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Glass Ceilings and Bottomless Floors: Black Women's Experiences in Education Reform Leadership

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GLASS CEILINGS & BOTTOMLESS FLOORS: BLACK WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES
IN EDUCATION REFORM LEADERSHIP

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Education

by

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To those who came before me, my ancestors, whose wildest dreams are the reason this
is possible.

To those who will continue after I am gone, my students, the reason I write this and
continue to do this work, deliberate and unafraid.

68.6.16

To the countless students I've lost during my work as an educator. The Black babies that
our current education system failed. Rest in power.

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It is important that we learn humility, which says there was someone else before me who paid for me. My responsibility is to prepare myself so that I can pay for someone else who is yet to come. –Maya Angelou

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ABSTRACT

Recent social commentary, articles, and research studies are increasingly discussing the ways in which urban education reform, which is overwhelmingly white and female, is failing communities of color in the United States by continuing to reify systems of oppression and inequity. As the faces of urban public school students in the United States become more African American and Latino, the faces of leadership in the U.S.'s urban schools should begin to reflect similar demographic changes. This study, to address the current gap in research literature, critically examines the narratives of Black women educational leaders who serve students in a mid-sized East Coast city. As an integral subset of educational leaders in education reform, Black women educational leaders' narratives provide a window into their experiences in schools, and the meaning they make of their practices, to add to the limited information currently available. Educational leaders' narratives also attest to the political nature of educating and give insight into school leaders' personal values, morals, and beliefs. Ultimately, this study argues that to fully understand and address the ways in which institutions, specifically schools, disable and institutionalize the people within them, the theorizing of Black women educators, including educational leaders, about their experiences is essential.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Strong Black Women's Meeting: "Don't let the title fool you."

Nyashia: Why does it feel like the whole principal situation is a set-up for us?

Minkah: What do you mean?

Nyashia: I mean that it feels like a big game of King of the Hill. Like they put us Black folks up there just to watch us fail.

Akilah: To watch us fail or to help us fail?

Nyashia: Right! I think it's both.

Minkah: I don't know about helping us fail, but I understand the no-win feel of being a principal.

Nyashia: Come on, [Minkah]! Are you going to sit here and tell me that you don't see how we are intentionally set up to fail here? You have to admit that Blacks, especially Black women principals ain't very successful here and it isn't because we're incompetent.

Akilah: Yep. Just look at how experienced and well-educated the Black women principals are here. We have more titles between us than all of the other leaders put together.

Nyashia: Hah! Don't let the titles fool you. Doctor, Chief, Deputy, Director, Principal, Assistant Principal... None of that matters. We're just niggers to them.

Minkah: Well, I don't want to assume that I'm viewed in that way by the majority of the people I work with. I do not believe they would ever entertain having a Black person in any position of power if that is how we were viewed. But I do believe that we are not seen as equally competent. That is why I am working to create this pipeline to funnel Black educators into educational leadership.

Akilah: I really don't know if that's enough. I struggle with all of the trauma and problems we face as leaders. If we do not have the power to shield ourselves or each other from the pain, microaggressions, and other foolishness, how can we ever be as successful as we need to be to make change?

Nyashia: There has to be a better way, y'all. We have to figure out how to make leadership different for people like us.

Minkah, Nyashia, and Akilah are the three Black women educational leaders at the center of this study. The above conversation between them begins to illustrate the ways that Black women as educational leaders experience leadership and “theorize” about their experiences in leadership (Barbara Christian, 1988). These experiences and the related theorizing are essential to creating better systems to support all educators and ultimately the success of students of color.

This study exists at the intersection of Christian’s (1988) understanding of Black people’s ways of making meaning and Alexander’s (2010) explication of how institutions like schools work to institutionalize Black children and adults. Christian (1988) explains, in her seminal article “The Race for Theory,” the uniqueness of the theorizing of people of color:

For people of color have always theorized – but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic...our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, the riddles and proverbs, in the play with language... (p. 68)

By employing this as a frame to critically analyze the narratives of the women in this study while linking it to Alexander’s (2010) argument that one of the clear links between schools and prisons is the way in which both institutionalize the Black bodies within them, this study works to connect Black women educational leaders’ theorizing to reasons for the continued substandard educational experiences for Black people – both educators and students. Ultimately, this study argues that to fully understand and address the ways in which institutions, specifically schools, disable and institutionalize

the people within them, the theorizing of Black women educators, including educational leaders, about their experiences is essential.

Urban Education Reform in Black and White

Recent social commentary, articles, and research studies are increasingly discussing the ways in which urban education reform, which is overwhelmingly white and female, is failing communities of color in the United States by continuing to reify systems of oppression and inequity. This growing pool of criticism includes a 2015 study that found that “Black teachers have higher expectations for [B]lack students than white teachers” and non-Black educators are significantly less likely to predict that their Black students would complete college (Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, p. 12). Christopher Emdin explains a critical issue in urban education reform as “a pervasive narrative in urban education: a savior complex that gives mostly white teachers in minority and urban communities a false sense of saving kids” (Downs, 2016). Emdin (2016) “draws parallels between current urban education models and Native American schools of the past that measured success by how well students adapted to forced assimilation.”

Jonathan Kozol (1991) links the grave consequences when a nation fails to invest in its own children and acquiesces in the maintenance of a status quo system of resource allocation. In his review of Anyon’s (1997) book *Ghetto Schooling*, Kozol asks the eternal question,

How long, and with what clever self-deception, will we pretend that racial and caste sequestration of the children of the poorest of the poor can be “restructured” rather than abolished and replaced by simple justice as it was enunciated more than 40 years ago in *Brown v. Board of Education* and more than 30 years ago by Dr. Martin Luther King? (p. 4)

Urban schools are mirages, imaginary spaces where poor, minority children go ostensibly to receive an equitable education. However, upon closer observation and rigorous inspection, too often the findings cause the observer to question if the school really exists as a place where equitable and appropriate learning opportunities happen. To address this, Emdin [and other researchers call] for a new approach to urban education that trains teachers to value the unique realities of minority children, incorporating their culture into classroom instruction” (Downs, 2016; Delpit, 2006; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Emdin, 2016; Hollie, 2011).

This essential work of replacing traditional urban education reform models with those that employ an “additive schooling” perspective which values the realities of communities of color begins with the educational leaders who lead in urban, minority schools – schools whose populations are almost solely comprised of Black and Brown students (Bartlett & Garcia, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). Agreement exists about the key role of the principal in urban schools, although conditions of professional practice often tend to be characterized by “situational and contextual variables that determine the appropriate application of professional skills” (Cistone & Stevenson, 2000, p. 435). Urban school leadership requires the principal to understand the long-range effects of poverty, the disparities rampant in local school funding procedures, the impact of neighborhood unemployment on crime within the schools, the necessity of interagency collaborations, and causal factors for low parental involvement. Given the research of a number of researchers, including Bartlett & Garcia, Cistone & Stevenson, Delpit, Dowdy,

Emdin, Hollie, and Valenzuela, this study posits that those best equipped to understand and address these issues are school leaders of color.

Why Black Women Educational Leaders?

“Teachers teach students and principals teach teachers.” –Akilah, an educational leader and study participant

Increasingly complex and demanding, the urban school leader position continues to evolve around the school as a social service agency as well as an educational institution. Over the years, educational researchers have tried to explain why patterns of social chaos and inequality tend to surface in poor, minority schools (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 1991; Noguera, 1996; Oakes, 1985).

