of the reasons for the limited research that has been done on the lives of Black women leaders in education is due to what Scheurich and Young (1997) called “the ‘invisible man’ syndrome, of whites ignoring racial issues and people of color” (p. 4). There is still a need for this research to understand the intersectional identities of Black women so that we can bring some balance to the current body of research based on the perspectives and experiences of Black women (Alston, 2012; Bass 2012; Horsford & Tillman, 2012). This lack of research is in part due to the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership positions (Alston, 2012). Alston (2012) stated that the best way to examine the stories of Black women is through a “racialized approach” (p. 129) which is what I strove to do through this research study and by having Black feminist thought as the theoretical perspective and critical race feminism as the theoretical framework.
Chapter Summary

In this chapter I presented the literature relevant to understanding Black women in general, and Black woman principals specifically, in regards to what it means to be a principal and the challenges that some Black women have to face in order to transition into the role of secondary school principal. I divided the literature into three major sections: understanding why Black women can and should be school leaders; understanding what it means to a school leader, and how some of the selection processes work; and, finally, understanding systemic and institutional barriers that can hinder Black women from obtaining the role of secondary school principal. The barriers presented in this literature review were consolidated into the embodiment of racism and sexism as for Black women everything connects to either their race, their gender or the intersection of both race and gender. The theoretical framework which guided my dissertation study was critical race feminism and the epistemological framework was Black feminist thought. The methodology selected for this research study will be discussed in the succeeding chapter.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The problem that this research study was striving to examine is the lack of Black women principals in secondary schools. To study this problem, I as the researcher chose to explore one specific component of the principalship, the transition process from being a teacher to becoming a school head, and through that examination to explore how race and gender played a role for each of the Black women that participated in the study. This problem was chosen specifically, because, as a Black woman, I know that Black women are capable of being principals and there is literature that expounds on such. As a Black woman, I also know there are obstacles that prevent Black women from being promoted, the literature states this as well. In this study, I connected the practices in education and the known literature on promotion practices to see if this holds true or not for Black women principals at high schools in a selected state.

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to fill the gaps within the existing body of scholarly work that is centered on the experiences of Black women in educational leadership. The participants were a sampling of Black women principals in a southeastern state of the United States. As noted in previous chapters, there are a limited number of women of color, specifically Black women, currently working in secondary educational leadership positions (Reed, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1996). To understand why there are few women in these positions, I examined the
transition experiences of six Black women that were currently serving as school principals.

My goal in conducting this study was to determine the roles that racism and sexism played in their transition experiences from classroom teacher to school head. By conducting this research my hope was to provide knowledge that could lead to the development of interventions to disrupt racist and sexist practices, and that the disruption of the current institutional practices would allow greater numbers of Black women to obtain leadership positions in the future.

**Pilot Study**

I conducted a pilot study during the 2017 fall semester (Neely, 2017). The participant for the pilot study was one Black woman former secondary school principal. The research question that guided my pilot study was how do racism and sexism impact the transition experience of Black women from the classroom to their leadership position as school principals? This question was designed to answer the calls for more research on Black women’s experiences in educational leadership as well as to fulfill my research goal of understanding how racism and sexism impact the transition experiences of Black women who desire to move from the classroom into administrative positions within the school system.

The data for the pilot study was the individual narrative gathered through a semi-structured interview, which allowed me to have some questions already scripted to use as a guideline, but also opened the interview to other questions that were relevant to the discussion. By being able to ask additional questions, I was able to gain a more in-depth
understanding of the experiences being discussed, as well as providing clarification to any statements made by the interviewee. Some of the questions that I asked were: what type of mentoring did you experience? Do you find any connections between race and the mentoring that you experienced? How has sexism impacted your transition experience? Have you ever been called mean, cold, angry, etc.? Generally, the questions were divided into sections related to their overall transition experience, the mentoring that the principal encountered, the interactions with racism and sexism and understanding what interactions with others outside of mentoring has been for the Black woman.

I completed a 33-minute semi-structured interview with the one Black woman principal. The interview protocol consisted of 17 open-ended questions that were used as a guide to gain knowledge from Eve (all names used in this study are pseudonyms). I recorded the interview with the permission of the participant and afterwards transcribed it verbatim, looking for components of racism and sexism. I used a thematic analysis (Saldana, 2015) as the means of examining the codes and categories that I created to analyze the data. I initially read through the transcript several times to familiarize myself with the content and to record general impressions about Eve’s responses and comments. Next, I went through the transcription looking for statements or references to racism or sexism that each woman experienced. I looked for statements that linked directly to racist or sexist acts that the Black woman principal experienced as well as remarks or notions that link to racism and sexism. My annotations included reasoning for choosing each passage or quote and made connections to her overall story.
The results of the pilot study provided a foundation for moving forward with the research that I wanted to conduct through my dissertation study. What I was able to discover through the pilot study was that there were elements of racism and sexism in the transition experience for Eve. However, Eve was able to successfully work within these confines and reach a high level of success. In fact, she suggested that she was afforded many opportunities in her district due to her race, gender, overall personality, and personal connections. There were also some elements of her journey that were unacknowledged by the participant in regards to their link to racism or sexism. These unacknowledged elements guided the revisions of the questions that I used to interview participants for my dissertation study.

From the pilot study, I moved into the completion of a full dissertation research study. The findings of the pilot study allowed me to have a greater understanding of the phenomenon that I am researching. One change I made to the interview protocol was to add questions that elicited background and social economic status (childhood, during their early adulthood and currently) from the participants. Based on the interview that I completed for my pilot study, there is a need for a deeper understanding of where the principals are from, and how they grew up as it could directly or indirectly impact their current leadership experience. Additionally, I added questions to the interview protocol to uncover the participants’ understanding of racism and sexism prior to asking specific questions about how they perceived racism and/or sexism in their transition experiences.
Research Question

The research question is used as a guide to direct the planning and analysis of research. Qualitative studies use a research question in lieu of hypotheses as the means of guiding the study (Creswell, 1994; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The guiding research question for this study is: What roles do racism and sexism play in the transition experiences of Black women as they move from teacher to secondary school principal?

Delimitations

Generally speaking, there are many factors that determine promotion within the school system, just as with any job. I was, however, looking for specific components that helped to tell a bigger story. Therefore, I focused on the perceptions of Black women principals in secondary education as they moved from being teachers to being school heads. I was intentional in my desire to give a voice to a primarily untold story from a firsthand perspective, therefore, I allowed each principal to tell her own story.

Research Design and Research Method

For this study, I chose to follow a qualitative research study design. A qualitative study was the most fitting design, based on my desire to collect data via interviews from each principal about the experiences that she had with racism and sexism during her transition from classroom teacher to school leader. Merriam (1998) stated that “qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption to the natural setting as possible” (p. 5). Through qualitative research, the researcher tries to make sense of actions and stories as told by study participants (Glesne, 2016). Qualitative
research is about understanding people’s lived experiences and making meaning and connections through and with those experiences to help understand a larger concept. Merriam (1998) explained that “the key concern is [to understand] the phenomenon of interest from the participants’ perspectives not the researcher’s” (Merriam, 1998, p. 5). Since the desire was to learn more about the experiences these women had in secondary education, I wanted to be able to engage in dialogue with them through the interview process.

The most fitting qualitative methodological approach for my research was a hermeneutic phenomenological study. Phenomenological studies, which began with the philosophical work of Husserl (1962, 1970), examine the human experience in all of its subjectivity, which is why it is a fitting model for this research study. Van Manen (1990) pointed out that phenomenological research is about how an event is experienced and the level of awareness that a person related to a particular experience that is being researched. An interesting perspective that phenomenology is able to bring out is the “attempt to explicate the meaning of [lived experiences] as we live them in our everyday existence, our lifeworld” (van Manen, 1990, p. 11). Hermeneutic phenomenology differs from other forms of phenomenological studies in regards to the interpretative nature that it solicits.

Aside from the descriptive phenomenology, another example of phenomenological method is existential phenomenology. Existential phenomenology is a combination of phenomenology and existentialism that is concerned with the “human existence and a certain mode of investigating that existence” (Dale, 1996, p.309). Each
method serves its purpose and the hermeneutic method is the best fitting model for the type of research that I conducted.

The focus was the subjective experiences of selected Black women as they transitioned from the classroom to becoming school principals. The objective of this phenomenological study was to understand how Black women understood their transitions from teacher to principal and the roles of racism and sexism in their experiences.

As previously mentioned, the transition experience was chosen as it was one of missing components from the literature. That is, there is limited information on what how Black women experience the transition from being a classroom teacher to being an assistant principal and later a principal. I chose this particular component of the experience as it helped shed light on how others may be able to emulate some of the decisions and choices and for the Black women to be able to speak to barriers or aides that assisted them in moving from a classroom teacher.

I specifically met the focus and objective through a hermeneutic phenomenological research design (van Manen, 1990; Husserl 1962, 1970). I intended to interpret and understand the information that is presented through the interview process, and not simply describe the information that was found. Laverty (2003) described hermeneutic phenomenology as a being “concerned with the life world or human experience as it is lived” (pg. 24). Hermeneutic phenomenology began as the work of Heidegger when he decided that research could not simply be descriptive and that it also
had a degree of interpretation to it based on the vantage point of the researcher (van Manen, 2011; Laverty, 2003).

**Site of Study**

The state where I chose to complete my dissertation study was located in the southeast region of the United States. The state has four regions that comprise the approximately fifty counties. The state has urban, suburban, and rural regions. Because the state does not contain any “large” cities, such as New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago, the words urban, suburban, and rural may have slightly different definitions in this selected state than they would in those major cities or the states where they are located. For the sake of standardizing the terms urban and rural, the data was obtained from the 2010 Census (US Census Bureau) to determine whether the counties included were urban or rural. The Census data did not utilize the term suburban, but did implement the usage of metropolitan (metro). Although six interviews were completed, only five counties in the state were represented. Based on the Census information three of the counties were mostly rural and the remaining two were mostly urban. The selection choices were mostly urban, mostly rural, or completely rural.

There are approximately 250 high schools in the designated state. Some highly specialized schools, such as schools for the deaf and blind, correctional facilities, and schools for artistic programs, were excluded.

**Participant Selection and Recruitment**

In the fall of 2016, when I began collecting data on Black women principals in the selected state, there were 28 Black women principals. However, as I began my research
study there were only 20 of the original 28 remaining, and one was brought in as a replacement for another Black woman principal. To identify the pool of potential participants, I searched every high school’s website within the state to obtain information on principals.

Purposeful sampling was utilized for selecting the state where the study was conducted as well as determining which members would join the study. Patton (2002) points out five types of purposeful sampling that can be used in research. The model that is most fitting for the research that I conducted is homogeneous sampling (p. 173). By having a sample of the current Black women principals from the designated state, I was able to intimately examine the data provided through the interviews. The sampling of the Black women principals was determined by dividing the women into the four respective regions where their school was located and then to begin contacting their respective school districts to obtain permission to contact the principals. The method of sampling align with the purposefulness brought by Creswell (2005) when he advocated for intentionality in selecting individuals and sites to learn about a particular phenomenon that is taking place.

Some of the school districts did not respond the contact that was made via phone calls and/or emails, and one school district denied access to their principals. Once the school district representatives granted permission, I reached out to the principal or principals to begin setting up either face-to-face, virtual, or telephone interviews. There were a total of six women who responded and were able to complete interviews. There were two that responded but we were unable to complete the interview.
The protocol that I used for contacting principals began by obtaining permission from school districts. Once permission was granted from the district level, I contacted the school principal initially via email and then through a phone call if I did not hear back from her within a 7-10 day period. After that time, I sent one more follow up email to request her participation in the study 14-21 days after the initial contact was made before removing her from the potential pool of participants. If the Black woman principal responded, then she and I coordinated a time either via email or phone conversations about a time that would convenient to complete the interview.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Black School</th>
<th>Years as a Principal</th>
<th>Years as an Administrator Prior to Principalship</th>
<th>Years in Education</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Has Children?</th>
<th>School-aged Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zillah</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebekah</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esther</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, high school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 Participant Descriptions
Participan Descriptions

A description of the six participants can be found in Table 3.1. Sarah Adams was the principal of Grove High School in the town of Oakdale. She was born and raised in Oakdale. After attending college, she moved back to her hometown to begin her teaching career and was able to later move through the ranks and become principal of the town’s high school. Ms. Adams had served as the school head for 8 years. Sarah started her career as an elementary school teacher. She then gained experience in middle school as an ELA teacher. Prior to becoming a school administrator, Sarah served in the capacity of instructional coach for curriculum at the middle school level. After her time as an instructional coach Sarah interviewed and was hired for an assistant principal position at one of the two high schools in the district.

During the time of the interview she was in her fifth year as the principal of the district’s only high school due to consolidation about 6 years prior. Sarah was intentional in her decision to stay in the classroom for a longer period of time. Her original desire was to stay in the classroom at least ten years before moving into an administrative position or a position other than a classroom teacher. Sarah felt that she was blessed by the experience that she had in leadership and that God’s presence and guidance has been a significant part of her overall journey.

Zillah Lucas was the principal of Longleaf High School in the town of Willow. Zillah was a long time educator and had the distinction of being the only female secondary principal in her district as well as being one of only two Black principals at the high school level. Mrs. Lucas was loved by her staff, students, and community. She was
very much dedicated to her job and improving the lives of the students that she served. Zillah served at Longleaf as an assistant principal prior to her appointment as school head 11 years prior to the study. Zillah was very down to earth and had an incredible personality that allowed her to work well with many groups of people. One of the ways that Ms. Lucas described herself was having a consistent personality and noted that she was the same in all circumstances and dealings with all type of people regardless of the location from the school to the grocery store, churches, or the mall. One of the desires that Zillah had was for all of her students to know that they were safe within the walls of Longleaf and to maintain a sense of order.

Rebekah Sathers was the principal of Elm High School in the town of Magnolia. Rebekah came into education after spending ten years in the world of banking. When her company began to downsize, she remembered the encouraging words of a teacher she met while visiting a school and decided that education was the place for her to share her knowledge and talents. Mrs. Sathers graduated with a degree in psychology and when she decided to move into the classroom went back and obtained a Masters in teaching in social studies.

She spent the first several years of her teaching career working in a Title I high school. She later moved to other school districts and began her journey through the leadership ranks, first as an assistant principal for approximately 8 years, and then moving into principalship. Rebekah had a desire to instill strength and self-worth in her students who come from a similar background to she did growing up. She wanted them to know the possibilities that were available to them outside of the world of poverty that
they saw on a daily basis. Due to her strong reputation as a leader she was placed at a secondary school in the district as an assistant principal prior to her appointment to Elm High as the interim and then permanent school principal.

Leah Jonas was the principal of Black Birch High School in the town of Laurel Beech. Mrs. Jonas dedicated her life to creating change for young people in her community. Although she did not work where she grew up, serving the communities where she worked was very important to her both as a teacher and later as a school leader. Leah’s experiences in leadership started as a teacher when she created a summer enrichment program for digital learning. Later as an assistant principal she also took on the role of being the evening program administrator. This program allowed students who were at risk of dropping out of high school a chance to complete the graduation requirements and obtain their high school credentials. Mrs. Jonas was dedicated to the success of all students that she served and felt that her students knew that she was there for them and they were able to approach her anytime, even if all they needed was a hug. Leah felt that her hardworking nature and determination to work for the greater need of students was integral to her overall success towards becoming an administrator.