As the faces of urban public school students in the United States become more African American and Latino, the faces of leadership in the U.S.’s urban schools should begin to reflect similar demographic changes. Shakeshaft (1999) dispels the myth that the number of minority-qualified applicants for administrative positions remains relatively few. In fact, she claims “women and minority candidates are certified in much larger numbers than they are chosen for administrative positions” (p. 100). Also, Murtadha and Larson (1999) contend that despite their availability and preparation to ascend into a campus leadership position, “principals of color, especially African American women, typically emerge as leaders of urban schools that are undersupported and economically depleted” (p. 6). Moreover, these researchers assert, “they [women of color] are expected to establish and carry out educational agendas that clash with

what they and the community see as vital to the education of African American children” (p. 6).

Despite more than 30 years of extant scholarship of contradictory and alternative findings, the myth remains that the ideal leader for most schools conforms to a White, masculine stereotype, especially at the secondary level (Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Murtadha & Larson, 1999; Shakeshaft, 1989). The educational literature offers limited knowledge construction based on data gathered from Black women educational leaders (Alston, 2000; K. W. Collins & Lightsey, 2001; Henry, 2001; Lomotey, 1989). Deficit theories and misogynistic notions constrain the advancement of Black women into leadership positions. These constraints include difficulty in usurping the male (White or Black) dominance position, stereotyping, self-imposed barriers, circuitous pathways with few or no mentors, and inadequate training in handling issues of power and control (Blakemore, 1999; P. H. Collins, 1990; Grogan, 1999; Hill & Ragland, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989).

School districts superintendents and school boards tend to offer administrative opportunities to Black women to “salvage their own people” (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003, p. 346). Yeakey, Johnston, and Adkison (1986) refer to those souls who accept such challenges as taking on the role of a “messiah” or eventually becoming a “scapegoat” (Hill & Ragland, 1995, p. 21). Often, this is the only opportunity Black women will have to become a leader of a school.

Default situations are often offered to women. Many school boards, usually in inner city schools, face school leadership...where a number of men have failed as leaders. With their backs to a wall, hiring a woman is the only remaining choice.

This situation is especially common in the too rare instances when minority women are given administrative positions. (Hill & Ragland, 1995, p. 20)

After successfully fighting battles to bring change to the culture, improving test scores and improving building facilities, minority women principals often become “sacrificial lambs” (Hill & Ragland, 1995, p. 21) if they aspire to higher administrative positions. They are considered too controversial and difficult to work with the central office personnel. Promotions are denied, and often demotions or nonrenewals occur.

Successful student achievement attributable to effective leadership in urban schools is difficult to measure because of the limited research in this area. The irony is that from these dismal portrayals of abandonment and neglect emerge Black women who tackled these critically ill schools and over time created schools that became beacons of light within the darkness of their communities. Telling their stories can inform and enlighten our current theoretical formulations about what it feels like to be an invisible change agent and servant leader who works “on the inside” of an imaginary school, with only illusionary career opportunities in the future.

This study, to address the current gap in research literature, critically examines the narratives of Black women educational leaders who serve students in a mid-sized East Coast city. As an integral subset of educational leaders in education reform, Black women educational leaders’ narratives provide a window into their experiences in schools, and the meaning they make of their practices, to add to the limited information currently available. Educational leaders’ narratives also attest to the political nature of educating and give insight into school leaders’ personal values, morals, and beliefs. Particularly for this study, Black women educational leaders’ narratives provide an

understanding of how larger educational policies (such as recruitment, retention, and advancement) carry over into schools and impact the lives of leaders, teachers, and students.

Literature & History: Visible Absences

Most of the information on African-American women in educational leadership and management is situated within larger gender research on women in corporate, public, or educational administrative studies (Allen, Jacobson, & Lomotey, 1996; Alston, 2005; Anzaldúa, 1990; Bell & Chase, 1994; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009; Lather, 1991; Loder, 2005; Marshall, 1989; Murtadha-Watts, 2000). An extensive search for dedicated qualitative or quantitative research on Black women educational leaders produced limited results, with much of the research on Black people in education focusing on the experience of teachers and what happens within classrooms. The explanation for this gap stems from both the focus of researchers as well as the historical context of Black women's access to educational leadership opportunities.

With the passage of the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decisions in the 1960s, some changes occurred, including grassroots activism in urban areas with large populations of Black people, to increase the representation of African-Americans in the principalship (Crowson, 1982; Lewis, 1997; Loder, 2005). Another legacy of the Civil Rights Movement was the establishment of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to create access to employment and career advancement opportunities in white-collar professions and government positions for African-American women (Amott & Matthei,

1996; Jones, 1985). Also, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 barred gender discrimination in any education program or activity receiving federal monies, which opened up doors for women to move up the ranks of school leadership (Loder, 2005; Mertz, 2003). Although both White and African-American women have been historically relegated to “female” jobs, being permitted opportunities to move into the professional realm carried a unique meaning for African-American women born before the civil rights era (Loder, 2005).

From slavery to Jim Crow, African-American women have been historically relegated to the lowest status jobs in U.S. society, which were physically brutal and emotionally taxing, often requiring them to work under precarious and substandard conditions (Gilkes, 1990; Jones, 1985; Loder, 2005). As late as 1980, for example, more African-American women were concentrated in domestic service than in professional jobs (Amott & Matthei, 1996). Consequently, African-American women who have made their way to college and became teachers had a strong sense of pride because the profession required higher levels of skill and far less subordination to and control by White employers (Shaw, 1996). However, even though teaching has been historically viewed as a respectable profession and highly valued by the African-American community, the pressure to teach diverted many African-American women from other vocational pursuits (Etter-Lewis, 1993; Loder, 2005; Perkins, 1989).

Many Black women educators and educational leaders view their work as an extension of the commitment to “uplift the race” pioneered by their predecessors in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002, 2004; Harley, 1982; Loder,

2005; Neverdon-Morton, 1982; Perkins, 1989; Taylor, 1996). In fact, for many African-American women, the work of teaching and leading children of color is viewed more as a spiritual calling than as a job (Harris & Ballenger, 2004; McKay, 1989). Mattis (1997) proposed that there is an “organic link” between African-American women’s spirituality, community activism, and their daily efforts to use their religious convictions to forge their survival. Spirituality and religiosity also help African-American women cope with life’s stresses and make sense out of the adverse circumstances that arise due to their marginalized status in society (Loder, 2005; Mattis, 1997; Neighbors et al., 1983; Turner & Bagley, 2000).

As Witherspoon and Mitchell (2009) and Witherspoon and Taylor (2010) explain, historically the Black American community has inextricably linked Black religion and social justice with spirituality and religion being central to the ‘project of seeking change’ (Sawyer, 2000, p. 297). It is important to leverage this history when exploring the experiences of Black women educators to make clear ties between their lived experiences and how racism and other forms of oppression and marginalization function in educational spaces, particularly since these educators’ experiences connect to struggles for social justice. Black women educators continue to be central to the historical pursuits of the Black American community for social justice as their work is in “creating coherence, attaching meaning, caring, wrestling with new questions, resisting, contesting inequities, and propounding change” (McLaughlin, 1993, p. 238).