Ruth Marks was the principal of Cherry Blossom High School in the town of Pinewood. Ruth transitioned into a leadership position after 8 years in the classroom. She started her leadership career as an administrative assistant (assistant administrator) before moving into an assistant principal position. She was very fortunate that she was able to spend all of her time as a leader at the same school, where after six years as the assistant principal over instruction she became the head of school.
Mrs. Marks was the first Black woman to serve in the capacity of high school principal in her school district. Like other women in the study Ruth, saw herself as being blessed by her experience transitioning from teacher to principal and knew that she was very fortunate to have had the unique experience of not having had to change schools to be promoted. Ruth loved her students and had a great relationship with them. They knew that she was there for them if they needed anything. She ate lunch with them and they knew that anything they discussed was strictly between them. She loved being the principal of Cherry Blossom High School and worked daily for the previous 24 years to make a difference in the lives of her students, faculty members, and community.

Esther Pauling was the principal of Sterling Maple High School in the town of Firville. Mrs. Pauling came into the field of education from the military. Esther transitioned into the field of education in her late twenties, and began her teaching career teaching middle school science. After spending time watching her assistant principal and principal, both of whom were Black women, she obtained her degree in administration.

After getting her degree, she served as the dean of students at a middle school and then moved into an assistant principalship at a combined middle and high school. Prior to her current position as secondary school principal she served as the program director at the alternative school. Esther was the only woman in the study to transition to the selected state from another state. She felt that a transition was necessary in order to have the possibility of obtaining a leadership position. Although the majority of the students at Esther’s school were Black, she ensured that all of her students felt included and loved.
Aside from spending time as a school leader, she spent time with her husband and children.

**Instrumentation and Data Collection**

The individual stories gathered via interviews served as the data for this research study. I utilized standardized open-ended interview (Patton, 2002) questions to gain insight from each of the principals about her transition experience, her definitions of racism and sexism as well as her educational and personal background. The questions were specifically designed and organized in a manner that allowed each woman to tell her story and provide me with the richest story possible information related to how she was able to obtain her current leadership position.

In following with the style of a standardized open-ended interview, I fully scripted the questions as a guideline, but also used probes and prompts, which allowed for asking follow up questions to acquire a more in depth understanding of the experiences being discussed as well as providing clarification to any statements made by the interviewees (Patton, 2002). I wanted to be able to get as much information as possible during each interview as I was only be able to have a single interview with each participant. The interviews that I conducted were face-to-face, via the telephone, via Skype and/or via Zoom conference (an online video conference service).

The interview protocol was designed to align the research questions and the interview questions in a way that allowed for conversation to go from broad to specific in the transition experience. The questions were grouped according to specific themes within the broad scale of the research design and the most effective way for the
participants to tell their stories from past to present and from familiar to unfamiliar thought processing (Patton, 1990).

The interview questions consisted of two main groupings: overview of the transition experience and participants’ perceptions of themselves as a Black women principals. Within the first grouping of questions I was interested in learning about the experience from the perspective of a woman, from the perspective of a Black person and then through the intersection of being both Black and a woman. In this section, I also asked questions related to their mentoring experiences. The interview protocol can be found in the Appendix D. Interviews lasted between 55 and 80 minutes. Internal Review Board (IRB) approval was granted in August 2017. The same IRB approval covered both the pilot study and the dissertation study. Informed consent for the studies was obtained through an information letter to the participants. A copy is included in Appendices A, B, and C. The same letter was also given some of the school districts either through a specific request by the district representative or through the application process.

Data Analysis

The semi-structured interviews consisted of a set number of questions that were used as a guide to gain knowledge from the principals during the interviews. Each interview was recorded (with the permission of the participants) and later transcribed. I began sending emails to school districts on 02 March 2018. In the first round. I sent emails to four districts and in total I reached out to 17 school districts that employed a Black woman principal. Of the school districts that I contacted, seven consented for me to reach out to a Black woman principal. One officially declined to allow me to conduct
research, and the others simply did not respond to emails or follow-up phone calls.
Within the seven districts that provided consent, I was able to contact a total of ten
principals; three of whom did not respond and one who consented to participating in the
study but would not set an interview appointment.

I conducted the interviews over a three-month period. The order and dates of the
carried out interviews was: interview one: Sarah, 22 March; interview two: Zillah, 26
March; interview three: Rebekah, 02 April; interview four: Leah, 09 April; interview
five: Ruth, 19 April; and interview six: Esther, 16 May. Transcribing began with
Rebekah. This interview took 5 to 6 days, varying hours per day to completely write out
the transcription on paper, and then took another 2 to 3 days, again with varying numbers
of hours per day to type. During this process, I made notations of my initial thoughts.
Shortly after the completion of the hand written transcription of Rebekah, I began to
follow the same procedure for Ruth. Ruth’s interview was a little longer than Rebekah’s
so this interview took almost 7 days to completely transcribe, but approximately the same
amount of time to transcribe. Just as with Rebekah, I began to make some notations of
thoughts and emerging themes that I noticed as I was transcribing and typing the
interviews.

With the last four interviews, I used a transcription service to help expedite the
transcribing process. In two of the four interviews that I had transcribed using the paid
transcription service, I was able to make corrections to the transcripts easily. However,
the remaining two interviews required more substantial editing due to accents and
speaking patterns, which the professional transcriber was unable to understand. After a
coup\el of \w eeks with little progress, I paid for an upgraded transcription service for the final two interviews so that I was able to complete the transcribing. After the upgraded transcriptions were completed I went through and make any necessary corrections to the transcripts. After I completed the corrections to all six interview transcriptions, I sent them off to the participants for them to make any desired corrections, or to provide additional comments.

I used MAXQDA software and Microsoft WORD to help code, organize, and analyze the data set as the process of coding the data took place. As with the pilot study, I implemented a thematic analysis of the text, looking for components of racism and sexism in the individual and collective stories. The steps I completed during the analysis phase followed the three steps of phenomenological process laid out by Scott (2013) which include “(1) gathering descriptions of lived experiences; (2) reviewing descriptions to determine themes; and (3) interpreting and analyzing themes” (p. 317). I completed these steps through the use of an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Audit trail. An audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Halpern, 1983) was established to provide a detailed account of all my decisions and actions during the research process. According to Creswell and Miller (2000) an audit trail documents the “inquiry process through journaling and memoing, keeping a research log of all activities, developing a data collection chronology, and recording data analysis procedures clearly” (p. 128). As a researcher, I engaged in each of the previously listed steps so as to maintain the highest reliability of my study, and also to allow for an outside researcher to be able to review the data for interpretative and analytic purposes. See
Table 3.2 for an example of how the audit trail was utilized and implemented through my research study.

**Table 3.2 Example of the Audit Trail within Analysis of Raw Data.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audit Trail</th>
<th>Interpretation and Articulation of Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>From Field Notes</strong></td>
<td>• From field notes and interviews,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the view of participants, dealing with people’s perspectives of Black women is inevitable and something that some choose not to deal with directly however, it effects the manner in which they handle their tasks as principals and those related to becoming a principal.</td>
<td>I noticed indicators of resentment, frustration and apathy towards the being considered an angry Black woman and being prejudged about who they are without people knowing them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>From Interview Transcripts</strong></td>
<td>• I noted in my journaling that although overt racism is not acknowledged by some of the women in the study, the existence of the “angry Black woman” stereotype was present for most of the women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“…just being an African American female because the stereotype that African American females are just angry Black women most of the time. So you deal with that scenario, you deal with the scenario of you’re an African American female so you really have to step up your game and set the bar to where that you...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
could hold your own just like any male can and whether African American male or a Caucasian”

“…it's just the norm…”

“…Mean, cuz I say what I mean and I mean what I say. Mean. But not cold, not distant, you know, again it’s, I just want to be honest. I call, being honest and I think that people don’t like to hear the word no. and so that’s what makes people angry sometimes. Or when I have to make a decision and that’s just the way it is…”

“I let people perceive…I didn't I didn't do that to change his perception. There's no changing the perception of a racist person. A racist person is just that. They believe what they believe and what they believe is not based on evidence in the first place....
Hermeneutic circles. I used the hermeneutic circle in the data analysis due to its link to hermeneutic phenomenology, and its connections to understanding and interpreting data. Moving in and out of the hermeneutic means “that the parts can only be understood from an understanding of the whole, but the whole can only be understood from an understanding of the parts” (Schmidt, 2014, p. 4). Through the usage of the hermeneutic circle, I was able to move through various levels of understanding based on the examination and re-examination of my thoughts and understanding and constantly obtaining new knowledge (Debassey, Nåden, & Slettebø, 2008). The goal in the analysis phase of the research study was to not only be able to listen to the women and hear what they were saying and report that information, but also to be able to dig at the roots of what their intentions were in their wording, and finding understanding and meaning in those intentions.

The implementation of hermeneutic circles to my research study allowed me to connect to both the theoretical framework, critical race feminism, and the epistemological perspective, Black feminist thought, by understanding the perspectives of the women that were involved in the study. Both Black feminist thought and critical race feminism are centered on the experiences of Black women and how they view themselves as well as how they interact with the world. Hermeneutic circles allowed me to make connections and gain insight into how the parts and the whole worked together to build the bigger understanding.

Trustworthiness, Credibility, and Validity
I strove to maintain a high level of rigor for my research study as a means of establishing trustworthiness. To address some of the limitations of the study and to address credibility and validity, I used member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Miller, 2000) to ensure the accuracy of the data and ensure the credibility of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The reliability of my study was established through the audit trail, which I discussed in the previous section. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) member checking is the process where “data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholder groups from whom the data were originally collected” (p. 314) and that it “goes to the heart of the credibility criterion” (Guba, 1981, p. 85).

I conducted my member check by sending an email to each participant. Each participant of the research study was sent a copy of her transcript to review, which aligns with the manner of conducting member checks outlined by Shenton (2004). In the email I asked the participants to read the transcript that was attached to the email and determine if the transcript was an accurate record of what was discussed during the interview and that their true feelings were well represented. The email also asked the participants if there was anything additional that they wanted to include to the transcript. Of the six total participants two responded, four did not. Of the four that did not respond two had auto-respond messages stating that they were away for varying reasons, and one had a message that stated that she was in transition to another position at a different high school and someone else would be covering her e-mails going forward. The two women that
responded stated that the transcribed data was an accurate reflection of their thoughts and feelings that were expressed during the interview.

In the establishment of trustworthiness, I also enlisted two peers throughout my process to serve as peer debriefers (Shenton, 2004; Creswell and Miller, 2000; Creswell, 1994). The peer debriefing served as a form of external check for the research that was conducted. Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that peer review can be used as a method for credibility establishment (p.314). One of the key features of the peer debriefer is having knowledge of the field that is being studied or with the research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Therefore, I utilized multiple peer debriefers as they served different roles and were able to provide differing perspectives that allowed me to continue to further challenge my views and perspectives of the data or to simply keep me “honest” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 308). One of the peer debriefers was a fellow Black woman doctoral student who was also focusing on the experiences of Black women. The second peer debriefer was a Black woman high school assistant principal with over 30 years of experience in education and 18 years as an administrator.

I meet with my peer debriefers on multiple occasions and had several conversations about the process from the time that I conducted the pilot study until the completion of the findings and discussion chapter of the dissertation. Each meeting provided great insight, and challenged some of the perspectives that I had as a researcher as well as offered feedback on my findings and implications. A draft of my findings was outlined or drafted prior to meeting with the peer debriefers. After the final meetings were conducted, I finalized the drafts of the findings and discussions.
A limitation of the small sample was that I made generalizations carefully as the study population was specific to one region, one state and that does not lend itself to generalization across all contexts. I carefully recorded all of my procedures during the research process. As a phenomenological study design does not follow a prescribed set of steps, I wanted to ensure transparency with all that was done through the course of the study to allow for replication with the same or similar populations. To further the transparency of the process I was sure to include both direct quotes from the study participants as well as providing a thick-rich description of the process (Shenton, 2004). A sample of a coded transcription are provided in Appendices E.

Limitations

The main limitation of this research study was the small number of participants included. A better representation of the overall population would have been possible if there had been a larger sample size. The sample size was limited because I was working alone and not as a member of a team or large group. As a single individual conducting the research study, I was responsible for all of the collecting, coding and analyzing of the data. Lunenburg & Irby (2008) stated that limitations are “not under the control of the researcher… [and that] they are factors that may have an effect on the interpretation of the findings and the generalizability of the results” (p.135). Despite the manner that the participants were selected, it is possible that the six women’s perspectives are not representative of the experiences of the majority of the Black women principals in the state. Creswell (2014) stated that the outcome of a phenomenological study typically consists of a descriptive narrative, a “synthesis of knowledge” about the phenomenon that
is being studied (p.160). Because the end product is based centrally on the narratives provided by only six participants, there could be some limited generalizability of the findings.

Additionally, the sample of Black women secondary school principals was drawn only from secondary schools in a single state. Furthermore, the research sample was only a portion of the current body of Black women secondary principals. Only the perspectives of the Black women secondary school principals were recorded and analyzed in this research study. The sampling of only six women from the selected southeastern state was due to other women declining to participate in the study. Some of those women not included in the research study were prohibited from participating by their school district administrators, and other Black women principals chose themselves not to participate in the study, although their district personnel permitted me to contact them. This means that the women that were allowed to participate were vetted by the districts and vetting is a form of gatekeeping on behalf of the districts. That gatekeeping could be to silence issues within the school district or state as a whole.

I purposefully chose not to include information from White or other minority female principals in this research study because that was beyond the scope of this research study, but it could have provided a different perspective of the leadership transition experience. The perspective of Black males was also beyond the scope of this study. A future study could be done on other minority women to determine commonalities in the experiences that all women of color have as they transition, but my goal in this study was to provide information solely on Black women’s experiences.
gaining the principalship. Future studies could also account for the perspective of other stakeholders within individual school districts as well as those working for the principals.

**Researcher positionality and subjectivities**

My subjectivities are based upon my race, gender, and current occupation. I am a Black woman educator who when she began this research study aspired to be an administrator in a secondary school (high school or middle school). Peshkin (1988) directed that subjectivity is the “substance of one’s persuasion at a given point” and that it is like a “garment that cannot be removed” (p.17). Through that understanding of my subjectivities being something that I cannot remove, I tried to make myself aware of the subjectivities that I have during each phase of the research process. As a member of the group I was studying, I brought with me certain biases that are limited to membership of the studied group. I have my own notions about the realities of Black women in educational leadership roles. These notions are based on personal experiences, experiences I observed from an outsider perspective, and experiences that I have personal knowledge of that have occurred to mentors. One of those notions was that Black women are not able to move through the promotion process the same way that other groups do (Black men, White men, White women, or even other women of color). I also felt that being an administrator was not something that a lot of Black women aspired to as most felt that it was something outside of their grasp rather than something that was not something was not desired. Another notion that I brought with me to my research study was that Black women desired the principalship, yet promotion was something that eluded them.
I have met Black women in various leadership roles within the educational system and these women seem to have some common experiences that are seemingly different from their counterparts (White women, White men, and Black men). Some of these common experiences include spending more years as a teacher before being able to obtain administrative positions, having to move further from home in order to obtain a position in leadership, feeling they have to prove they are worthy of the leadership opportunity, having to put in more hours than others, or having to obtain higher credentials than their counterparts. This intrigued me and I wanted to more know about their experiences obtaining their leadership roles.

I desired to know about Black women in leadership and to determine if these women had isolated experiences or if these examples were a norm within the leadership experiences of Black women in leadership positions. I feel strongly about the need for this research and its importance because of the importance of Black leadership in the lives of students.

Knowing and understanding my personal biases is an integral part of qualitative research. One of the points emphasized by Reed (2012) is that not all Black people have the same experience, awareness or level of concern regarding racial bias. Therefore, as I entered my research study I was mindful that my biases could lead to making assumptions about other people’s journeys and perspectives. Yin (2014) discussed the impact of having researched an issue beforehand and seeking to “substantiate a preconceived position” (p. 76), so I was mindful not to push my perspectives on the study participants directly or indirectly through question development or the way that the
research was interpreted. One way that I tried to ensure that this did not happen was through having my interview questions checked for bias by members of my committee. The preliminary set of interview questions that I used for the pilot study was revised for the dissertation study to gain more specific information about the women’s backgrounds and how or where they grew up. I felt that this information helped me to understand their current perspective. Lastly, when I was coding I was mindful of my personal biases while understanding that those biases were the lens through which I saw aspects of the data.

I strove to meet the needs of various stakeholders and audience members through the manner in which the information is presented. This is done through the types of information presented. Different audience members come with different knowledge and my desire was to reach those with background knowledge as well as those that may be new to the topics. I strove to strike a balance between not over informing or generalizing the experiences of all Black women in the literature review nor making assumptions that audience members will all have the same background knowledge. I also strove to make the information relevant to those potentially desiring to go into education leadership, as well as those currently serving in leadership roles. I desired to ensure transparency with my knowledge and experience with the research topic, in addition to making my personal biases apparent to readers.

Chapter Summary

This study offered a perspective of literature that is currently missing, as there are not many studies that offer a perspective of the transition experiences of current Black women principals. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions
that Black women principals have of their transition experiences as they relate to their encounters with racism and sexism. The research question guiding this study was: What roles do racism and sexism play in the transition experiences of Black women as they move from teacher to secondary school principal?

In this chapter, I gave a breakdown of all the methods that will be utilized to conduct this research study. The methods included a description of the targeted population for study, the recruitment procedures, and data collection and analysis. The data analysis process included self-analyzing the transcripts and coding the data to conduct thematic analysis.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

Black women and their stories have been told, yet there are many gaps in completely understanding who they are and how they are able to fully achieve the highest leadership positions. This is the case for Black women in general and it is especially true for Black women principals. To fully understand the transition from teacher to school administrator, there has to be an accounting of the complexity of the topic, how dynamic the situation related to being a Black women is, and how that dynamic impacts each aspect of her life.

There is currently a body of literature that speaks to various facets of being a Black women, being a Black women administrator, and even being a Black women leader in general. However, the component of why some women are able to become principals and others are not is still missing. There is still the missing component of what helps and what hinders Black women from becoming a principal. Lastly, there is the missing component of how racism and sexism play a role in Black women’s transition experiences from teacher to school head. Therefore, the purpose of this research study was to look at one phase of becoming a school leader, the transition from teacher to principal.

In this chapter, I present an analysis of the data gathered from the six interviews that were conducted in addition to the findings of the data analysis to answer the given research question: What roles do racism and sexism play in the transition experiences of
Black women as they move from teacher to secondary school principal? Answering this research question was dependent on a focus into how the women transitioned, who aided or failed to aide in that promotion process, what the Black women felt they brought to the table, and what hurdles the women had to overcome in order to reach an administrative position.

**Summary of the Study**

The research study that I conducted contained six participants, Black women principals of high schools in a selected southeastern state. The Black women were chosen through purposeful sampling that was intended to capture as many possible participants as were willing to participate. I first contacted the school districts to obtain permission to speak with the women, and then contacted the Black women principals themselves to determine their willingness to participate in the reach study. The hermeneutic phenomenological study that I conducted was done with the goal of gaining an understanding of their experiences moving from being a classroom teacher to a school administrator, first as an assistant principal and then a principal. All of the women that I interviewed were serving in the capacity of school principal. I examined their transitions from a lens of a critical race feminist, and utilized semi-structured interviews to answer the research question.

Potentially, this study has the capacity to change the conversation that is taking place around how women and Blacks, specifically Black women, are being promoted to assistant principal and full principalship positions. This study could also potentially influence practices in secondary education around who, when, and how Black women are
being promoted and the types of schools that they are being promoted to lead. Specifically, the practices related to racism and sexism, in regards to both the overt and covert actions were examined.

Findings

I started developing the themes by looking for patterns in the women’s stories as I was listening to the audio recordings from the interviews as well as when I was reading the finished transcripts. I recalled components of the literature review during the third or fourth readings of the transcripts. I began coding with broad themes such as racism, sexism, angry Black woman, and as I continued other patterns quickly developed such as being chosen, being hardworking and connections to being a Black woman. The remaining themes developed from the need to further clarify parts of the leadership experience for the participating Black women principals.

As coding and analysis continued, three central findings from the analysis of the transcripts emerged that made the transition for the six women that participated in the research study possible, and one main theme that served as a hurdle for them to overcome. The three aides in the transition process from teacher to principal were that they were hardworking, they were chosen and had the proper mentoring and sponsors, and they were focused on the bigger picture of their professional goals. The hurdle that the women had to overcome was being seen as the angry Black woman. The fourth theme that developed was more about a mindset of the Black women and how that mindset could help the women understand and properly maneuver through the promotion process.
Connections to racism and sexism will be examined in the following chapter along with connections to the literature, my epistemological perspective and the theoretical framework. Merriam (1998) emphasized the nature of qualitative research being that it “reveals how all the parts work together to form a whole” (p. 6). Therefore, my goal in presenting the findings was to see how the parts and individual stories fit together to create a larger story for each individual Black woman principal, as well as how the stories of the six women in the research study fit into the larger conversation about Black women in secondary school leadership. The themes that are presented may not be the only components of the Black principals’ stories, however, they are components that are common to women in general and relevant to understanding why there are limited numbers of Black women serving as school leaders.

**Theme #1: Hardworking**

One of the known traits of Black women is that they are hardworking (Ashley, 2014; Orem, 2017). Just as this is true for Black women in general, it was true for the women in the research study. Being strong and being hardworking seemed to be connected for the women. Most of the participants provided one or more examples of how being hardworking was a part of how they saw themselves and ultimately how it tied to them being able to move beyond being a teacher and into a leadership position.

When Leah was asked what made her transition easier she affirmed that it was related to her work ethic. She expressed that,

I think work ethic, work ethic was definitely one of the things that made it easier because people look for people who are willing to work hard and put time in. I
was …assuming the responsibility without having the position. So it seemed like a natural progression to assume a position that I was already doing at that point anyway.

She went on to declare,

I put in a lot of hours that were beyond my scope of work hours. I put in hours during the summertime and worked all summer. No pay. To, to make, because they were things I wanted to do. They were programs that I wanted to implement. There were opportunities that I wanted to give children and if the district couldn’t afford to do it and pay for it and implement then, and I had resources and I had myself, I could dedicate my time to make sure, to making sure that the things that needed to happen for children happened for children.

For some of the women being hardworking was something that was taught to them as young children. Ruth stated that,

Well, my mom and dad definitely about hard work but, you know, just people, the way that I felt with people, with our interactions with others as I was coming along. And you know, so it wasn’t about them. I already knew about hard work but just simply, you know, having the credentials, that’s the word, which typically equates to paper for others to see.

Zillah expressed “So, I believe hard work-- hard work is all I know.” She went further to say,

I think that's just in my DNA. But I'm not going to half do anything. So if you give me that task it's not going to be sloppy. That's just in me. So if I do the job
I'm going to do the job. Nobody has to tell me- like when Dr. Filder (pseudonym) used to call and ask me to do a presentation. He didn't tell me but I prepared for that presentation…So I just think anything with my name on it, I'm going to oversee it, it's going to be done the best, best that I know how to. So that's when I go back and do the hard work. I'm not a slacker, so that's about all I can say. Now I'm getting kind of old and a little tired but still I'm not going to produce anything sloppy.

Zillah felt that hard work was an ingrained behavior for her and that it showed up in everything that she did and yet it was also intentional. For Ruth it was more of a desire to learn as much as she could through every experience that her principal gave her in the years prior to becoming a principal. She summarized her experiences as,

I did feel like I was working hard… And I never told him no, like whatever he asked, it was, I never told him no. So I kinda became the person that he went to because you know, although it may have been a challenge, I was just ready...

Sarah made a connection to being a Black woman and having to work harder when she articulated, “And I guess by being an African American female unless always happened to go above and beyond to prove ourselves.”

She felt that Black women have to do things that others such as Black males, White females and White males do not have to do. For Ruth, being hardworking meant feeling the necessity of proving herself. Ruth’s proving herself came through obtaining her doctorate. She confirmed the necessity of additional credentials for Black women when she expressed,
My personal opinion is that you have to get, you really just gotta go to school, you’ve gotta further your education. I think you’ve got a better chance. So maybe they’ll want someone who is, you know, somebody who is outside that by chance if that happens, but I think, that we have to. Especially in Pineville School District 81. Now it may be different in a smaller district but in a district the size of Pineville School District 81, I think you have to, you have to further your education, for people to take you seriously.

**Reputation.** A byproduct of being hardworking was having a good reputation. Rebekah and Zillah acknowledged the impact that having a good reputation had on their being able to transition. Rebekah expressed how it helped for others to know what she had done. Zillah stated that her promotion from assistant principal to principal was in part due to her reputation. She stated “my reputation was fair…the big thing that she's fair, she's consistent.” Being hardworking and having a solid a reputation led to Esther being more confident when she applied for positions. She noted “I was more confident because of the experience that I had prior to applying for that position, because the individuals who encouraged me knew my work ethic.”

**Building relationships.** One of the benefits of the hard work and time that these women put into their jobs was the relationship that they are able to develop with the staff, students, and community as a whole. Zillah was able to build in spite of the racial dynamics in the community that she served. She communicated it this way:

You've got that racial tension up here, so the irony for me is I handled a lot of racial stuff up here, but I guess just being honest helped me handle it quite well…
So I go back to that ability to work with people regardless, the poor, the rich, the white, the non-white, or whatever. And when I work with my assistant principals- - see you don't get to sit in that chair for people to figure out who you are or what you do…I think that people see through you and know your heart. That's the way to build those relationships.

Her working diligently towards creating a positive learning environment and a safe space for children to be extended to her treatment of others and helped to build the reputation that allowed her to be able to transition through the ranks of leadership. Sarah was also able to build a strong rapport with her staff. Sarah described her relationship as very close to her staff and a prime concern for her when asked her about whether her staff would describe her as mean or angry, she exclaimed:

No. Total opposite. They’ll tell you that I’ll, in the morning, I’ll tell you about my staff. When I get there, I am one of the first ones there, and I’m in the front office so I can greet each staff member by name in the morning. And I could be talking with somebody else, good morning so and so, and if you’re out, “Welcome back. How you doing today? How’s your mom doing?” So I’m personable with them, or whatever, when I’m not in that front office. I get emails, I gets texts, “We missed you today.” When I go back, “We’re so glad to have you back.” And that’s Black, White, Indian, all of them.

For Esther, the relationship with her staff and students was through the fair treatment of everyone. She explained her belief system as,
I believe that everybody should be treated equally and fairly. It doesn't matter what your title is or what you do within the school or whether you’re the custodian, a cook, like the kids should be respectful as well as teachers respecting kids, and a lot of people disagree with that philosophy. And if a kid does something that kids should be held accountable. That's my philosophy. You hold the kids accountable. If the teacher does something wrong, my philosophy is you hold the teacher accountable, and sometimes people don't agree with that because sometimes people say that the teacher is always right.

**Summary.** Being hardworking is a characteristic that is not new for Black women in general and definitely not something that was new for the women that participated in the study. These women worked diligently to make sure that their work represented the best of who they were as well as making sure to positively represent Black women as a whole. Through their hard work and diligence they were able to build reputations that contributed to their overall success in securing leadership positions when they sought promotion from teacher to assistant principal and then again as they moved from assistant principal to principal.

**Theme #2: Chosen**

Much like Eve from the pilot study, there were women in the study that felt that their journeys were unique and to an extent easy. They felt that the reason for this was they were chosen. Eve felt that she was chosen from the time she was a student teacher. For the women in the dissertation study it was not stated that they were chosen early, nor did they give a specific time period or reason why they felt that they were chosen, but it
was their viewpoint that this was one reason why their transition from teacher to principal was without as many obstacles.

When recounting her experience moving from being a teacher to an administrator, Rebekah felt that she never applied to a job or was rejected. She noted,

I didn’t have to look for the jobs. You know, I was recruited. That definitely made it easier for me. And I would also say because of relationships that I already had in the district. I really never had to do a “dog and pony” show to get the job. So I think that was beneficial to me. I don’t know what other people’s [situations were], so I don’t know what that experience is like to have to go online and fill out an application and then fly somewhere for an interview. I don’t have that experience.

Rebekah was placed at the high school where she served as a principal. She was given a call from a person at the district office and asked to be a part of the district leadership development program. When asked about who this person was or how the person knew about her and her leadership qualities, Rebekah was unsure of who may have provided the person the information about her, but she was willing to take advantage of the opportunity. Rebekah described the first school that she worked at as an assistant principal as,

Cherry Rose High School (pseudonym) was, we don’t really have inner city but you know, it was an urban, title I, majority Black students. So I don’t know. I grew up in Hampshire so I don’t know if they associated the fact that, you know, I knew people in Hampshire and had relationships that they thought I would be a
good candidate. And I also know that at the time that the admin team at Cherry Rose did not have a Black assistant principal.

Rebekah was very fortunate that she was able to begin her new position in the midst of the school year that she was finishing her degree. Rebekah transitioned from being a teacher to being an administrator in March. This was something that she stated was a unique situation that allowed her to learn the job and get acclimated prior to the beginning of the following school year. Additionally, Rebekah stated that she felt when she applied for the position at Cherry Rose it was already a done deal and that she was confident that the position was hers. In speaking of two of her colleagues and their experiences she stated, “I know one came from another district, and the other female I know was probably asked because of her success and she came from a predominately white school to serve at a predominately Black school.” She then went on to state a keen observation about Black women and secondary leadership when she exclaimed “I do believe that for the secondary principalship, I do believe that we’re recruited.” Therefore, being recruited or selected for the position might be the only pathway to success.

When telling her story, Ruth acknowledged that she was the first Black woman high school principal ever in her district. Unlike some of the other women in the group, she had access to both a district-provided mentor and a Black woman that served as a sounding board and mentor for her. She also had a Black woman friendship circle that she was able to meet with regularly and was always available via phone if needed. However, this was not something that any of the other women in the study had. Zillah
had a couple of close friends who also serve as school leaders, either currently or previously, but they were of a different racial background.

Ruth stated that she was not aware of the impact that her being the first Black woman in the district had until she received accolades and praise from others in the community after her appointment. To Ruth, it was just the next step, but at the time she did not have the necessary credentials. Her principal fought for her and she was given time to complete her degree. She detailed that,

The opportunity came for me to be an AP and I was granted that opportunity but I also was told you gotta finish this program, I’m gonna put in for a permit, but you’re gonna finish, you’ve gotta finish this program. And so that’s exactly what I did, I went back and finished it.

When asked why she thought this was done for her, her response was “he wanted me.” She felt that she had earned the opportunity and that her principal acknowledged her talents and potential. When she reflected on her overall journey she affirmed,

I had a really good relationship with the principal who was here prior to me becoming principal and so he has just groomed me. To be honest, he has stretched me to the point, because I did not see that I would one day become an API, assistant principal over curriculum and instruction, I didn’t see that at all. In fact, I always just thought that I would be someone who just managed the kids and so once I become the assistant principal of curriculum and instruction I learned a lot more, a lot the inner working of the school and really, that is when I decided that I would be a principal. Just did not initially see that for me.
Esther, who moved to her district from out of state, was given opportunity through a friend. She was able to use a personal connection to create a professional opportunity that she felt would not have been afforded her if she had stayed in the state where she was previously working. Esther felt that in regards to interviewing and getting the position of principal, she was a “shoe-in” but that the position was not guaranteed to her. While Zillah did not specifically utilize the words chosen for her gaining the principalship position, and through her personal acknowledge of difficulties while in the position of school leader, she was stated that she was not strong in certain areas that were key to being a student-centered and curriculum and instruction grounded leader. However, she was able to obtain the position through what she felt was her reputation in the community and the willingness of the person of who become her direct supervisor as well as the superintendent (both of whom were Black) to help her fill those gaps later on. She had people in her corner who were willing to take a chance on her. She recounted the following story:

When Mr. Greys (a pseudonym for the principal that she worked under as an AP) makes his announcement that he's going to retire, I didn't apply for this job. I knew, and I want to say this respectfully because he and I are two different people. I knew his leadership style. I knew what it was going to take with this building. And I can remember him coming to me. He said, "Ms. Zillah, the district is waiting for you to apply." I said, "Okay." He comes back the next time. He says, "Ms. Zillah, the district is waiting for you to apply." I said, "Okay, I'll do it." So it took me two weeks to even apply for this job. At that time, I was going
through my own transition whether to stay in education or not. So, I applied for the job.