It is ironic to note that the advancements in employment opportunities for African-Americans during the post-civil rights era led to a decline in their longstanding

pursuit of careers in the teaching profession (Gordon, 1997; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; King, 1993a, 1993b). However, despite this decline, education continues to be one among a few careers that afford African-American women attainable opportunities to advance into leadership, even though barriers to their advancement continue to persist (Loder, 2005; McGee Banks, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1999).

Since scholarship about the leadership of women in education surfaced in the 1970s and 1980s, the focus has been primarily on the experiences of middle to upper class White women without equal attention to women of color and those from other classes (Collins, 2000; DeLany & Rogers, 2004; Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009; White, 1999). Several studies have since appeared that examined Black women's leadership characteristics and the barriers they experience. These studies employed Black women principals' experiences to challenge gender and racially neutral presumptions (Collins, 2000). Despite the inclusion of Black women in leadership positions in professional settings, however, many still contend with "gendered racism" (Essed & Stanfield, 1991).

When assessing research on leadership and effectiveness of women, Shakeshaft (1979) found that the research used the male model as the norm. She states, "beyond the fact that the male model is the norm in dissertations, women are not investigated as populations but as topics of study, much as someone would research whales or hurricanes" (p. 217). Fast-forwarding to the obvious extensions of this view on women versus men in research, the current research on Black women versus White women in educational administration is considered a topic subsumed under the larger population

of women's studies. Interestingly, Shakeshaft (1979) continues by denouncing the lack of inclusion of women's perspectives in educational research:

Rather than looking at the research on women in the problem area, research on women in general is often cited, giving conceptual frame of reference but no understanding of the problem. This practice both illustrates our confusion on the subject of women and reinforces the idea that men are a population and women are a deviant subject. (pp. 217-218)

A similar concern arises about the apparent inclusion of Black women educational leaders' contributions within the predominantly White feminist's studies program. Asking questions from a White woman's view without incorporating race and class issues into the conceptual framework highlights the unwanted outcomes of such practices: (a) perpetuating the practice of intellectual and cultural exclusion by creating the appearance of acceptance into women's studies using an ethnic additive model and (b) failing to acknowledge that White women retain White privilege; women of color do not hold a color privilege, thereby making Black women's experiences similar in some ways to women in general but deviant from the White female norm.

Goldberger (1996) extends this line of reasoning by explaining the ways in which "knowledge, knowing, class, race, gender and culture all intersect and shape one another" (p. 8):

In any society, there are privileged epistemologies – the socially valued ways for knowing for establishing and evaluating truth claims – that assume normative standing. When a person's ways of knowing are at odds with the dominant culture, he or she may experience a sense of coercion over "the right way to know" or may feel called on to silence or give up ways of knowing that are devalued. (pp. 8-9)

Topics by and about Black women are not easily categorized within the disciplines of ethnic studies, African American studies, feminism, gender studies, or

critical theory. Moreover, epistemological research about Black women conducted by Black women is deemed unremarkable in mainstream academia. Findings presented by a minority insider's perspective are regarded as dubious and unlikely to be published in professional journals (Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Henry, 2001; Morrison, 1992). Suspect conclusions are summarily ignored or dismissed, seldom becoming part of administrative leadership theory. The pursuit of academically devalued research and the production of disciplinary, universalizing feminist discourses have been characterized as "risky business" (Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000, p. 533; Blakemore, 1999, p. 3). Gitlin (1994) labels such practices as "institutional silencing" (p. 4). It is the aim of this study to contextualize the experiences of Black women educational leaders, challenging this institutional silencing and adding to the small, but significant, body of research on Black women in education by Black women.

Scope of the Study

This study explores the experiences of three Black women educational leaders who work for Mji Public Schools, an urban public school district in Mji, a mid-sized East Coast city. An exploration of their narratives and their experiences as educational leaders in urban, minority schools is the focus of this study. Centering this study on the experiences and voices of Black women educational leaders works to provide counter-narratives to the White-dominated master narratives currently at the center of research on educational leadership and disrupt discourses posited as "normal" and generalizable to the experiences of all leaders. With this focus, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How do the experiences of these Black women educational leaders reflect the impact of race and gender on leadership practice in urban schools?
2. What competencies do these Black women educational leaders perceive as most critical to survival and success in an urban school and district?
3. What do these Black women educational leaders see as barriers and challenges to success as educational leaders?

These questions help in this researcher's goal to give primacy to individual, episodic narratives as a research method that examines educational leadership as more than just the flattened, singularly focused, "androcentric," "managerial" frames currently found in leadership research (Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010). By analyzing the participants' narratives through the lens of these questions, this research attempts to contextualize the impacts of the participants' intersectionality as Black women educational leaders in an institution that marginalizes and oppresses Black people. Although each leader tells complex and even conflicting stories, collectively their perspectives provide insight on the experience of this subset of educational leaders of color. Ultimately, this research has implications for informing school leader preparation programs whose purpose is to improve the outcomes for students in urban, minority public schools.

Significance of the Study

Recent research and social commentary points to the phenomenon of "diverging generations," where more and more younger Black Americans are attributing their success and failure in attaining the American Dream to individual efforts versus collective struggle and social and historical influence (Bositis, 2001; Loder, 2005). Yet, some commentary has noted that the social reality for younger Black Americans is not all rosy. Although they constitute the first generations to reap the rewards of the hard-

earned battles for civil rights, some commentators have observed that young Black Americans confront persistent institutional and *covert* racism and sexism, poverty, and inequality (Cose, 1993; Tarpley, 1995; West, 1993).

In light of these study findings and recent social commentary, it appears that one of the most formidable threats to keeping the tradition of activism vibrant in Black American education is the lack of institutional memory that exists within younger Black women (and men) educators concerning the struggles it took to promote social change in the education profession. Alluding to a rift in this tradition, Collins (2000) cautioned that “large numbers of Black children remain warehoused in inner-city schools, sadly, many of them taught by Black teachers who have little institutional memory...of activism” (p. 223). Collins concluded that this lack of institutional memory has left an increasing number of younger Black American women educators “unprepared politically to recognize and deal with new forms that racism, sexism, and other kinds of oppression now take” (p. 223). Consequently, there exists among many of today’s Black women educational leaders and teachers a sense of alienation from the experiences of the civil rights struggle as well as feelings of frustration, incompetence, and despair about their inability to promote meaningful change in contemporary Black schools.

This study continues the work of other related research studies working to raise awareness among education scholars about the desperate need for further inquiry into this area. More inquiry is bound to lead to viable answers and new directions about how to bring the institutional memory – the knowledge, wisdom, and experiences of older generations of Black educators – to the younger generations of Black educational

leaders and teachers in an effort to keep the integral activist traditions, which recent social commentary and studies are identifying and essential, of Black American education alive and well in the 21st century (Emdin, 2016, Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2015).