...Well, nobody had talked to me. You got me? So, I'm literally sitting in that library and Dr. Filder comes in. He says, "Now this isn't how we normally do this." So everybody really thought the person was standing outside of the library door. I can remember, I'm sitting back there sort of like this and he announces me as the principal. The whole entire faculty jumped up. People were crying which is very interesting to me because I stood up. I said, "What y'all crying for?" The few that were. And so he used to tell that. He said, I guess, in his experience after me as the second, I guess, person. But that's the support I have of this community. So that transition for me wasn't hard. You get in there-- it's all about dealing with people. Same thing with teaching.

Despite the experiences of those mentioned above, it is necessary to state that not all of the women felt chosen. Sarah and Leah felt that they had to work for all that they achieved especially with a lack of mentoring, and a lack of assistance in the promotion process, and being hard-pressed to find leadership opportunities after obtaining their degree. Leah had a difficult time becoming a principal, although moving from teacher to assistant principal was accomplished with relative ease for her due to the summer enrichment programs and other leadership opportunities that she took advantage of. She stated:

I've always said the transition from the classroom to an assistant principal was an easy path for me because I really didn’t, I really didn't apply for my job as an
assistant principal… I went into an internship. And I was asked to do an internship. I was asked to do an internship at a specific school by our human resources director. She came to my classroom and told me that's what she wanted me to do. And so when she came to my classroom and told me, that's what she wanted me to do, then I didn't know if she was the only one who wanted me to do it. Or if the superintendent,…Then later the superintendent’s wife, then came to me and told me, Leah, we need you to go to a school as an intern here, and I'm going to be your mentor. And so she was. And then the next year they hired me as an assistant principal.

Being the one that they wanted truly helped her to move out the classroom and begin her career as an administrator. For Sarah, although she was not specifically chosen for a leadership position or groomed to take on a position, she did remember her principal encouraging her to take leadership into consideration. She said:

I did have a principal when I was at the middle school. He liked the way I handled my class and how I taught it. He kind of encouraged me also. He was like, I was Mrs Adams then- Mrs. Adams if you would, when he would leave, when he will be out of the district and we didn’t have, when the assistant principal was not there, I was assigned to be the administrator in charge that day even though I didn’t have a degree or whatever. And he would tell me, if you had your degree, I’d make you assistant principal right now.

As this quote illustrates, even Sarah was chosen, and she had someone who was willing to give her access to the leadership opportunity.
Taken under their wing and trained. Within the theme of being chosen was an understanding of the need to access to a mentor or sponsor as a teacher and then later as an assistant principal and the implications that it had for the Black women as they sought higher positions. As discussed in Chapter Two, the difference between a mentor and a sponsor is a mentor shows you how to do certain aspects of the job, while a sponsor is someone who is able to help you access higher positions though their personal and professional connections and knowledge (Growe & Montgomery, 2000). Mentoring comes in all different shapes and forms. For Esther mentoring came from her former principal in the form of

learning management and how to run a school, how to develop relationships with people, how to play the politics game, literally how to play the game of education politics and paying attention to those things because I was very naïve about the reality of politics in education.

There was also the principal and assistant principal at the first school that gave her “the autonomy” to teach the way she felt fitting and later they gave her “opportunities to take on leadership roles in that perspective.” Esther went on to say, “And I think, just watching those two African American females operate, just kinda motivated me and encouraged me to let me knew that just as well as they can.” They were able to provide support and the necessary opportunities for her to grow as a professional. When Esther reflected on mentoring overall she felt that mentors are people that you have to seek, she said,
If you want to be mentored, you have to seek out a mentor to mentor you, because, I do, very seldom do you have someone that comes up to you to say, "Hey. I really want to be your mentor. I want to show you the ropes or how to achieve higher or move up the ladder faster." So, I think you have to seek it but I think sometimes for females, it's kind of tough to ask for that assistance for a mentor, because then in that perspective if you ask for a mentor, it may look like you need assistance or you need help and you're not confident or competent enough to do your job.

With Esther it was about the mentoring that she had as much as the connections that she made. Her opportunity came through a relationship with another Black female and that helped make her transition possible. She stated

Well…it goes back to that networking I guess. Because I kinda knew someone who knew there was a position open and said hey, I think you’ll be great for it and I wanted to apply for it, and I did. And I was offered the position. And at that time in Orchids County in order for me to transition from dean of students to AP, you had to have had so many years of experience as a dean of students, and it was so many different applicants applying for one job, you may have anywhere from 80 to 90 people applying for one position in Orchids County.

She went on to share that she felt promotion was about

Just sometimes knowing the right people. Knowing the right people. Always carrying yourself professionally at all times. Because you never know who is
observing you and people observing you from the outside sometimes are the one to encourage you to put in the application for openings that are coming up.

The last reference that she made in relation to networking and its significance was that, I think you have to network with a lot of different individuals, make those connections, build those relationships, and me, personally, I’m an introvert. So I’m not that type of person that knows how to network and find that different avenues, and from that perspective I think being in the right place at the right time has been key to knowing somebody who knows somebody who could actually get a foot in the door. And another perspective is just experience. Just getting into, get an opportunity to serve as an AP is tough when you’re trying to fight for that position and you have no experience when you are up against people who have all kinds of other experience in that particular role. So that, that’s kinda tough.

And when those opportunities came, she felt that she was ready due to the on the job training that she was able to receive. She referenced that,

At that particular point, after I had served in that role for a couple of years, and all of the responsibilities that you would daily kind of get to see, I said, “You know what, I can take on some of the roles of the principal because I am doing basically the same thing.” Because at that particular time my assistant principal kinda gave me the autonomy to run the school. He was in and out. And he went to meetings and things of that nature and I kinda operated the school. To get a feel for how the principal role was so when the opportunity came, you know, I accepted it because I was familiar with the operations and things of that nature.
Much like for Esther, when Ruth reflected on mentoring it was about having the space to grow as a professional and learn on the job. She noted in her role as assistant principal,

Just the process of learning it all, I just felt like I could do it. My principal at that time was very much a person that gave me the latitude to you know, do what I wanted to do, you know, make decisions for him, for the school and so at one point it just looked like he was the face, but I was the work and that is really what made me say, ok, I can do that job because I'm doing it now just not getting the check. So that happened, said that’s my money, I'm going to get my check. Cuz I'm doing all the work and he was like telling all the jokes. So, I said this was a job I could do. But being totally honest, it was far more than what I ever could have imagined. There’s a lot of things I didn’t see that he was doing and so I was surprised when I became a principal, truly, because there was a lot of things I thought I knew everything but I had no idea.

So for Ruth, having that experience is what helped her to fully see her own potential and encouraged her to seek promotion in her professional career. But her former principal was not the only person encouraging her. Along the way she connected with a Black woman that worked at the district office and this woman served as a mentor and a sounding board for her over the years. Ruth described their relationship when she stated,

She’s an African American female. But mostly, you know, she’s somebody I can call and really just tell her how I was feeling, and then we’d work backwards and
so she truly allowed for me to say what I wanted to say and then we’d figure it out.

Even the principal that Ruth worked for allowed her the ability to work on different projects and committees, which ultimately led to several networking opportunities. When Ruth thought of her first conversation with that principal and a desire to seek a leadership position, that principal “started to give [her] opportunities to be on district-level committees so [she] could get out there and meet people [her]self and build [her] own relationships.”

Ruth connected her path and the way that she was able to transition from one level to another as a gift from God. She tied her success to this religious belief when she reflected,

I just really felt like I was blessed. Umm, I had a really good relationship with the principal who was here prior to umm, prior to me becoming principal and so he has just groomed me. To be honest, he has stretched me to the point because I did not see that I would one day become an API, assistant principal over curriculum and instruction, I didn’t see that at all. umm, in fact, I always just thought that I would be someone who just managed the kids…

Sarah took advantage of leadership training offered through the district and the state, but she was also able to receive training and guidance from both a former principal (a Black male) and her superintendent (a Black female). She recalled,

Our HR person was a former principal so he took us, took all the principals under the wing, and we would have like, monthly principals meeting where we would
go with things, things that we needed to do. And of course my, my superintendent, she was an African American female also. So of course she took us under her wings because she knew the struggles, she never worked in high school. She was an elementary educator, but she knows the struggles of African American ladies or whatever. So she may feel that we were equipped with everything we needed to be successful. She helped us with budgeting, how we interview staff, just everything. We went through an evaluation process. We looked at that and say, okay, this is the area that you need to grow on, you’re strong on this area right here, they actually offered us professional development within the district because they knew that we aspired to be school leaders.

There was great significance to being taken under the wing of a person that was currently serving or had previously served in the position that the Black women desired. Having a person to help prepare them for the position, in addition to any sponsorship opportunities, was a catalyst for the women to begin their transition into a leadership position.

**Summary.** For the women in this study, being chosen greatly impacted the manner in which they were able to navigate the path to leadership. Mentoring and its impact was different for each women, just as each mentoring relationship was different in terms of race, gender, and position of the person that was doing the mentoring. Whether that person had the ability to also be a sponsor or advocate was also different for each woman, but it was apparent that it was key for the majority of women to have that person or people in their corner.

**Theme #3: Angry Black Woman**
Each day women have to live with the notion that who they are is not the first thing that people will know about them. That is not an experience unique to Black women but the impact of culturally accepted norms is. There was an across the board consensus in the literature that Black women professionals are still confronted with issues of being seen as an angry Black woman or having others perceive them as angry due to their mannerisms and professional stances. The Black women principals involved in the research study had to deal with the same biases during the promotion process as well as in their current positions as school leaders.

The degree of acknowledgement was different for each woman as well as the way that she reacted to the situation. Rebekah explained that for African American females,

There’s this perception, that when we stand in our position of authority, that we are seen as the angry Black woman. And I feel also that I have, that I have to work a little extra harder, because of my culture and where I’m from to, I don’t wanna say to convince people, but it is, it’s a measure of trying to convince them that I’m intelligent, that I really know what I’m doing and I don’t like to feel that is something that white females have to go through and I don’t feel like its something that my white male counterparts have to deal with. But I don’t think that’s something that they even have to process.

Being a Black woman for Rebekah was more than just about her skin color. It impacted an intimate part of her life and she had to overcome things that others did not and may never even have had to think about. That gave her greater satisfaction as she was aware
of the barriers that she had to overcome in order to obtain that position. For Ruth, it was connected to being strong and straightforward. She stated that is seen as mean because

I say what I mean and I mean what I say. Mean. But not cold, not distant, you know? Again it’s, I just want to be honest. I call it being honest and I think that people don’t like to hear the word no. and so that’s what makes people angry sometimes. Or when I have to make a decision and that’s just the way it is. You may not agree with it but that’s just the ways it is. I don’t think that anyone would say that I’m just cold or distant because I am very much a people person.

For Esther, dealing with the perception of being angry was “just the norm” she went on to describe it this way:

We're in school 180 days and I can be very calm 179 days of the school year and that one student that I may elevate my voice, but I've been calm the whole 179 days of that one school year until that today. "Oh, I see. See what I told you? We're all the same angry black women, even though you've been calm the 179 days. So I think that's a stereotype that you're constantly wary of, that's something that's just been ingrained for people to think.

The impact of that perception is that actions can easily be taken out of context or an angry parent can go to social media and try to taint your reputation and that becomes who you are now, or it confirms who people always thought you were just as it did for Esther. Zillah recalled a “parent group that attempted to tank” her when she first became principal of Longleaf High School. She went on to conclude that they did meaningfully
impact her in some ways and that the effects of that are “still lingering with people that may not know you”. To further explain the situation she detailed,

I had a group of parents…that literally, literally tried to get me removed from this building, literally. And that's why I always tell people, ‘If you ever want to hear a testimony on an enemy, I got it for you." And one of the ways they portrayed me, are you ready? She hollers, she screams, she puts her finger in your face, and I remember saying. "That's the profile of an angry black woman." And I was nothing, if you ever know me, if I get upset, actually, I get calmer. I don't yell. I don't scream. I mean, literally, my sister always say it, but I'll go calm before.

Now, but pointing my finger, I talk a lot with my hands. It would be very disrespectful for me to put my finger in your face, or holler, or yell. You might hear anything else. You're not going to hear that I yell at people because I don't. So the first thought that I thought was y'all are trying to portray [me as] an angry black woman, and you got the wrong Black woman. Okay.

**Combatting the image.** The stereotype of the angry Black woman or the notion that Black women are mean, cold, or distant is very much ingrained in American culture, so just as most Black women have to deal with it so did the women in this study. When asked about how she still has to work to fight that perception in her current role, Zillah stated, 

Oh yes. Forever. I think you're going to-- Yes. And I go back to that one example six years ago. To literally portray me for somebody, I mean, that I. So I think
you're always going to battle that or people hear, you know there's a black female there. [It is] probably going to run through their heads until they actually meet me.

Some of the women worked to create a more positive image through their interactions and engagement with staff and the community. Esther determined that she needed to “build relationship with staff and talk to learn about the families and you connect with different things of that nature.” Zillah provided some examples of how people saw her differently once they met her and got to know her. In response to the story relayed above about the women that tried to tarnish her public image, she said,

I met a man who said, "Gosh, Ms. Zillah, you aren't nothing like they said you were." I always think that's very interesting. The man told me that or people will be like, "Ms. Zillah, thank you so." I mean so those that know me and then the people that you've had to turn down and they're mad at you, that you get that out. So that's the difference of it, because you've got people that don't even know you but have heard this by people. That's why I say be very careful.

When Sarah thought of how she treated her staff members, she said her goal was equal and fair treatment of everyone. She stated,

No one can tell you that I treat this one better than I treat that one. I bond with all my teachers that I have. I mean, I have Jamaican teachers. I have African teachers. I have Indian teachers, Caucasian teachers, I have African American. I mean, I have all different kinds of teachers. Different races, ethnicities, however you wanna call it at the school, but I treat them all the same.
Combating the angry Black stereotype is something that some of the women consciously chose not to do. When asked about what she does to combat being seen as an angry Black woman, Leah commented that she does nothing. She went further to explain,

I let people perceive, No. I, the only reason I did with him (a former supervisor that she worked for) was not, was to protect my job- to protect myself, protect my job because I had, I saw what he was doing to other black women who were ill prepared to meet him with documentation and evidence. And so when I saw how he operated then the only, the only- I didn't, I didn't do that to change his perception. There's no changing the perception of a racist person. A racist person is just that. They believe what they believe and what they believe is not based on evidence in the first place. So it's hard to use evidence to prove someone who has no basis for their belief in the beginning.