Extending this awareness of the historical traditions of education as central to the pursuit of social justice in the U.S. Black community, this study is also significant in its effort to deepen the field's understanding of the school-to-prison pipeline as a result of the institutionalization of children and adults within schools. This study is distinctive in its attempt to fill the void in our understandings of the connections between Black women educational leaders' epistemologies, pedagogical approaches, activism, and related trauma. Moreover, using the theorizing of Black women educators as the vehicle for this deeper understanding provides additional context for the high value of the counternarratives of women of color in education. This valuing and centering of their narratives supports the continued push for additional research in this area.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since the beginning of the nation, White Americans have suffered from a deep inner uncertainty as to who they really are. One of the ways that has been used to simplify the answer has been to seize upon the presence of Black Americans and use them as a marker, a symbol of limits, a metaphor for the “outsider.” Many Whites could look at the social position of Blacks and feel that color formed an easy and reliable gauge for determining to what extent one was or was not American. (Ellison, 1995)

The suppression of the ideas of Black women in research and epistemological knowledge construction remains a force that undermines the economic, political, and social revitalization within the Black woman’s world. As a Black woman who is also a K-12 educator this researcher is deeply connected to this reality (see Identifying Myself as Researcher in Chapter 3). In seeking to overcome the dominance of the Eurocentric, patriarchal agendas of previous approaches, Black feminists are increasingly seeking a methodology addressing the interconnected nature of oppression based on race, class, and gender (Carby, 1987; Harding, 1991; hooks, 1984; Lorde, 1995; Parmar, 1998).

One framework that is useful in understanding Black feminist thought is standpoint theory. Standpoint theory focuses on the production of knowledge that is emancipatory, anti-oppressive, nonhierarchical, negotiated, and politically focused. It uses language and stories to produce alternative realities. Yonezawa (2000) explains that

standpoint theory proposes that people gain knowledge through their positions or social locations. They use the term *positionality* to capture how people’s positions in the larger social structure (e.g. race, class, gender, and sexuality) influence what they are aware of and their interpretations of events. (p. 111)

Therefore, Black women would view the world from discrete perspectives based on their social positions, or positionality, within the confines of the larger social structures of race and gender (P. H. Collins, 1996; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Scott, 1982). Each interpretation creates new knowledge about work, family, and society using a privileged epistemology. The individual narrative exposes the structural and cultural barriers that curtail professional advancement or social mobility within bureaucratic systems as schools, corporations, or government agencies. These individual episodic narratives, or “critical tales” have been explicated by Van Maanen (1988) and more recently by Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (1995) work using the methodology of “portraiture.” Knowing how Black women educational leaders see themselves and their work helps standpoint theorists understand more comprehensively why the leaders behave, respond, and act the way they do in specific situations.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) espouse the belief that standpoint epistemology and cultural studies models are creating

new ethical and epistemological criteria for evaluating research. At the same time, these perspectives are making lived experience central to qualitative inquiry and developing criteria of evaluation based in ethics of caring, personal responsibility, and open dialogue. (p. 102)

Four assumptions of Black feminist epistemology (P. H. Collins, 1990) are first, that the content of thought cannot be separated from the historical and material conditions that shape the lives it produces. Thus, only a Black woman can produce a Black feminist standpoint. Second, an assumption persists that Black women, as a group, will share certain commonalities. However, third, diversities between and among Black women based on class, religion, age, and sexual orientation are real.

Finally, although a Black woman's standpoint might exist, all Black women may not recognize or accept its premise. Thus, Black feminist standpoint theory reveals how Black women educational leaders gather and make sense of work in urban schools. The theory also helps to eliminate the pathology of thought about the lives and work of Black women in the United States.

Critical Race Theory in Education (CRTE)

With its origination in the critical legal studies movement, critical race theory considers how laws and institutional structures that appear to be "race neutral" can contribute to inequities in education (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Critical race theory (CRT) considers race and racism to be central, defining characteristics of United States society, in general, and of educational institutions, in particular (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano, Cela, & Yosso, 2000). Although race is the central concept, it is viewed as operating with other inequalities, such as gender, language, generational status, class, and sexuality; Crenshaw (1991) refers to this interconnected relationship as "intersectionality." As with a Womanist Perspective, CRT values narratives, stories, and experiential knowledge of people of color and is also committed to social justice and the end of racism and racial subordination.

Education scholars began to utilize CRT as a research tool during the 1990s (Solórzano, 1998). Solórzano (1998) defines critical race theory in education (CRTE) as a framework that "challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as they relate to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups" (p. 122). There are five principal tenets of

CRTE, as identified by Solórzano (1998) after drawing from several fields, including ethnic studies, history, law, psychology, sociology, and education. The tenets call for scholars to (1) centralize race and racism, (2) challenge the dominant perspective, (3) commit to social justice, (4) value experiential knowledge, and (5) conduct interdisciplinary research (Conchas, 2015). Examples are offered below to explore how they support raced-gendered epistemologies.

1. *The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination.* Raced-gendered epistemologies emerge from ways of knowing that are in direct contrast with dominant epistemologies, partially as a result of histories based on the intersection of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination. This means that the research process must recognize that multiple layers of oppression are followed by multiple forms of resistance (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).
2. *A challenge to dominant ideologies.* Employing CRT gives meaning to the creation of culturally and linguistically relevant ways of knowing and understanding and to the importance of rethinking the traditional notion of what counts as knowledge. Layering on the transnational framework grounded in Marshall's work with raced-gendered epistemologies also push the consideration of pedagogies of the home, which offer culturally specific ways of teaching and learning and embracing ways of knowing that extend beyond the public realm of formal schooling (Delgado Bernal, 2001). Because power and politics are at the center of all teaching and learning, the application of household knowledge to situations outside of the home becomes a creative process that challenges the transmission of "official knowledge" and dominant ideologies.
3. *A commitment to social justice.* Critical raced-gendered epistemologies are grounded in raced and gendered histories, and their legacy of resistance to racism and sexism can translate into a pursuit of social justice in both educational research and practice. Indeed, research and practice grounded in a critical raced-gendered epistemology seek political and social change on behalf of communities of color (Bernal, 2002).
4. *An emphasis on experiential knowledge.* Experiential knowledge of people of color has been viewed as a deficit in formal learning environments for too long. Critical raced-gendered epistemologies allow this experiential knowledge to be viewed as a strength and acknowledge that the life experiences of people of color are "uniquely individual while at the same time both collective and connected" (Dillard, 2000, p. 676). An emphasis on experiential knowledge allows this study to embrace the use of counterstories, narratives, *testimonies*,

and oral histories to illuminate the unique experiences of women educators of color.

5. *The importance of transdisciplinary approaches.* This framework's transdisciplinary approach draws on the strengths and research methods of various disciplines in understanding and improving the educational experiences of people of color. Ethnic, cultural, and women's studies, in particular, "have opened the way for multiple theoretical and epistemological readings in the field of educational research," and scholars of color have provided "a needed critique as well as an 'endarkenment' on society as a whole" (Dillard, 2000, p. 676).

These five defining elements come together to offer a unique way to approach educational research and to move researchers and educators into spaces of moral and critical practice. As Gloria Ladson-Billings (2000) states, "The 'gift' of CRT is that it unapologetically challenges the scholarship that would dehumanize and depersonalize" (p. 272). This multilayered framework employing CRTE can help uncover the possibilities of raced-gendered epistemologies in educational research and practice. Through this lens, Black women educational leaders, with their multiple identities and the liminal spaces in which they exist, can be seen as "holders and creators of knowledge" who have the potential to transform schools into places where the experiences of all individuals are acknowledged, taught, and cherished (Bernal, 2002, p. 121). In combination with Womanist theory and racial battle fatigue – both discussed later in this chapter, this lens can be defined as a framework that challenges dominant discourses on race and gender as it relates to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice subordinate certain racial groups (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). These theorists acknowledge that educational structures, processes, and discourses operate in contradictory ways with their potential to oppress and marginalize and their potential to emancipate and empower. This

multilayered lens creates a transdisciplinary framework that draws on many bodies of progressive scholarship to understand and improve the educational experiences of people of color within the urban education reform movement (Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999).