Very similarly to Leah, Ruth expressed that,

I don’t know if I’d do anything to combat it. Or I, I don’t. I’m just me. I’m just really, and if I’m doing something it’s just probably, I’m not doing it consciously. I just feel like I have to be me. I have to be who I am. And so, but that’s the difference between where I’m just making it about business or we’re joking, you know what I mean. So even with that, I’m very conscientious because not everybody wants, they want a principal that, some people want a principal, I call it a clipboard carrying principal, where you’ve got your clipboard, you’ve got your evaluations, and you’re in and out of class, where I do the same thing but I like to have fun, I like to talk. I like to laugh. So but at the same time, you can ask
anybody and they’ll say but she doesn’t play ‘bout the kids. Because that is always the next thing out of me- we can do a lot, but you’re gonna treat them with respect and there’s not gonna be a room in this building that they can’t go into. There’s not a room where they feel I like oh I don’t wanna go in there. Because that’s a problem. Because the classroom is for them. So when other people may have felt like oh, you know, Johnny is really bad and whateva it is, it’s okay. I just find myself just being that person and I’m clear about that. So some people will find that, if they hadn’t meet a person like that, they may find that to be a bit of a problem. But I just try and be me.

For each woman, their responses to the situation may have been different but the overall existence of the stereotype and the implications on the job was there. These women were fortunate in some ways in that they had someone who was willing to give them the position in spite of the image due to time spent proving their work ethic, dedication to the school and students, as well as building those relationships that allowed them access to promotion. For Rebekah, it was about having a Black mentor (that she sought out) to help her understand her role and who she was as a Black woman leader. She reflected that

I think Abigail (pseudonym for her Black woman mentor) helped me to gain confidence in, so as a Black female, I feel like there’s always this perception about us being angry Black women or being hard, and I think what Abigail helped me with was being okay with being the authority figure, with being a leader and making the hard decisions and having hard conversations with people without being “the angry Black female.”
One of the ways that this stereotype could be feed by the actions of the Black women principals is by the limited desire of some of the Black women principals to socialize with colleagues outside of the school setting. Leah explained her relationship with her colleagues, subordinates, and supervisors as,

**We have casual relationships with each other in our professional role. It's not like I'm not hanging out with anybody on the weekend. I mean, I'm not hanging out with anybody after school. That just doesn't happen for me. And then didn't have anything to do with race or gender or anything. It's just my personality.**

While that lack of desire to socialize and blur the lines could be a defense mechanism due to, as Sarah put it, “keeping my guards up,” it could be seen differently by others. Ruth stated some of the same sentiments when she reflected on her journey, interactions with colleagues, and their reception of her. She said,

**I think it’s the common experience where people are automatically intimidated, you know, automatically intimidated by Black women, in our culture and the way that we carry ourselves. I’m constantly thinking well I’m not interested in the good ole boy system- I’m not interested in going to the bar with you. Like my former principal, they would go to the bar and they would talk. Well I’m not interested in doing that with you. I’m not going to the pool because I don’t like the sun, so, you know, but, you know, sometimes I feel like I’m forced, when people think that, so it doesn’t make me as friendly as he is, but that’s not where I’m comfortable, you know, doing more of that, but I never feel like I can have**
my guard down, black, white, blue, green, purple, I just always feel like, like I always need to be the principal, if that makes sense.

Esther expressed that when forming relationships with her staff at the school there still had to be some boundaries set because,

You can't get too close, because you have to understand that it's only professional. And you, as an administrator, you have to go into these classrooms with those teachers, so when you build these little, close, tight-knit bonds with people, you're friends, and you're hanging out and all that good stuff, and you have to go into a classroom, you observe them and their observation is not going [well], they take it personal. And it's easier to hold a serious conversation with someone when you have a relationship, but there's a professional relationship versus you have a, is it a personal relationship, you have to have a serious conversation about the observation, they don't take it as well. So you have to know your boundaries.

**Summary.** For each of the Black women in the study being Black, being a woman, and being a Black woman meant something different, but regardless of how they perceive who they were, they each still had to deal with how others perceived, received, and reacted to them and that perception was strongly grounded in them being seen as angry or mean or in some regards cold and distant. This idea of the angry Black woman is something that was determined to be a possible hurdle to the promotion process because it is so embedded in the fabric of American society, and, if the person doing the promoting cannot see past that stereotype to the individual characteristics of a
Black woman applicant, he or she may determine that the Black woman applicant is not the right fit for the position without truly looking at her qualifications.

Theme #4: Focused

The fourth theme in the data analysis is that the Black women had to learn how to be focused on who they wanted to be and what they wanted to achieve and learn to navigate within the system or institution in which they worked. They had to learn how to operate within that system while trying to remain true to who they were when they started their journey. The Black women had to learn how to live with the challenges that they face on a daily basis, being Black, and being a woman in addition to taking on the challenges of being the school principal.

The challenges of being a principal. Each job comes with its own challenges and obstacles. The Black women principals had to handle challenges related to their careers as well as making decisions related to their personal lives. In regards to the high school principalship, Sarah charged that,

It’s tough, especially as a high school principal. A former superintendent told me that the toughest jobs in the district are the superintendent and the high school principal, people look at the high school principal and they look at, of course, the superintendent, and believe that you were for female and there are so many different things going on at a high school. If you never worked in high school. We talk about it all the time.

The challenges that Esther and Rebekah faced were centered on the staff and the way conflicts or friction existed in that relationship. Esther explained that sometimes
Going to a school sometimes [is] a culture shock because the people that have been in that position before, they have been of a different race, but when you go in and you start making decisions and you start addressing issues that haven't been addressed in the past, and sometimes those issues that they've addressed with individuals of another color, I think sometimes they can get personal, and it's a vendetta to where they try to get those individuals of that same color to kind of do an alliance against you. So I kind of experienced that.

When Rebekah had to deal with similar issues with staff, she noted that it was not direct actions or direct push back but more indirect behaviors. She stated

   Okay, when I first arrived they were friendly and open and I think when they realized that, I don’t even know to put this, when they saw there wasn’t going to be any kind of favoritism because you’re a Black teacher and I’m Black, you know, I’m gonna treat you like I treat all of my teachers- then I feel like the distance occurred. And yea, I don’t feel supported by my Black teachers. And I don’t, I don’t think we, I know we haven’t a relationship of trust…And I know what I have had with Ms. Luther who is the Black female principal at Clover High School and I think her experience has been the same there cause we’ve mentioned it to each other.

For some of the women, there was a point that they had to make professional decisions that impacted their personal lives. One challenge that Sarah discussed that impacts women in particular is the time requirement. She discussed that one of the factors that women have to take into consideration with the job of high school principal is the long
hours. One of the factors that contributes greatly to the long hours is high school athletics. For Eve, she mentioned in her interview that sports was a great focus in her job and that it played a part in her needing to rely on others for information and guidance. Zillah also mentioned that she was not an athletic person, so learning the world of high school sports was something that was very new to her. She said,

We have sports all year round. So as a high school, I have my other best friend, she’s an elementary principal, so she never has the load that I have to have. I have football games as soon as football season is over I have basketball, and my children expect to see me there. Dr Adams, are you gonna at the game? We’ve got soccer. Right now We’ve got spring sports soccer, baseball, softball, track and field. All these things are going on and they expect you to be there. And when all that is going on, you are still inside the building you’re dealing with athletes all year long. You’re dealing with money rolling in all year long because you have juniors and seniors, paying junior dues and senior dues, you are getting ready for the prom this time of the year, right here…The office managers collecting the money every day. You have to pay the officials for the sports. You have a lot of money coming in and you have to have a lot of patience.

Being a principal is a hard task and comes with great time and emotional obligations. The existence of year round sporting events and responsibilities related to sports can greatly impact the personal lives of Black women principals. A few of the women in the study mentioned their level of gratitude for supportive husbands and families. Esther confessed,
Well, I'll tell you, it's been a tough challenge juggling being a parent, a wife, and then an administrator because sometimes, you tend to, tend to push some family things to the side so that you're able to make the football games or the basketball games, or you're able to do Saturday school, or you're able to do all these events at your school. It's hosting to recognize your kids, and, sometimes, your family gets the short end of the stick. But I think, this year, I've really tried to transition to where things that are important to the family that I'm there. Because you realize at certain points that your kids grow up. My daughter, she's graduating high school this year. They grow up, and a lot of those moments you can't get back. So it's best to enjoy. And sometimes, you have to say, even as the principal of this school, that you're going to let the assistant principal attend this so that you can be a part of some of your family's more memorable moments. But it's tough to juggle. It's tough to juggle. I'll tell you that.

Esther concluded that, as principal,

You not only take on your responsibilities as a mother, a wife, a student, an educator, you take on the responsibility of all the staff that you serve on a daily basis. And you take on, sometimes their burdens because they’ll share with you things that are personal and something that may impact them in the classroom. So you’re dealing with a lot so you have to learn how to separate your personal and professional.

Esther was able to express here the vital notion of separation between personal and professional. Which relates to the previously presented notion that some of the Black
women principals chose not to interact on a personal level with their fellow principals or other members of the district outside of the work environment. Similarly, Ruth confided that there was a high price on family time when she stated,

> What we didn’t talk about was the tax that it has on your family. Because it is taxing. You know, because you are working hard, and so you know, that is a lot of time away from your family, and you know, my kids. I feel like they grew up in the school. My daughter who is seventeen, she was like a year when I started this journey into you know, teaching and going into administration. And this is all she knows, but I wouldn’t change that because I love helping kids. But I do think about some of the people that, you know they may not mind leaving at 5, but I recognize that if I leave at 5 o’clock every day, somebody’s watching, somebody’s saying something. So these are just the inequalities that I think that people experience generally but, you know, I just think that as moms, it’s much harder. Because we still want to be mom. And that a role that somebody cannot take from you. So, you know, it’s just hard, it’s hard to do both because you are spending, [a lot of time in the office] And I feel like, you know, when it comes to gender men are better able to do that than we are.

Sarah also expressed that women have a tougher choice than men. She acknowledged that, in terms of responsibilities, “With the high school principal, a lot of women would not want to be, especially if you have kids, you would not want to be out the long hours”.

**The politics.** A factor that each of the women had to learn was how to deal with the politics of being a part of the leadership in the educational system. The politics
influence so much of what it means to be promoted into educational leaders. Esther noted that as a teacher “no one, no one is willing to take the chance to give you the opportunity to gain experience to say that I have done this in the AP role.” She was an example of someone who had to work through her own connections and knowledge to navigate in spite of obstacles. When Ruth contemplated her transition and what she had learned through the process, she commented that she,

Did not realize that politics was such a huge role in the high school principalship. And so although I know there wasn’t a lot of female principals, it wasn’t until I started to sit in meetings being the only female that I realized “Oh my gosh!” And it goes from being a woman in a room full of men and then truly a woman of color in a room full of white men.

She went on to assert that she felt out of place or that she did not belong there. However, through the above passage, there was also an acknowledgement of how different she was than others in the same room. Further into the discussion of what challenges she faced and the impact of politics on those challenges, Ruth touched on the topic of how the promotion and movement within the ranks of educational leadership was not the same for all. She gave an example of how certain actions are beyond what she would have access to due to her race and gender. She perceived that being promoted and appointed did not happen for her in the same way as it did for some white males in her district. She reported that,

would never happen to me. That would never, ever happen to me, where I would be afforded the chance to just move like that. now there’s not a lot, I wouldn’t say
there’s a lot of people like that but I can quickly tell you that as you look that probably the people of color have their doctorates and you’re more likely than not going to find more Caucasian people without it.

This notion of there being a need for additional requirements or credentials for Blacks relates back to the theme of being hardworking and having to put in the extra effort necessary to be noticed.

For Sarah, one of the challenges that she had to deal with was having personnel giving directives from the district office that never stood where she was standing. She mentioned how it would have been “perfect” if they would “let you go and do your job.” But after 25 years in education she chalked that up as just part of the politics of the job.

With Leah, her story when dealing with the politics of the educational system and being a leader was centered on job placement and promotion. She commented on the “politics of it all” when she exclaimed

The politics, I mean just the politics of it all. That when you, when you know that you're qualified for a position and that you can do a great job at the position. But at the same time you know that you're not going to be chosen because of community politics that going to, when you walk out of an interview and you know that you nailed that interview and you and you even had people that were sitting on the panel to tell you gosh, you nailed that interview. You did a great job on the interviews, and you have people that are shaking their heads when you're talking who- and when the interview, you know what well and your told later went well, and then you find out that you didn’t get the position because there was
already someone that was slated for that position. Then that's one of the obstacles that you have to deal with in this field.

She went on to discuss the politics and implications of having a Black women in the position of school principal who was not the desired choice when she recounted

   It's political …if an African American female assumes a leadership role at certain high schools then you lose the community and business support because that's not the face that they want to necessarily see in that role….so I don't think it is as much internal sometimes as it is external forces that kinds control and dictate the politics in, within a district.

Internal and external factors determine what the leadership of a school may look like. During her interview Leah discussed how she was not wanted by the community where her school was located when she was initially appointed.

   Disconnecting from the negative. One trait that helped the Black women be able to transition from teacher to principal was the ability to disconnect from negative experiences. Not everything that they endured as a Black women trying to become a school principal was positive. Being able to move beyond those circumstances, or to push them out of their minds, helped the Black women to stay focused on their initial goal of being a school leader and being able to positively impact the lives of children.

   For example, per the interviews with Leah and Sarah, these women chose to not pay attention to the actions that were happening around them. Through their responses to particular questions, it was apparent that things were happening in their jobs, but they chose not to give attention or energy to those negative situations. The way that Sarah was
able to overcome was through her ability to “not see color.” Leah expressed that she felt “I don't think my race has anything to do with my job”. She then continued by saying in regards to actions about racism or sexism that,

I don't… I don't really pay it any attention. I mean there are things, things that there are things that you might see in a paper, there are things that you might hear people say about, like in my district, for instance, the majority of principals, leaders that serve as a principal, serve if they’re black, they serve school with a majority black population. And although I know that's true, I don't care. That doesn’t have anything to do with me. I'm concerned about the children that are in my building every day.

This denial is an example of being able to disconnect from the negative and focusing on the positive.

Turning away from racism or sexism. Being able to turn away from components of racism and sexism was key factors to success for some of the Black women principals. Leah expressed she has not encountered or had to “deal with overt racism” with her job or her journey. Rebekah expressed the same sentiment when she said,

As it pertains to like being a leader, I really haven’t seen it. I have seen it when it comes to the equity in our schools but you know, I haven’t, I can’t tell you that personally, I’ve experienced racism.

However, it is important to note that not all of the women expressed the non-existence of racism or sexism in their lives. Some of them did report instances of direct and indirect
examples that happened along the way between being a classroom teacher and becoming the school head.

**Being a Black woman.** The last component of being focused on the goal and doing what was required to get there was the examination of who the women were and how they saw themselves as they developed along their journeys. For being a Black woman was used as a standard for her. She reflected,

I’ll say with my experience, in my experience as a Black female, as a principal, you know, you face a lot of difficulties and challenges, you’re an African American female so you really have to step up your game and set the bar to where that you could hold your own just like any male can and whether African American male or a Caucasian.

Though the majority of the women served in predominately Black schools, being seen as a Black woman or acknowledging themselves as Black leaders was not at the forefront of all of their agendas or missions as Black women leaders. Leah summarized it as “I really don't see myself as a black woman administrator.” In a similar manner, Ruth stated,

Ok. So yeah, I don’t think for me, I wouldn’t go to say, I wouldn’t tie it into me being Black, although sometimes you think, oh gosh she’s Black just like I am but you know, I quickly go back, we got a job to do and it’s not about you being Black, white, blue, green, purple- we’ve got work to do. Let’s talk about the work.

and so, no, I don’t- they all have their issues.

She went on to say,
For others, they may be caught up on the fact that I'm Black and that I've been successful to get to this point. For me, you know, for me, for the kids- you can do it. Look at me. Sometimes for them, I like to use my own upbringing as an example of it doesn’t matter what the situation is, you can still overcome it. Umm, and so, umm, if that helps someone want to, to be better or to strive harder than that is fine but for me, it’s really not about just being the Black woman. I just want to be effective and that’s what I want, I want them to see too. It’s not that we don’t have those conversations, specifically with my males, when I say “okay, so you’re Black and you’re a male, there’s nothing you can do about it. You’ve heard all the history and you know, you gotta make some decisions.” You know what the world is like. And so I do have conversations like that with or even some of my Black girls, some of my Laquishas, we, there is a standard that you have to meet, so you cannot say it’s just about you being Black, you have to live in a world that includes all people.

There is significance for the Black women principals to know who they are as Black women and as Black leaders. Knowing this impacts how they interact with others as well possibly how others perceive them.

**Summary.** This final theme was about the Black women principals having a deep understanding of the factors outside of understanding the details of the job that can impact their ability to transition, as well as being able to successfully navigate the school districts and the social dynamics of being a school leader.

**Chapter Summary**
In this chapter, I presented an analysis of the findings of the research study based on four central themes of being hardworking, being chosen or hand-selected for the position, the impact of the angry-Black woman stereotype to the promotion process and then lastly being focused and having the resiliency to endure to the sake of their desired outcome of being a high school principal. The sought after outcome in presenting these four topics was to bring an understanding of current practices that help and hinder Black women in their transition from the classroom to the secondary level principalship.

Of the four themes presented in this chapter, three of them are active components; being hardworking, being chosen, and being focused; whereas the being chosen theme is passive, and, therefore, not something that the women were in control of. Being chosen was something that was completely external to the women and their desires. Being hardworking, being focused on the goal, and avoiding being seen as an angry Black woman were things that the women could control. The concept of control for the Black women was limited to the impact that racism and sexism have within society. Racism and sexism as embedded systems limit all that the Black women did. Their actions were in many ways a reaction or response to the systems at play within society and their respective institutions. In the next chapter, I discuss the connection between the findings of the data and the literature review and theoretical framework. I also discuss the implications for practice and further research.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The leaders at any school in America have the ability to impact student learning and their overall education in multiple ways. The National Center for Education Statistics (2017, 2016) showed that, although women make up a larger number of principal positions than men, the majority of those women are leading elementary schools and few are leading secondary schools. The same report also stated that the majority of principals are not Black. Therefore, although the literature presented in Chapter Two shows that there is value in having Black women as school leaders, the current situation does not reflect that knowledge. Not having Black teachers makes eliminates the impact that they could have on the lives of students in schools across the nation. Understanding how race and gender can impact the promotion process for Black women could lead to an understanding of the current educational practices, and could help illustrate what needs to be done to have additional Black school leaders.

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding from Black women currently serving in the role of high school principals what aspects of their transition were impacted by racism and sexism in addition to having a greater understanding of what the transition experience was like for them. This purpose was tied to the utilization of Black feminist thought as the epistemological perspective and critical race feminism as the theoretical framework. The content of this chapter is centered on establishing the
connections between the analysis of the findings introduced in the previous chapter with racist and sexist practices of promotion within the educational system.

To answer the research question What roles do racism and sexism play in the transition experiences of Black women as they move from teacher to secondary school principal? I have organized this section based on responding to the themes developed from the data analysis and presented in chapter four to link the themes and sub-themes to racism and sexism. There are three challenges that I present in this chapter. They are: (1) challenging the perception of Black women; (2) challenging the politics of the selection process; and lastly, (3) challenging the notion that women (Black women) can have it all. These three challenges are meant to view the themes presented in the previous chapter from the vantage point of racism, sexism or the intersection of race and gender for the Black women principals.

**Denials**

There are many factors impacting how racism and sexism are manifested in the workplace. There are even more variations of what racism could look like for an individual person. One of the phenomena illustrated by the Black women participants was that, although some of the six women stated that they did not encounter instances of racism or sexism in their professional careers, the examples that they presented contradicted those statements. For the Black women in the research study, there were components of their journeys that they were not fully acknowledged or perhaps were not wholly understood.
Those components are things that I considered to be denials. For example, Leah and Sarah either failed to see or ignored the actions that were happening within close proximity to them. Another example was that Zillah felt that she never encountered any aspects of discrimination based on gender or race in her professional career in regards to promotion. She did have instances where she had to handle racist comments and remarks from parents and students, but she did not see them as being related to her ability to move from teacher to school administrator. This finding conflicts with the quotes provided that stated that were people trying to tarnish her reputation and that she was still dealing with the backlash of that. In this case, and in similar scenarios, the Black women in the study referred to themselves as being naïve to the situation or unaware of it. But perhaps the contrary is true. Perhaps they were actually aware yet chose not to react.

Their rationale for not reacting could be varied and multi-faceted. Speculations as to their reasoning would be just as varied and multi-faceted and not actually reach the true reasons behind why each woman chose to react to (or failed to react to) the situation that lay before her.

An alternative view is that the women simply did not see their situation as racist or sexist. One position Ahmed (2015) identified was the notion of registering an event. Instead of racism and sexism not ever showing up in the lives of these women, perhaps they simply did not register it as such, or perhaps these women were unwilling to fully acknowledge the presence of racism and/or sexism in their professional lives due to the implications, responsibilities, and possible consequences of that acknowledgement. In their study, Enomoto, Gardiner and Grogran’s (2000) participants expressed difficulty in
separating their Blackness from their womanhood, yet for the women in my study there were those who did not see themselves as Black women. This is a denial that varies greatly from the other published studies. Black feminist thought points to the notion that Black women experience life and Black womanhood in different ways. This was also true of the six women that participated in this study.

**Challenging the Perception of Black women**

**Angry Black women.** The most dominate perception imposed on the Black women was the idea of the angry Black woman. Whether they tried to overcome it, deny it or avoid it— it was an undercurrent in how they presented themselves to others. It impacted all they did and how they acted, but it also impacted how they were perceived and received by others. Ashley (2014) described the angry Black woman stereotype as one “including hostility, rage, aggressiveness, and bitterness” and as being “reflective of survival skills developed by Black women in the face of social, economic, and political oppression” (p. 28).

The most impactful statement was when Esther commented that of a 180-day school year the totality of her reputation could be based on a single bad day, if she raised her voice, lost her cool or showed any unfavorable trait. That single day would negate the other 179 days where she was perfectly in control and putting the image of her best self forward. When asked about her encounters with sexism, Ruth said, “only based on how people receive me. That’s it. I don’t think that I’ve felt any directness, but you know, as a female, how people receive my response or lack thereof.” For Zillah it was overcoming
the vindictive actions of parents that were trying to get her removed from her position as school principal. All those examples were based on racism and sexism.

Being seen as an angry Black woman is a social construct that Black women have to deal with in their personal and professional lives (Ashley, 2014; Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Hunnt, 2016; Orem, 2016). Black women may as a fear of the label of angry Black woman, and as a result, suppress “disclosures of anger and minimize its impacts in their lives” (p.28). In some regards, this was true for the women in the study. Some stated that they do not do anything to deal with being perceived as angry. Others acknowledged its presence in their lives and tried to make an effort to ensure that they were not perceived that way.

Racism is a factor of the perception of the angry Black woman in regards to the way that this perception is only real for Black women. There is not this same angry stereotype for women of other races. While Black men are seen as aggressive or violent, that notion is not the same as Black women being seen as angry or hostile (Ashley, 2014; Lewis et al., 2016). Sexism is also a factor as the gender is just as intricate a part of the angry Black woman perspective as the race is. Due to the intricate nature of race and gender on this perception for Black women, it can be a hinderance to the promotion process. This notion of the angry Black women can hinder Black women’s transition to the principalship because others can have pre-conceived notions about who the women are, what their capabilities are and how they can or will behave as the principal. Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, and Hunnt (2016) conducted a research study involving 17 Black women who were undergraduate, graduate and professional students at a predominately
White institution (PWI) to learn about their experiences with gendered racial microaggressions.

One of the themes that emerged from their study was the “expectation of the Angry Black Woman” (p. 768). Lewis et al. (2016) described the theme as the “perceived expectation to embody or fulfill the stereotype of Angry Black Woman” yet the Black women involved in the study “felt pressure to sensor themselves to avoid perpetuating” the stereotype of the Angry Black Woman (p. 768). My findings on this topic were very similar to those of Lewis et al. The other two themes from the Lewis et al. study were “the expectation of Jezebel” and being silenced. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Jezebel characterization is related to Black women being hypersexualized, seductive, and seeking of sexual pleasure (Collins, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Fortunately, the Black women in my research study did not report experiences that mirrored those themes. None of the Black women discussed feelings of their bodies being objectified or had feelings of being invisible or seeking respect from those around them in their roles in the classroom or as they moved up the promotion ladder. Even though the women did not experience or report experiences of being objectified or silenced does not negate the feelings that they endured related to the Angry Black Woman stereotype.

**Maternal.** While the Black women principals did not report the existence of the Jezebel stereotype in their experiences, several of the women discussed how important it was for them to have a connection to their students, particularly the Black ones. This manifests as the women serving as surrogate mothers to the students. Ware (2002, 2006) determined that the characteristics of exemplary role models for African American
students are those that exhibit “an ethic of caring, beliefs about the students and the community, and instructional practices” (p. 428). these are traits that the Black women principals exemplified.

This desire to be a second mother to the students is tied to the mammy stereotype which again links to the race and gender of the Black women principals (Guiffrida, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1999). While being maternal was not exhibited by all participants, for most there was a feeling that it was an expectation from others. While this second-mothering is a desirable trait as it positively impacts the lives of the students, particularly the Black students there is a link for the Black women to racialized and gendered norms. Leah commented during her interview that women are more tolerant than men in leadership roles towards the students. This belief could impact her decision making process because she could possibly feel obligated to be more lenient toward a student. Gender stereotypes such as this one can impact how women feel they should react to particular situations or circumstances that they encounter.

They could also impact the way they are perceived as a whole when applying for and seeking leadership positions. For Black women, the mammy stereotype (Ladson-Billings, 2009) could hinder them from being promoted if others feel that they are going to be too soft on the students or even if a particular woman is not thought to be very motherly or affectionate (within bounds) towards the students.

**Hardworking.**

Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it’s some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but
we don’t know nothin’ but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and
tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don’t
tote it. He hand it to his womanfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so
fur as Ah can see. Ah been prayin’ fuh it tuh be different wid you. Lawd, Lawd,
Lawd! (Hurston, 1990, p. 14)

This quote is from Hurston’s (1990) novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* where
one of the characters, Nanny, is explaining that Black women have been carriers of the
load that others do not carry. In essence its speaking to Black women being strong and
hardworking. Black women have become the mule to the whole world. The Black woman
works hard to carry the weight of her family, her community and in some regards she
carries more weight as a result of her choice of employment. Just as hard work and Black
women have a longstanding and complex history, so does strength for Black women.

The notion of being strong has become embedded in the lives of Black women, it
is part of who they are and how they identify themselves (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009;
Haygood & McLean, 2010; Nelson, Cardemil, & Adeoye, 2016). The strength that Black
women have is what makes them push so hard and give all that they have to the jobs that
they have chosen (and those that were chosen for them) (Ogina, 2017; Orem, 2017).
Many of the Black women principals in this research study, identified as hardworking
and being dedicated to the job of being school leader at all costs.

Linking the topic of denial with the presented discussion of being a hard worker,
Zillah stated that she did not know her reputation. She was not aware of the way she was
perceived by others that she worked with, worked for, or supervised. That contradicts the
fact that she perceived herself as a hard worker. It is difficult to be both a hard worker and someone who does not know that others see the hard work that they do. They get a choice of whether or not they acknowledge the efforts, rewards the efforts, or ignore the efforts, but very rarely can they say that they did not know that a particular person was putting in such effort.

During the data analysis, I noticed how many of the Black women principals stated that what they did was for the betterment of the lives of the students that they served. That was the focus of and a byproduct of that could be the accolades of an administrator or supervisor (direct or indirect).

For the Black women principals in this research study, being hardworking was one of the traits they described as part of them as a teacher as well as a school leader. They felt it was a positive characteristic about themselves, and most took great pride in describing themselves as hardworking. Some of the women linked it to their childhood and upbringing, while others did not make that connection, but did ascertain that it was a long established component of their professional careers. Gay (2014) learned early that as a Black girl she needed to work hard “towards being the best” (p. 55). She compared being Black in the United States to second class citizenship that comes with a need to “claw your way toward equal consideration and some semblance of respect” (p. 55). That strength and determination for one of the principals was something that she identified as being a factor on her physical health and she admitted that her only desire after this job was to live. Ruth, was not able to even fathom being a superintendent due to the health issues that took a toll on her body as a school principal and she imagined the level of
magnification if she was to move further up the leadership ladder. Many of the principals in the study were isolated from peers and carried the burden of knowing that they had not given as much as they wanted to their families on account of them giving so much of themselves to their job.

The quote at the beginning of this section is a reflection of the hierarchy of society. It gives voice to Black women being at the bottom of the social totem pole. It also gives voice to racism and sexism in the lives of Black women, so the notions of being strong and being hardworking are linked to the racist and sexist mindsets of society and they are a long embedded doctrine (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Haygood & McLean, 2010; Nelson, Cardemil, & Adeoye, 2016; Orem, 2017).

One of Arslan’s (2001) findings on work ethic was that there is a “significant difference between ‘any man who is able and willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding’ and ‘if one works hard enough he is likely to make a good life for himself’” (p. 332). Therefore, we can draw the conclusion that working hard contributed to building a solid reputation for the Black women principals prior them being promoted, yet that work ethic was not a guarantee for future success for them. And could be a limitation if working hard were misconstrued as being angry.

White (2015) described Black employment, decades of parents telling their children that to have success they had to be twice as good as a White person. This is also commonly referred to as the Black tax (Prince, 2017). It is the understanding that Black men and Black women (and other oppressed groups) will have to work harder than the
majority group to prove themselves worthy. This is the very foundation of racism in a society. Coates (2015) proclaimed,

> All my life I’d heard people tell their black boys and black girls to ‘be twice as good,’ which is to say ‘accept half as much.’ And these words would be spoken with a veneer of religious nobility, as though they evidenced some unspoken quality, some undetected courage (p. 90)

Kennedy (2015) determined that the idea presented by Coates is “a corrupting racial double standard. Whites do not discuss this type of conversation with their children. They don’t have to. They do not have to prove themselves as worthy. They do not have to prove that they are just as smart, just as talented. The notion of having to prove yourself as a Black woman is linked to both their race and their gender. In Chapter Four I presented several examples of Black women who felt that part of what made them successful was having the right credentials. Those credentials were part of the Black women feeling like they had to prove themselves.

**Internalized perceptions.** While almost all perceptions have ties to social norms and implications thereof, there comes a time when those become internalized (Orem, 2017). For Ruth, the perceptions were manifested through her worries about being seen as incompetent due to the high school that she attended and the neighborhood where she was raised. She also tied her fears to the historically Black college that she attended and obtained her degrees from. This fear was linked to her race and being seen as not good enough.
Ruth also stated that part of the challenging part of being a principal is linked to the people in her building, as well as for other Black women principals, questioning her credentials and qualification for the job. As discussed in Chapter Two, Redmond (2014) “going mean” as a result of being challenged by students as to whether or not she was qualified. This notion of “going mean” is linked to both race and gender. For Ruth, attending a historically Black college or university (HBCU) created a personal anxiety that she was being judged as not as knowledgeable or competent as others who attended predominately white institutions.