In the following section, the concerns about the subordination, oppression, and marginalization of Black women, will be addressed in the discussion on Womanism. Womanist theory, like CRTE, explains the experiences of minority groups – particularly Black women. In addition, Womanist theory adds another layer to the context of understanding Black women’s experiences in educational leadership by examining how being Black and female in the United States produces a particular experience, wisdom, and understanding unique to Black women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Collins, 2000; Foster, 1993b; Henry, 1998; Walker, 1983).

Womanist Theory

Writing over a century ago, Mary Church Terrell (1904) noted that “not only are colored women...handicapped on account of their sex, but they are almost everywhere baffled and mocked because of their race. Not only because they are women, but because they are colored women” (King, 1988, p. 42). Terrell recognized that being a Black woman had double consequences and serious implications. Today, contemporary scholars concur with Terrell’s stance and add that an understanding of Black women’s lives requires an examination of their multiple (and simultaneous) encounters with race, gender, and class oppression (Higginbotham, 1992; King, 1988).

For Black women in the United States, their positioning in lower economic classes demonstrates the ways in which class intersects with gender and race to form a triply oppressive reality (Dill, 1979; Higginbotham, 1992). Even professional Black women, such as those in academia, feel the “chill in the air” (Myers & Turner, 2004, p. 83) and the pressure of these simultaneous oppressions. Often serving as one of few faculty of color in predominantly White college institutions, a Black woman may encounter subtle racism or sexism in the gestures, tones, and attitudes of her colleagues (Samuel & Wane, 2005). Therefore, while class and educational status vary producing differing oppressive realities for women of color in general and Black women, in particular, their experiences give rise to a collective wisdom for understanding, surviving, and hopefully surmounting these oppressions.

Adopting a Womanist framework

Some authors argue that Womanism is a “celebratory” theory that simply notes the differences among women, rather than critically discussing power and hegemony relations (Henry, 2005), others fold both theoretical frameworks under the term Womanism (Brock, 2005; Henry, 2005). This researcher, on the other hand, sides with authors such as Hudson-Weems (1989) and Garth (1994) who advocate for a term that divorces itself from traditional White feminist theories. These scholars posit that simply adding “Black” to the term “feminism” inadequately reflects the distinct cultural and historical realities rooted in Black women’s culture and experience. They go so far as to rename Black feminism “Africana Womanism,” for they believe it is a truer expression of

the experiences and standpoints of Africana women across the diaspora (Garth, 1994; Hudson-Weems, 1989).

While the debate over terminology may be endless and futile, Collins (1990) reminds scholars of the critical and overarching need for theory on Black women to (1) originate from their diverse and dynamic standpoints and (2) articulate their self-defined stances, self-determination, struggles, and political perspectives. In this light, a Womanist framework can be adequately used to understand Black women's lives, standpoints, and wisdom gained through their experiences (Brock, 2005; Henry, 1996).

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1995), calls Black women's wisdom the "*epistemological privilege of the oppressed*," because this knowledge includes a "suspicious wisdom" that helps them to recognize, teach, and survive White hegemony. As she explains:

There is the idea that the development of this understanding is not rational—it comes from "the gut"; it is based on experience and intuition. There is the idea that this suspicion is passed down from the ancestors who teach the next generation the subtle dangers—through act and deed—who instruct their offspring in how to walk through treacherous mine fields, who show them jungle posture. There is the idea that this suspicion is healthy, necessary for survival *and* that it can coexist with creativity—that even in creativity and expression one must always be watchful, clear-headed, not "act the fool." And finally, there is the idea that African American women have this deep, instinctive suspicion down to a science. We use it subtly, deftly, wisely. If we didn't know how to use it, we would be destroyed. Some of us have begun to give it high status by labeling it a privilege, the epistemological privilege of the oppressed. (p. 60)

Viewing a Black woman's knowledge as an epistemological privilege edifies her agency and empowerment, and tells us much about how she uses both to sustain her existence and others in the community. Recognizing this wisdom is also helpful in understanding how this perspective extends into the school when educating Black teachers and students.

Andrea Collins, a third-grade teacher in Dixson's (2003) study, reveals how this wisdom, gained through her personal experience, is used to push a student to overcome the challenges present in their lives. A snippet in her narrative transcript reveals her memory of being told she would not succeed in school due to skipping classes and failing tests. She notes,

I had to like pull it together. But, had I not had the foundation laid early on, I wouldn't have been able to have known HOW to come back. So, I think that, my practical and life experience bring A LOT to this. Cause when they say 'oh Miss Collins, I can't,' You know what? They told me I couldn't do it either. Guess what? From the time I came back to school...I was on the Dean's list every, EVERY semester...When I was...teaching middle school ids, I tell them, 'look, I know, I know how it is. I've been there. I've done through it. I have failed.' Okay? BUT, I have also been successful through many failures, so I am telling you now, 'let's do this!' (p. 229)

Her epistemological privilege of oppression (being told school is not for her) provides her with the lens with which to understand how and why Black students are not encouraged to pursue academic excellence. Furthermore, her insights are useful beyond teaching students "not to act the fool"; it infuses her teachings, encouraging the success and survival of students as well as that of the entire Black community (Foster, 1993b).

Womanist scholars articulate the collective experiences of Black women and explain how knowledge derives from their positions as a marginalized group (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Henry, 1998; hooks, 1984; Walker, 1983). Also, these scholars see agency in Black women's positions by the ways they seek to empower themselves and others. However, as feminist theories evolve, more feminist scholars of color (in addition to this researcher) have chosen to identify with Walker's Womanism,

as a term and paradigm (Brock, 2005; Henry, 2005; Hill, 2003). These authors assert that adopting the term Womanism encompasses the diversity among Black women in a more holistic manner, thus accounting for their ethnic distinctions and complex identities (Taylor, 1998a, 1998b).

However, there are limitations to Womanist theory. For one, Womanism provides a limited analysis of the challenges and difficulties Black women experience as a result of their multiple identities and realities. Articulating these experiences not only will advance scholarship on Black women educational leaders and teachers but also promises to illuminate the ways in which these challenges and difficulties inform their approaches and educational philosophies while serving Black communities. In the next section, this researcher explains how Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) can be employed to understand better the challenges and difficulties, as well as their effects on Black women educational leaders. Including RBF in this study provides the theoretical vocabulary for naming the potentially negative lived experiences of the educational leader participants.

Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF)

Although racism and sexism occur blatantly at times, overt acts are less common and less socially accepted than are subtler and covert racist and sexist acts (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1995; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Feagin, 1995). The term microaggression refers to these more subtle and covert acts, often identified as verbal and nonverbal insults. Microaggressions are brief, “subtle and stunning” encounters that are a frequent occurrence in the lives of subordinated groups and that impact views of the self

(Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Pierce, 1970, 266; Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2007). Examples include “averted gazes, exasperated looks” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), code-words such as “quotas” or “affirmative action,” and comments such as “You’re not like the rest of them” or “I don’t think of you as a Mexican” (Solórzano, 1998). They can range from racial slights, recurrent indignities and irritations, unfair treatment, stigmatization, hyper-surveillance, and contentious classrooms to personal threats or attacks on one’s well-being (Bobo & Smith, 1998; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Essed & Stansfield, 1991; Smith, 2014; Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson, 1997; Wilson, 1990). The incessant occurrence of these microaggressions is similar to the concept of cumulative discrimination noted by Feagin (1995). Microaggressions are powerful because, despite being invisible to the perpetrator, they exact a toll on the recipient’s psyche. Research has demonstrated the physical, psychological, and emotional costs of such an environment for Black people (Feagin et al., 1996; Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007).

The concept of microaggression has been used to construct Smith’s (2014) theory of racial battle fatigue (RBF) and explore the experiences and career paths of marginalized populations of men (Smith et al., 2007; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000), almost to the complete exclusion of women. Smith et al.’s (2007) study, conducted with African American males on historically White college campuses, presents *racial battle fatigue* as a

Theoretical framework for examining social-psychological stress responses (e.g. frustration; anger; exhaustion; physical avoidance; psychological or emotional withdrawal; escapism; acceptance of racist attributions; resistance; verbally, nonverbally, or physically fighting back; and coping strategies) associated with

being an African American male on historically White [college] campuses. (p. 552)

The lack of other racial and gender groups in these studies limits understandings of the extent to which other marginalized populations experience microaggressions based on their multiple identities. The utilization of RBF in this study assists in naming and defining the impact of racism on populations with multiple marginalized identities.

Pierce (1974) argued that in analyzing racial discrimination, we “must not look for the gross and obvious. The subtle, cumulative mini-assault is the substance of today’s racism” (p. 516). These mini-assaults are defined as microaggressions, and he explains that these racialized insults “may seem harmless, but the cumulative burden of a lifetime of microaggressions can theoretically contribute to diminished mortality, augmented morbidity, and flattened confidence” (Pierce, 1995, p. 281). Smith et al. (2007) point out that “Racial microaggressions are large-scale, systems-related stressors that are widespread, sometimes becoming highly publicized, race-related, traumatic events” (p. 554). Landrine and Klonoff (1996) posit that whether at the micro- or macro-level, perceived racial discrimination is a nearly universal stressor for people of color, and these universal race-related stressors are linked to poor mental and physical health outcomes. Racism has a systemic, powerful, and far-reaching effect on the lives of people of color (Feagin, 2006). The impact of racial microaggressions on individuals of color becomes communicable as the psychological, and emotional pain of the incidents is passed on to family, friends, the larger social group, and across generations (Feagin & McKinney, 2003; Smith, 2014).

As a result of chronic racial microaggressions, many people of color perceive their environment as extremely stressful, exhausting, and diminishing to their sense of control, comfort, and meaning while eliciting feelings of loss, ambiguity, strain, frustration, and injustice (Brown et al., 1999). When racially oppressed groups are in situations where they experience environmental stressors as mundane events, the ramifications are as much a psychological and emotional burden as they are a physiological response (Carroll, 1998; Pierce, 1974). As Smith et al. (2007) explain, “Racial battle fatigue addresses the physiological, and psychological strain exacted on racially marginalized groups and the amount of energy lost dedicated to coping with racial microaggressions and racism” (p. 556). Unlike typical occupational stress, racial battle fatigue is a natural response to living and working under mundane conditions of heightened distress, especially when the perception that one’s life, personal dignity, or character is being threatened (Smith et al., 2007). For people of color, racial battle fatigue is the culmination of constant physiological, psychological, cultural, and emotional handling of racial microaggressions in less-than-ideal and racially hostile or unsupportive environments. They experience mundane environmental stressors as physiological, psychological, and emotional burdens (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996).

Within the urban education reform movement, the restructuring of schools – their climates and cultures – reify white supremacy, leaving the spaces open racial discrimination in both subtle and overt forms. Black women educators are forced to function in these white supremacist spaces to provide students of color with the support needed to be successful, despite never knowing if or when they might be the

targets of discrimination (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). The potential physiological symptoms are many, including tension headaches and backaches, extreme fatigue, and loss of appetite, and the psychological symptoms, while also numerous, include constant anxiety and worrying, loss of self-confidence, “difficulty in thinking coherently or being able to articulate (confirming stereotype),” frustration, and resentment (Smith et al., 2007, p. 556). For example, Jones’ (2002) study on teachers’ perceptions of Black principals’ leadership in urban schools found that their leadership in urban schools was perceived differently by their ethnically diverse followers, and teachers believed that their leaders’ ethnicity had an impact on his or her leadership of the school. These perceptions and beliefs can result in principals of color experiencing microaggressions, leading to RBF.

A Prismatic Lens

Through the joining of Womanist theory, CRTE, and RBF, this study endeavors to more directly analyze and illuminate the intersectional realities of Black women educational leaders. While CRTE provide the language and theory to explain the experiences of minority groups’ raced experiences in education, in order to more fully address and contextualize the experiences of Black women in education, Womanist theory is necessary. The two together assist in illustrating how Black women have a particular experience, wisdom, and understanding unique to them. However, without the inclusion of RBF, there is the potential for the deleterious nature of Black women’s intersectional experiences to be obscured. Like a prism, the combining of these three

lenses allows for the multifaceted realities that complex beings – Black women educational leaders - experience because of all of their identities.

Literature Review: A Womanist Tradition of Teaching

The historical tradition of Black educators chronicles their long lasting legacies of determination and commitment. Seeing themselves as “mothers of the world” (Harley, 1982), many believed it was their higher calling and social obligation to improve the social conditions of the Black community. Female educators like Fanny Jackson Choppin, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Charlotte Hawkins Brown are examples of late nineteenth and early twentieth century activists, who dedicated their lives to educating Black children and adults (Hill, 1990; Irvine, 2003; Perkins, 1982, 1993). Jackson Choppin, for example, believed it was her duty and special honor to get an education and “teach her people” (Perkins, 1982). McLeod Bethune and Hawkins Brown are models of Black women who opened schools in their communities. These educators are particularly well known for their determination in keeping their schools afloat despite the fiscal challenges that threatened the schools’ existence (Downs, 2003; Irvine & Hill, 1990).

The larger body of research on Black women teachers points to a maternal lens as the shaper of their practices, and illustrates how this lens influences their professional roles beyond “educator,” to one as “other mother.” Foster’s (1993) study recounts Black educators’ experiences teaching in the segregated South, attesting to the ways they acted as surrogate mothers, aunts, and grandmothers—all indicating the sense of motherly responsibility towards the social, educational, and emotional

development of their students. Case (1997) also refers to these educators as community othermothers and historicizes their practices within slave traditions where elder Black women assumed the maternal responsibility of all in the community. In this light, Loder's (2005) study, of Black women educational leaders, is another example of how Black women educators assume "maternal authority" over all in the community. Dr. Lowe, a participant of Loder's (2005) study notes: "I treat [my students' parents] as if they're my children. And I talk to them like I would my own child. So I mother the parents as well as the children" (p. 312). These women educational leaders extended their roles as community othermothers to include students at their school as well as to the young parents in the school community and used their positions to provide advice and assistance to those in need.