**Challenging the Notion That She Can Have It All**

This section contains three subsections related to the notion that Black women principals are unable to have it all. The subsections are that Black women principal are hired only at selected schools, which is about Black women predominately working at Black or large minority population schools; acknowledging the sacrifices that must be made in the role of principal and lastly the impact of strength and the price that must be paid in order to give the appearance of strength.

**Only at selected schools.** The Black women principals that were involved in the research study were all serving at predominately Black schools with the exception of Zillah, and Eve (Shell, 2017). One of the limitations of the promotion of Black women to principalship is the location and demographics of the school. Five of the six Black women in the research study were heads of predominately Black schools. Zillah, as well as Eve, served in schools that were predominately White. Both of their schools had very small Black student populations. Eve had a greater sense of comfort with being one of a
few Black people in the building, while Zillah seemed much more uncomfortable with her situation. Zillah learned her school and how to operate within it while being true to herself.

In connection to the theme for this section, I challenge the notion that Black women are given the opportunity to work in many different school demographics as a school principal. Horsford (2012) provided a rationale for why school districts often assign Black women to schools that are “largely Black, poor and underresourced” (p. 13). Black women do not have the advantage of being able to have their choice in which schools they lead. Horsford (2012) connected the limited demographics of the schools that Black women, and Blacks in general tend to serve to the qualities that Black (Black people) bring to the table and the impact that those qualities can have on the students that those schools serve.

Regardless of the school district size where the Black women worked, they were primarily limited to working within the same type of school. This limiting factor in their careers was based on their race. There is no debate that Black women bring unique qualities, experiences, and leadership styles to the leadership table, yet for these to be used as a limiting factor for the schools that they can lead is an inhibitor for Black women leaving the classroom to seek leadership, specifically principalship.

**Sacrifices must be made.** Arguably, as a professional women, there is the assumption that you can have it all. However, Slaughter (2012) contended that, even today, women cannot have it all, that there must be a sacrifice made in regards to having a strong personal life (with husband and kids) or in the professional life (having the
desired career). The desired outcome is to be able to have both and serve the multiple roles well, however, Slaughter (2012) provided anecdotes that showed in order to succeed in one area, there must be sacrifices made in the other area. There were many women who had children and were cognizant of the impact that being a principal would have on their children and their families as a whole. For the women with children, the majority of them felt that they needed to wait until their children reached a certain age before pursuing their dream of principalship. This is an example of how sexism played a role in the transition from teacher to principal.

The women were aware of the immense challenges that come with being a school principal and had to choose between job and family. This is typically not a choice that men have to face as women are the predominate keeper of the home and children, even in an age where typically both the man and woman are working outside the home. Several of the women mentioned the long hours required, the obligation of attending the majority if not all of the school sporting events, with two or more sports are always in season, aside from all of the primary tasks that come as part of the job of being the school leader to maintain the daily operations of the school and an acceptable level of academic integrity for all students.

**The price strength paid.** Based on the notion of strength and how it serves as a mask in the lives of Black women (Walker-Barnes, 2014), one needs to consider the role that strength plays in the sacrifices that Black women have to make in order to obtain the principalship. As discussed in Chapter Two, perceptions of Black women can either be from a social perspective or an internalized perception that Black women have of
themselves. One of the self-imposed, internalized perceptions was having to be 
“superwoman” which is characterized by being “hardworking and hypercapable” (p. 
169). This role ensures that she can be all things to all people at all times, while 
sacrificing her personal needs (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009).

Ruth provided a great example of the sacrifice that she had made in becoming a 
principal. Ruth expressed her desire to live. She mentioned “It’s stress. Like the stress is 
tremendous for a high school principal and I could only imagine what it would be for a 
superintendent, who’s in charge of the entire district. And, you know, I wanna live.” She 
desired to be able to live when she had completed her job as principal. She also alluded to 
the sickness that she has suffered due to the stress of this intense position, but she did not 
name it specifically. Although Ruth was the only one to state the sacrifices made, it is 
likely that others may have felt similarly.

According to Ashley (2014), the demands of being strong for Black women could 
contribute to “feeling unsafe and unprotected as a result of oppression and stereotyping” 
in addition to feelings of anxiety related to current and future circumstances around being 
stereotyped (p. 28). Ashley went on to discuss “feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, 
and self-hate” (p. 28). None of the women in this study explicitly admitted to the 
presence of these afflictions in there, but that does not negate the potential presence of 
sickness or the negative impact that this illness could have on the Black woman principal. 
Both Zillah and Ruth acknowledged knowing Black women who had previously served 
as school principals and decided for unspecified reasons to leave the position.
Leah discussed the demands of serving in the principalship and how no one would fully understand what was required of it unless they themselves had served in the position. Growe and Montgomery (2000) noted that seeking a mentor is something that women may be hesitant to do for fear of looking incompetent to others. This again is a way that sexism manifests itself in the transition as well as in the daily task of being a Black woman school principal.

For Black women, the issue is further compounded behind having to appear strong and “superhuman” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Orem, 2017; Walker-Barnes, 2014), which results in a racialization of the transition experience that is unique to Black women as they desire to move from the classroom to being the head of a school. Phillips (2016) went further with this description to state that the Strong Black Woman is represented as “emotionally controlled and regulated (i.e. strong)” and she is distinguished by “her self-depleting care of others, and her self-reliance (i.e., radical independence)” (p. 69). This exemplifies the responses that the women gave about being guarded or not mixing personal and professional activities, making sure that they had strong boundaries between themselves and their subordinates, between themselves and their peers, and between themselves and their superiors.

The Black women principals did not report having large social circles and had some issues trusting others with their stories in their daily lives. These examples all tie back to the definition presented by Phillips (2016), who cautioned that this characterization is “more an illusion than a reality” (p. 69), which is also true for the women in this study as some of them desired to have more connections and relationships.
with others. Gay (2014) pointed out that Black women “must be exceptional if we are to be anything at all” (p. 56). Gay also pointed to the notion of exceptionalism, being the only one or one of a very few. This was essential to the stories of the Black women principals that participated in the study. They were exceptional. They were the only Black women principals in their districts or one of a very few. Their stories were exceptional. These women represent both the normal and the exceptional of what it takes to be a leader in the field of education, specifically at the secondary level.

**Challenging the Politics of Selection**

Being chosen, selected, wanted, or recruited was key to the promotion process for the Black women principals. Yet, it is something that the Black women principals had zero control over. They were not able to do anything to determine whether they would be chosen or picked. Their selection may not have been actually related to their reputation as hardworking, their dedication to bettering the life success of the students under their charge nor the credentials they worked hard to obtain. The earliest case was the participant from the pilot study while others may not have given a specific time of when they felt that they were chosen for the promotion process.

This selection process was both gendered and racialized. During the course of the interviews, one or two of the women even alluded to their selection being based on factors that were beyond them. Some of the reasons given included the need for more diversity within the school district or within a particular school, the personal and professional relationships they developed, or the timing of when they applied for positions, or chose to begin an administrative career.
Within the selection process, the women felt that one of the barriers that they faced was centered on high school athletics, and that being a primary part of the job that women were not as comfortable with. They also felt that it was an area that was very male dominated and required them to either have had experience as a high school athlete or have someone to serve as a liaison to help navigate the field. This was an example of the effect of sexism in the transition process.

Their relationships were key to their promotion in regards to either training, sponsoring, or mentoring. Enomoto, Gardiner, and Grogran (2000) stated that for people of color it is “important that the mentor believe in them and care about their success” (p. 574). For the women in this study who were able to receive a mentor, their mentors were able to meet this requisite. The mentoring came in the form of leaders of the same race, as well as mixed race configurations. Myung et al. (2004) gave significance to the race and gender of a supervisor as a potential aide for the promotion of a Black woman through tapping. Yet, for the women in the study, there was a mixture of race and gender combinations for the direct and indirect supervisors (assistant principals, principals, and/or district personnel including the superintendent), as well as the mentors and sponsors the women had as a teacher or as an assistant administrator. It cannot be stated that only same-gender or same-race relationships were a determining factor in being able to succeed in the promotion process but it can be stated that the presence of a mentor and/or a sponsor was vital to the promotion from teacher to principal for these six Black women secondary school principals.

Missing Voices
An observation that I had was some of the school districts opted out of participating in the research study. Some responded and said no and others simply would not respond to the calls and emails. It makes me wonder why they would not allow their principals to participate. Other Black women, whose districts permitted them to participate, opted out. Like some of the school districts, some of the Black women responded that it was not a good time, while others simply failed to respond to emails and/or calls.

I can only speculate about the reasons that those women chose not to participate. I know that the time of year that I attempted to contact them was a busy part of the school year, but honestly there are not really extended times during the school year that are not hectic for a high school principal. One speculation that I have is that not everyone is willing to have a conversation about racism and sexism within their work environment. Not everyone is willing to deal with the possible ramifications of speaking out about what they have encountered in regards to racism and sexism within the organization that they work for, especially if they have aspirations of further promotion or progression within the district.

Additionally, I believe there must be a level of acceptance and understanding of the issues on the part of Black women in order for them to participate in the study. Some may have felt that their experiences were not worth telling, and others may have felt that the current status of things was the norm and that discussion around the topic was not necessary.

**Recommendations for Future Research**
The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of Black women secondary school principals in regards to their transition from the classroom as a teacher to being the school head. The focus area of their transition journeys was the impact of racism and sexism and the potential hindrances or aides in the lives of the participating Black women. In this study I utilized data from six interviews with current Black women high school principals.

Future studies on the experiences of Black women in educational leadership should attempt to expand the size of the sample population, as well as conducting multiple interviews and focus groups for the participants. Holding focus groups may be particularly beneficial to provide an opportunity for the women to interact and engage in a discussion of their journeys. That discussion would perhaps allow women to share a deeper insight into, or perhaps to recall different aspects of, their transition experiences than they would during interviews.

I was also an outsider and I may not have known the right questions to ask to get them to open up. To the participants, I was a researcher and not a peer in regards to holding or having previously held the position of secondary school principal, so there were things that I was not privy to understanding that perhaps another Black women secondary principal would have been able to bring out in the discussion.

Additionally, aside from the group forum, having multiple interviews with the women would have been helpful. That would have given a sense of comfort with me and that could have aided them discussing some of the topics more freely.
One area that would extend my findings from this study would be to get the perspectives of current Black women assistant principals, Black women teachers who have a desire to move out of the classroom into leadership positions, and Black women who previously served in the capacity of secondary school principal. Each of these groups of women would likely offer valuable insight to round out those provided by the women in this research study.

There is value in speaking to each of these groups because they are each at a different level and the stakes are different for them so their comfort when speaking of future endeavors or prior experiences may be different than the Black women principals that were in this research study. Black women who are still in the classroom can speak to the current struggles of moving out of the classroom, as well as some of the things that they have tried to do, some of the things that they are doing well and some things that they have learned along the way that they think will help with them transition into a leadership position. Those Black women serving in the current role of assistant principal can speak to barriers that they have encountered with promotion, their desire to be promoted, and some of the lessons that they have learned on the way.

The final group of Black women, former principals, could speak to what their experience was like without the strings of still being tied to their former positions. There are limitations at times to what people feel like they can or should say about their employer when they are still highly vested in that institution. Those who are no longer in that institution have a freedom of speech that can help others understand what the transition was like for them.
As this research study only provided the vantage point of those residing in one state, another avenue for further research would be to expand the area from which the participants are drawn to include other southeastern states. Additionally, although the women in the study represented all parts of the state and a neighboring state, having the perspective of other regions of the United States would provide more overarching depth to the experiences of Black women secondary principals. Furthermore, having Black women at various phases of the educational leadership career path from varying parts of the United States speak to their experiences, a more general understanding of Black women’s experiences transitioning into leadership positions could be developed.

Understanding what it takes to get into leadership can begin to answer the question “Where are all the Black women leaders?” Black women bring experiences and perspectives with them as leaders that can positively impact the lives of all students, especially Black students. Yet, there are not many Black women serving in the capacity of secondary leader which is a disadvantage for those students. There is still much work to be done on why there are limited numbers of Black women serving in the capacity of secondary school principal and understanding what needs to be done to change that shortage.

Replication of the current study is needed for further research to close the gap in the literature surrounding the experiences in educational leadership for Black women and how other Black women can gain access to those leadership positions. Some questions that can be derived from such studies would be:

1. How can Black women prepare to become school principals?
2. What is the role of the school district in this preparation process?

3. What is the role of preparation programs in preparing leaders that are aware of racial and gendered bias that exist in the hiring process?

4. How can school districts take a more active role in eliminating factors of racism and sexism?

5. How can the politics around selection of candidates and appointees be limited in educational hiring practices?

**Implications for Practice**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand the impact of racism and sexism on the transition from teacher to school head for Black women principals in secondary schools in a specific southeastern state. In secondary education leadership there is much work to be done around bringing more diverse leadership to the table. The desired outcome of this research study is to create dialogue around its findings, both the positive measures and the obstacles that the Black women involved in the study encountered to determine measures that schools, school districts, superintendents, and other stakeholders could implement to begin aiding, continue aiding, or removing barricades to increase the promotion of Black women into secondary leadership positions.

Racism and sexism are entrenched, longstanding social norms in American society. Racism and sexism can impact the practices within organizations and institutions. The implications of racism and sexism can impact the day-to-day norms and patterns of organizations. They can also impact the hiring practices that people have about those of an opposing gender and/or race. Yet, Black women are still striving
towards goals that they have set for themselves. Those goals often require promotions within the companies they work for. In order for them to obtain higher positions, they must learn the norms of the organization that they are a part of and how to navigate those embedded structures. The Black women in this study were the same as others in regards to having to learn to navigate the organization that they desired to be a part of. They encountered racism and sexism throughout their experiences being promoted, yet they were able to successfully navigate and obtain higher leadership positions.

The limited number of Black women secondary principals is an issue that cannot be ignored. This study was designed to help understand what facilitated and what hindered Black women as they made the transition to the principalship from a classroom teacher and how those components were linked to racialized and gendered biases.

The findings of this study indicated that racism and sexism played significant roles in the transition for Black women principals from being a classroom teacher to being a secondary school principal. The women in the research study were able to successfully navigate the politics and systems of racial and gender bias in order to obtain the personal goal of becoming a principal. The findings indicated that, although the women did not register some events as racist or sexist, racism and sexism were an undercurrent to all that they did prior to and while in the role of school principal. There is a need for discussion of the impact that racism, sexism and their intersectionality has for Black women seeking the principalship. There is a need for all stakeholders to be involved in this conversation if there is to be change within the educational system around who is deemed worthiest to be a secondary school principal. The dialogue needs
to be centered on what the current barriers are, as well as the supports that are in place that make the transition from teacher to administrator possible.

Issues of diversity are often embedded in educational leadership graduate courses, but the discussions are typically broad and occur infrequently. In order to understand and interrupt hiring practices and institutional norms a conscious effort has to be made from all angles including university leadership preparation programs. University preparation programs can help mold the minds of new leaders, which can lead to breaking the systems of practices that could be perceived as racist or sexist. Doctoral programs have a responsibility to emphasize diversity and the current practices in educational leadership related to race and gender bias within each course taught.

One potential measure that school districts could implement is an a leadership institute specifically designed to provide the leadership experiences, mentoring, and other forms of support minority leaders need to help gain access to leadership positions in schools. The program could be beneficial to Black leaders and women leaders at all levels. I would recommend seeking leaders with double or multiple minority attributes.

School districts should consider implementing professional development seminars for school-level and district-level leaders that address some of the current hiring practices and speak to how they are related to potentially racist or sexist practices. Also creating professional developments that truly addresses the need for diversity in school districts could be beneficial. In order for this to be most effective districts should consider bringing in an outside professional who specializes in diversity training and awareness.