The maternal themes that emerge from the narratives of Black women educators, however, should not be mistaken for patriarchal notions of women as "nurturing," "domestic," or "maternally weak" (Case, 1997). On the contrary, they enact politically charged agendas that nurture critical thinking, and opposition to the social structure. These politically charged agendas can be seen in the ways educators talk candidly to students about racism, sexism, drugs, gang violence, poverty, and other issues that affect their communities. These kinds of discussions are also similar to how they advise their own children. A Black woman educator in Case's (1997) study discusses the straightforward ways she talks to students:

In my last homeroom, I had 23 or 24 kids. Many of them were on drugs. They would come in and crash on you. They didn't have the energy for anything. They'd tell you they were smoking [marijuana]. They said it feels good, that they can forget everything. I'd say to them, "boy, stop smoking that nasty week—

[you're going to] get your brain all mixed up" ...I used to talk to them about it. I told them how dangerous and addicting it can be. (p. 110)

This quote illustrates the ethic of care that educators bring to their profession and the ways emancipatory pedagogical practices challenge the "air of hopelessness" that permeates students' communities (Case, 1997, p. 31).

Through an understanding of the how Black women historically viewed the vocation of teaching as a higher calling for social justice, rooted in maternal ways of knowing, one can connect this to a type of spiritual calling. As Delores Williams (1993) posits:

...the modern phenomenon of black mothers like Rosa Parks acting as catalysts for social change stems from a long tradition of black mothers and nurturers who were catalysts for social change in and beyond the African-American community—even though some social processes in the community restricted black women's opportunities while expanding black men's opportunities... structures of domination have had an impact upon the lives of African-American mothers and nurturers. Surrogacy is one such structure. Hagar and African-American women have a common bond in this surrogacy theme threading through their stories. (p. 543)

According to Williams, the conditions that made resistance possible were created from the long tradition of the assertions of Black women, even when socially powerless. This discussion helps elucidate how the Black community appropriated the Bible to make meaning out of experiences of bondage and oppression, and in the case of Black women, sexism and misogynoir. Williams (1993) continues by using the experiences of the "mammy," who she credits as the "strong mothers of the community," within the slavocracy, who used the Christian tradition to assist them in maintaining their dignity, even though she existed in a system in which slave owners raped and bred her. As she explains:

...it must be emphasized that strength is not necessarily synonymous with power, nor does it here imply an idea of black matriarchy...The antebellum black mother had no real power...many...had the helpmate not of the black man but black religion” (pp. 536-537).

Using Williams’ (1993) analysis, it is clear that the spirituality of Black women is rooted not only in their experiences as Black people but also in their experiences as Black women. The powerlessness encountered in the face of both racism and patriarchy, however, did not leave them feeling hopeless. Williams (1993) makes this clear when she explains that “[T]he African-American mother’s God-consciousness and absolute dependence upon God provided hope...where hope seemed absurd” (542).

While the gendered nature of Black women educational leaders’ experiences is discussed in Chapter 5, it is important to connect this with the ways Black women continue to conceptualize their work, in this case the vocation of education, as spiritual work that involves serving as some form of a surrogate mother working for social justice. These educators believe that educating is more than academics. It also entails a political agenda that challenges the school curriculum as well. Andrea Collins, a Black educator in Dixson’s (2003) study, talks about the ways she presents issues of racial and gender oppression in US History. She notes:

And, you know, when I teach, you know, Social Studies in class, and talk about you know, the Declaration of Independence and all that stuff. Look, it wasn’t written for us. I tell my kids that. My White kids, it was you little White girls—it wasn’t written for you either. You know, we talk about those things. And, I put on the board, it was for White, male, property owners. And so, if you didn’t own property, and you were White, it wasn’t written for you either... I try to keep it very real from a um, varied perspective... (p. 229)

The above quote gives an example of the ways political agendas undergird Black educators’ practice and the ways they integrate the school curriculum with politically

charged lessons for student survival in a race and gender conscious society (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). It also demonstrates how Black educators' classroom methods are empowering pedagogical practices because they validate diverse students' languages, cultural values, and experiences as it relates to their learning (Callender, 1997).

Black scholars, including Ladson-Billings (1994), see value in culturally relevant pedagogies. She argues:

[it] empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These cultural references are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right. (p. 18)

Agreeing with Ladson-Billings (1994), Gay (1998) writes that culturally relevant teaching methods affirm students' cultural background and stimulate learning through cultural frames of reference for Black students as mainstream schooling has done for White American students. Additionally, she argues that such practices create a school culture that is in sync with students' home culture. Other scholars favoring this method hypothesize that such educational methods draw on students' cultural strengths and improve their academic status because it allows them to acquire new knowledge through their own experiences (Delpit, 2006; Emdin, 2016; Howard, 2001; Nieto, 1999; Stanford, 1997).

The gaps in the literature between Black women educational leaders' experiences, their theorizing about their work and experiences, and the ways in which their experiences and theorizing converge to impact how they do their work and the subsequent outcomes for children, are glaring. Bringing together these different bodies of research, no matter how sparse, is important to more fully understanding the impact

of the education system on Black women as well as Black students. And this understanding opens up the space for more thoughtful, nuanced, and responsive solutions to the challenges faced by people of color in education.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Don't walk bareheaded in the hot sun; cook pumpkin fritters in very hot sweet oil; soak your little cloths right after you take them off...this is how you grow okra—far from the house, because okra tree harbors red ants; when you grow dasheen, make sure it gets plenty of water or else it makes your throat itch when you are eating it; this is how you sweep a corner; this is how you sweep a whole house; this is how you sweep a yard; this is how you smile to someone you don't like too much; this is how you smile to someone you don't like at all; this is how you smile to someone you like completely; this is how you set a table for tea; this is how you set a table for dinner; this is how you set a table for a dinner with an important guest...this is how to behave in the presence of men who you don't know you very well, and this way they don't recognize immediately the slut I have warned you against becoming; be sure to wash every day, even if it is with your own spit; don't squat down to play marbles—you are not a boy, you know; don't pick people's flowers—you might catch something...this is how to bully a man; this is how a man bullies you; this is how to love a man, and if this doesn't work there are other ways, and if they don't work don't feel too bad about giving up...this is how to make ends meet... (Kincaid, 1978)

The quote above is from Jamaica Kincaid's (1978) short story *Girl*. In it, Kincaid recites her mother's teachings and warnings while growing up in the Caribbean nation of Antigua. Kincaid's *Girl* illustrates the ways in which cultural wisdom or cultural capital—the collection of figurative elements such as skills, mannerisms, credentials, posture, clothing, tastes, that one acquires through being a part of a particular social group or class—gets shared intergenerationally, from elders to young people. It highlights the distinctive epistemologies and theories of knowledge produced in particular cultural communities (Collins, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Scheurich and Young, 1997). To understand these “culturally produced epistemologies,” it is essential that researchers employ “culturally congruent methods” that interpret individuals' lived realities in ways that are valued by and resonate with those being studied (Scheurich and Young, 1997).