Conclusion
This study provided insight to fill the gap of what the transition experience is like for Black women principals in secondary schools while providing perspectives on how racism and sexism factor into that transition experience. Specifically, this study revealed that some Black women know and openly acknowledge the ways that racism and sexism factored into their journey, and that both racism and sexism played key roles in their transitioning from classroom teacher to being a school principal. However, some of the Black women in the study felt that they did not encounter racism or sexism in their personal careers, though they were able to see how it would impact others. Others were able to see it in their journey, and one was even able to see how it may have benefitted her as it helped her gain access to positions through the need for diversity.

In this final chapter, I brought together the themes of the transition experience that were tied to racist and sexist practices, then made a call to practitioners to change the way of doing things so that Black women are able to have equal access to promotions within the field of education, as their presence matters. Through looking at the connection to the caricatures of Black women portrayed in the media in connection with the stories provided by the Black women involved in the study I was able to fully examine how the embedded nature of racism was a factor on how these women were perceived by their peers as well as by those working for them and how for some Black women, the perceptions of potential employers could be a stumbling block in their pursuit of leadership positions. I also examined how the “angry Black women” stereotype displayed both a racist and sexist mindset.
In the final chapter I also spoke to the need for further exploration of the topic. I suggested expanding the body of the study to Black women teachers and Black women assistant principals who aspire to principalship as well as including former Black women principals as each of these groups can provide valuable insight that could lead to a more complete look at such as a complex issue.
Appendix A:

Internal Review Board Documents: Information Letter

Information about Being in a Research Study
Clemson University

Understanding the Transition of Black Women from the Classroom to the High School Principalship

Description of the Study and Your Part in It
Dr. Hans Klar and Mrs. Brittany Neely are inviting you to take part in a research study. Dr. Klar is an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at Clemson University. Mrs. Neely is a graduate student at Clemson University, and will be conducting this study with the help of Dr. Klar. The purpose of this study is to look at how issues of race, gender, and class impact the transition experiences of Black women from the classroom to the high school principalship in [Redacted].

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a Black woman principal at a [Redacted] public high school. Your participation in this study will not exceed 1.5 hours. During this time, we would like to interview you face-to-face (or via telephone or Skype) for approximately one hour. In the event a follow-up interview is necessary, it would not exceed 30 minutes. We would also like to ask you to share documents which would help us understand your transition experience, such as your job description, resume, and calendars of events and meetings.

Possible Benefits
A benefit to your participation in this study is the opportunity for you to reflect on issues of racism, sexism, and classism that have impacted your transition experience from the classroom to the principalship. This study is also beneficial to the academic community as it will fill a gap in the current research.

Risks and Discomforts
We do not know of any risks or discomforts to you in this research study.

Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality
Only members of the research team will see your information in its original format. The data will be maintained on password-protected computers belonging to research team members. Information which identifies you will not be shared. Pseudonyms will be used in place of your school and school districts. The results of this study may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations; however, no individual participant will be identified.
Audio recording will be used during the interview process but will not be used for any other purposes outside of the data analysis portion of the research study. Audio files of the interviews will be transcribed. After the audio files are transcribed, the original audio file will be deleted. All data will be maintained for at least five years after the completion of the study, in accordance with Clemson University's archival storage policies.

**Choosing to Be in the Study**
You do not have to be in this study. You may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

**Contact Information**
If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Hans Klar at Clemson University at 864-656-5091 or hklar@clemson.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-0636 or irb@clemson.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC’s toll-free number, 866-297-3071.

A copy of this form will be given to you.
Appendix B:

Internal Review Board Documents: District Recruitment Email

Understanding the Transition of Black Women from the Classroom to the High School Principalship

Good morning/afternoon/evening,

My name is Brittany Neely. I am a high school math teacher in Greenville County and a graduate student at Clemson University. I am conducting a study on the transition of Black women principals from the classroom to the high school principalship in [redacted] with the help of my doctoral advisor. I have received permission from Clemson university to conduct this study. I am writing to ask for your permission to invite [name(s) of Black women principal(s) in district] to participate in my study.

If [name(s) of Black women principal(s) in district] agree(s) to participate in the study, I would interview her/them face-to-face (or via telephone or Skype) for approximately one hour. In the event a follow-up interview is necessary, it would not exceed 30 minutes. I would also ask her/them to share documents which would help me understand her/their transition experience. I have attached an informational letter that provides more information about the study.

If you permit me to conduct this study, or would like more information about the study, please simply reply to this email. I look forward to the possibility of hearing from you and from learning about the experiences of [name(s) of Black women principal(s) in district].

Thanks so much for your consideration.
Kind regards,
Brittany Neely
Appendix C:

Internal Review Board Documents: Participant Recruitment Email

Understanding the Transition of Black Women from the Classroom to the High School Principalship

Recruitment Email to be sent to prospective participants:

Good morning/afternoon/evening,

My name is Brittany Neely. I am a high school math teacher in Greenville County and a graduate student at Clemson University.

I am writing to ask you to participate in a research study that I am conducting on the transition of Black women principals from the classroom to the high school principalship in South Carolina with my advisor. I have received approval from your district and from Clemson University to conduct this study.

If you agree to participate in the study, I would interview you face-to-face (or via telephone or Skype) for approximately one hour. In the event a follow-up interview is necessary, it would not exceed 30 minutes. I would also ask you to share documents which would help me understand your transition experience. I have attached an informational letter that provides more information about the study.

If you agree to participate in the study, or would like more information about participating in the study, please simply reply to this email. I look forward to the possibility of hearing from you and learning about your experiences.

Thanks so much for your consideration.

Kind regards,
Brittany Neely.
Appendix D:

Interview Protocol

Understanding the Transition of Black Women from the Classroom to the High School Principalship

Interviewer: ___________  Interviewee: ___________

Location: ___________  Date: ___________  Time: ___________

Interview Protocol

Hello, _______________. Thank you for sitting down with me for this interview. From the conversation that we had a couple of weeks ago, I am conducting interviews to learn more about how Black women serving as secondary school principals understand the role of racism and sexism in the transition experience from the classroom to the current leadership position.

Thank you for taking time out of your schedule to meet me with and allowing me to interview you.

- I want to remind you that your participation is voluntary and that you may stop participating at any time or choose not to answer any questions
- I would like to record our interview using a digital voice recorder. Do I have your permission to record this interview? Thank you, I will begin recording now.

Focus of Interview: to gain insight on your transition experience from being a classroom teacher to being a school principal. And to examine the ways that racism or sexism may have impacted that journey.

Background of education, experiences in education and teaching experiences (to be used as prompts)

1. How old are you?
2. Where did you grow up? (describe the city, the state, the community)
3. Tell me a little about your family and family dynamics when you were growing up.
4. How would you describe your social class growing up?
5. How would you describe your current social class?
6. Did your family (immediate and extended) emphasize education?
7. When did you know that you wanted to be an educator?
8. What initially made you want to become an educator?
   a. How long have you been in education?
b. What made you remain in education?
9. Tell me about the college/university that you attended.
10. What did you learn in college about what it means to be an educator?

11. Tell me about the Black teachers that you had growing up. Tell me about the Black administrators that you had growing up.

**Overview of Transition Experiences**
1. I want to begin the conversation by asking, what was your journey to becoming a principal like?
   a. What prompted you to become a principal?
   b. What other professional positions you have held?
   c. What were some of your previous roles and responsibilities?
   d. Follow-up questions from their information about previous roles in educational leadership

2. When did you determine that you wanted to be an administrator?
3. What was the timeframe between finishing your degree and beginning to apply for jobs?
   a. How old were you when you started your certification program?
   b. How long did it take to finish the certification program?
4. How long from the time you started applying did you get your first AP job?
   a. How long was this after your completing your degree?
5. Do you think that where you grew up or the city/state where you worked as a teacher impacted your transition experience? In what ways?
6. What is the transition from the classroom to the high school principalship like to for a Black woman?

**Mentors**
1. What, if any, mentoring did you receive along the way to becoming a principal?
   a. Who were your mentors?
   b. In what ways did they mentor you?
2. Do you feel that the principal that you worked for as teacher and/or while you were an AP, helped to prepare you to become a principal? How?
   a. If the principal did not support your growth, how did you gain additional experiences? Was there someone that helped groom you for this position?
   b. Why do you feel that no one/your former principal(s) did not help prepare you for this position?
   c. What was the race and gender of this former principal?
3. Could you tell me about two very different mentoring relationships that you’ve had over time and describe how they were similar? How were they different?
   a. How did gender and race influence your mentoring relationships?

**Gender**
1. How do you define sexism?
   a. What is the impact of sexism on women being able to transition in the field of education?
b. Do you think that sexism can have an impact on the mentoring that a person can receive as a teacher or assistant principal? In what ways?

2. How do you think being a woman influenced your experiences becoming a school leader? (positive and negative)

3. In what ways do you think your experiences were different from those of male principals?

4. Would you say that you’ve experienced or faced sex discrimination during your professional career?

Race

1. How do you define racism?
   a. What is the impact of racism on Black women being able to transition in the field of education?
   b. Do you think that racism can have an impact on the mentoring that a person can receive as a teacher or assistant principal? In what ways?

2. How do you think being Black influenced your experiences becoming a school leader?

3. In what ways do you think your experiences were different from those of male principals?

Race/Gender

1. What does it mean to be a Black woman educator?

2. What does it mean to be a Black woman administrator?

3. How do you think the combination of being Black and a woman influenced your experiences becoming a school leader?

4. Do you think this experience is unique to just you or is it the common experience of most Blacks, specifically Black women in your community? City? State?

5. In what ways do you think your experiences were different from principals who weren’t Black women?

Summary

1. Overall, was there anything in particular that made it easier for you to become a principal?

2. Overall, what hurdles or obstacles do you feel that you have overcome?

Perceptions of You as a Black Women Principal

1. How do you feel race and gender has affected the way you are perceived by others (staff, students, colleagues, peers)?
   a. In what ways would you say that as a Black woman you are expected to have a different relationship with minority students (mainly Black students) than your white counterparts?
   b. As a black female leader, do you feel that you still have to fight against the perceived stereotypes of black women? In what ways do you feel this is your reality? Give specific examples of instances if you can.
   c. Have you ever been described as mean, cold, distance, too serious? Why do you think that is your characterization? Do you feel that is a true statement as you as a professional? Why or why not? If so, was it intentional?

2. How often do you interact with other principals?
   a. Who do you interact with and what about?
b. Are these interactions exclusively for you and the other Black women principals?

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## Appendix E:

### Sample Coding Transcript

**Mean, angry Black woman**

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<th>Rebekah</th>
<th>Uhh, yes, I would say that African American females as I mentioned earlier, that’s there’s this perception, that when we stand in our position of authority, that we are seen as the angry Black woman. And I feel also that I have, that I have to work a little extra harder, because of my culture and where I’m from to, I don’t wanna say to convince people, but it is, it’s a measure of trying to convince them that I’m intelligent, that I really know what I’m doing and I don’t like feel that is something that white females have to go through and I don’t feel like its something that my white male counterparts have to deal with. But I don’t think, think that’s something that they even have to process. I think they were different. I think [deleted] helped me to gain confidence in, so as a Black female, I feel like there’s always this perception about us being angry Black women or being hard, and I think what [deleted] helped me with was being okay with being the authority figure, with being a leader and making the hard decisions and having hard conversations with people without being “the angry Black female”</th>
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<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Mean, cuz I say what I mean and I mean what I say. Mean. But not cold, not distant, you know, again it’s, I just want to be honest. I call, being honest and I think that people don’t like to hear the word no. and so that’s what makes people angry sometimes. Or when I have to make a decision and that’s just the way it is. You may not agree with it but that’s just the ways it is. I don’t think that anyone would say that I’m just cold or distant because I am very much a people person.</td>
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<td>Esther</td>
<td>It’s not you if you are-- because my thing is if you build relationship with staff and talk to learn about the families and you connect with different things of that nature. But in the same token, you can't get too close, because you have to understand that it’s only professional. And you, as an administrator, you have to go into these classrooms with those teachers, so when you build these little, close, tight-knit bonds with people, you're friends, and you're hanging out and all that good stuff, and you have to go into a classroom, you observe them and their observation is not going, they take it personal. And it's easier to hold on a serious conversation with someone when you have a relationship, but there's a professional relationship versus you have a, is it a personal relationship, you have to have a serious conversation about the observation, they don't take it as well. So you have to know your boundaries. It's, I think, they feel that it's just the norm. Yeah, it's just the norm. Because I, we're in school 180 days and I can be very calm 179 days of the school year and that one student that I may elevate my voice, but I've been calm the whole</td>
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187
179 days of that one school year until that today. "Oh, I see. See what I told you? We're all the same angry black women, even though you've been calm the 179 days. So I think that's a stereotype that you're constantly wary of, that's something that's just been ingrained for people to think.

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| Zillah | It's just whoever you're talking to. So if you're a parent that I won't excuse five days for a cruise then you've got a real problem with me because you got excused in elementary school and middle school and now you come over here, and you know, "Ms. Zillah, are you telling me I can't take my kid out?" And I say, "Yes you can, but what I'm telling you is you've only got five days." But to that parent, you're trying to tell me what to do with my child. No I'm not. So you've got a mixture of, if I've got to tell you no, and you don't like what I'm saying then you know, I've got times where I try got to explain to, okay, this is the reason why. So it's a mixture of everything. I don't think you can guess because people, your current parent population is very different too. On what they believe in, what they allow their children to do.

Oh yes. Oh yes. I mean like, I don't do any social media by choice. I just don't. Handling all the emails once a day is enough for me. But you get people that are very interesting to me. That one parent group that attempted to tank me and I think they did. So you've got that still lingering with people that may not know you. Like I met a man he said, "Gosh, Ms. Zillah, you aren't nothing like they said you were." I always think that's very interesting. The man told me that or people will be like, "Ms. Zillah, thank you so". I mean so those that know me and then the people that you've had to turn down and they're mad at you, that you get that that go out. So that's the difference of it because you've got people that don't even know you but have heard this by people. That's why I say be very careful. There are three sides to that story but as the principal you don't get to tell your side. Depending on if it's a personnel issue, you've got to be that professional whereas they're out there on social media and in the community ripping you apart. And really, you can't really, really respond to it.

Oh yes. Forever. I think you're going to-- Yes. And I go back to that one example six years ago. To literally portray me for somebody, I mean, that I. So I think you're always going to battle that or people hear, you know there's a black female there. Probably going to run through their heads until they actually meet me.

Or your response to questions, so that's what I mean. Because, I'll give you a good one. I had a group of parents, this will be interesting for you, that literally, literally try to get me removed from this building, literally. And that's why I always tell people, "If you ever want to hear a testimony on an enemy, I got it for you." And one of the ways they portrayed me, are you ready? She hollers, she screams, she puts her finger in your face, and I remember saying,
"That's the profile of an angry black woman." And I was nothing. If you ever know me, if I get upset, actually, I get calmer. I don't yell. I don't scream. I mean, literally, my sister always say it, but I'll go calm before. Now, but pointing my finger, I talk a lot with my hands. It would be very disrespectful for me to put my finger in your face, or holler, or yell. You might hear anything else. You're not going to hear that I yell at people because I don't. So the first thought that I thought was y'all are trying to portray an angry black woman, and you got the wrong black woman. Okay?

Leah No, I let people perceive, No. I, the only reason I did with him was not was to protect my job- to protect myself, protect my job because I had, I saw what he was doing to other black women who were ill prepared to meet him with documentation and evidence. And so when I saw how he operated than the only, the only- I didn't I didn't do that to change his perception. There's no changing the perception of a racist person. A racist person is just that. They believe what they believe and what they believe is not based on evidence in the first place. So it's hard to use evidence to prove someone who has no basis for their belief in the beginning.
REFERENCES