Ladson-Billings (2000) defines an epistemology as a “system of knowing” that is inextricably tied to our worldviews (p. 257). Our experiential knowledge, gained from our experiences, as well as the conditions in which we live, also shape how we understand and view the world around us. This theory is relevant both for understanding the epistemologies of ethnic communities, as well as in locating and defining the epistemological positionality researchers bring to their study. According to Scheurich and Young (1997), because there is a link between each research design and a particular ontology (our understanding of the nature of the world) and a particular epistemology (the manner in which we come to know the world), many academics find traditional Eurocentric epistemologies and research methods to be inappropriate for studying ethnic groups outside of the dominant culture. Some researchers note that Eurocentric approaches are racially biased, value differing ideologies and concepts of legitimated truth norms, and distort interpretations of cultural minority groups (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Scheurich and Young, 1997). Additional arguments outline how Eurocentric epistemologies can conflict with the knowledges produced in marginalized cultures and can be harmful when studying the experiences of these groups in the United States. For example, a researcher using a Eurocentric (or even White feminist) lens may misinterpret Kincaid’s mother’s theorizing (i.e. not squatting while playing marbles or setting the table) as sexist rather than “instinctive suspicions” or teachings of survival that Black women use to help young girls navigate within societies in the Caribbean (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1995, p. 60).

It is for these reasons that this chapter stresses the need for a race-based and culturally congruent research methodology that lends itself to a better understanding of the experiences and perspectives of individuals outside of the dominant culture. This chapter provides a theoretical rationale and methodological approach that is rooted in a Womanist epistemological framework and argues that this foundational conceptual framework is most appropriate for understanding the experiences and perspectives of the Black women educators in this study.

A Womanist Perspective

The previous chapter included a discussion of how Womanism theorizes from the cultural, historical, and political positioning of Black women—revealing the epistemological wisdom developed from their experiences as a marginalized group (Brock, 2005; Henry, 1996). Feminist theorists (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Collins 2000) posit three main principles of a Womanist Perspective:

First, womanists understand that oppression is an interlocking system, providing all people with varying degrees of penalty and privilege. Second, they believe that individual empowerment combined with collective action is key to lasting social transformation. Last, they embody a humanism, which seeks liberation of all, not simply themselves. (p. 72)

Research rooted in a Womanist Perspective also values the knowledge produced by Black women and integrates Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) Afrocentric feminist epistemology. The four contours of this Afrocentric feminist epistemology are: (a) concrete experiences as a criterion of meaning, (b) the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, (c) an ethic of care, and (d) an ethic of personal accountability (Beck, 2010).

A Womanist Perspective provides for understanding the complex nature of lived realities of Black women (Sheared, 2006). Emerging in direct response to the exclusion of Black women's voices in dominant research methodologies, a Womanist Perspective takes into account the ways in which the intersecting identities of Black women shape a collective and particular epistemological wisdom unique to women of color (Bernal, 1998; Collins, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Sheared, 2006) while emphasizing "their need to ameliorate their own conditions for empowerment on their own terms" (Taylor, 1998, p. 235).

A Womanist Perspective also centers the Black women in this research study and acknowledges their lived experiences and life stories (Bernal, 1998). A Womanist research agenda examines the lived realities of Black women from their perspectives, an approach that is in stark contrast to traditional Eurocentric methods that have historically defined and objectified other cultures from distant and biased perspectives (Ladson-Billings, 2000). This research agenda asks distinct questions that expose the many ways Black women understand and interpret their realities. For instance, a study on Black women educators in the United States might look to understand their experiences in urban education. Such an inquiry might ask: What are the perspectives of Black women, and in what ways have their experiences in urban education impacted their lives? The researcher may use individual interviews (Gilpin, 2003; Henry, 1998), focus group interviews (Brock, 2005), or mixed-method approaches such as questionnaires and follow-up interviews (Francis, 2005) to ensure that the Black women participants generate the knowledge themselves.

The following section describes how this study interweaves a Womanist perspective with Collins' Afrocentric feminist epistemology and narrative inquiry to analyze better the experiences of Black women educators in leadership positions in urban school settings.

Narrative Inquiry: A Womanist Perspective

Narrative inquiry refers to a collection of methods within qualitative research that employ stories to describe how humans make meanings of the world around them (Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative methods such as oral and life histories and "testimonios" are critical to qualitative research because they communicate cultural ways of knowing, events, and stories of personal experiences (Beverley, 2000) that are essential for better understanding the experiences of marginalized populations. For ethnic minority groups, in particular, narrative inquiry pays close attention to the ways that ethnic minorities give and make meaning of their experiences while uncovering the culturally specific ways of knowing shared with members of their communities. Purposely for this research study, narrative inquiry will carry with it a political agenda that advances a Womanist and Afrocentric feminist perspective to make meaning of the Black women's experiences, specifically as leaders within urban education reform in the U.S.

Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology: Concrete Knowledge as Criteria for Meaning. As the first tenet of Collins' (2000) Afrocentric feminist epistemological framework, concrete knowledge as criteria for meaning suggests that individuals who have lived

experiences with which they claim to be experts are more credible and believable than those who study or read about such experiences.

The use of narrative methods places Black women at the center of this research and seeks an understanding of their experiences from their perspectives. From this stance, narrative methods enable the exploration of the beliefs of this study's Black women educational leaders—their perspectives on education, how their beliefs shape their pedagogy, and the ways in which they negotiate a position for themselves in their schools and districts (Gilpin, 2003; Henry, 1998). The synergy of a Womanist perspective and Afrocentric feminist epistemology allow for deeper analysis of this study's participants that will be used to enact deep Afro-feminist sentiments that are politically charged and geared toward hearing the voices of Black women education leaders who are frequently marginalized in educational research (Henry, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology: The Use of Dialogue in Assessing Knowledge

Claims. According to Collins (2000), dialogue between researcher and participant is important because it promotes a connectedness between both individuals. Dialogue, however, must be distinguished from “talk” in an interview where the interviewer follows a strict protocol of questions, keeps a “safe” distance from the subject, and tries her best not to show emotion or bias (Oakley, 1981). For this study, dialogue from a Womanist position will differ from these traditional methods, and instead be used to promote a sense of community and connectedness between researcher and participants (Brock, 2005; Collins, 1990).

Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology: An Ethic of Care. An ethic of care has three interrelated components that acknowledge the uniqueness, emotion, and empathy of an individual during dialogue (Collins, 2000).

Narrative inquiry, in this study, is more than simply a research method; it is also a place in which the researcher can participate in the story through a rich exchange of dialogue, feelings, and emotions. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1995), in the following quote, reflects on her emotions and the simultaneous roles she plays as a researcher utilizing narrative methods. She notes:

As I listen to these extraordinary women and men tell their life stories, I play many roles. I am a mirror that reflects back their pain, their fears, and their victories. I am also the inquirer who asks the sometimes difficult questions, who searches for evidence and patterns. I am the companion in the journey, bringing my own story to the encounter, making possible an interpretive collaboration. I am the audience who listens, laughs, weeps and applauds... Occasionally, I am a therapist who offers catharsis, support, and challenge, and who keeps track of emotional minefields... Throughout, I must also play stage manager, coordinating the intersection of three plays—the storyteller’s, the narrator’s, and the reader’s... (p. 12)

This case illustrates that narrative inquiry allows for a deep exchange of emotion and feeling where the researcher can be personally involved and invested in data collection. The researcher, in this light, is not regarded as an “invisible, anonymous voice of authority,” but rather as a caring individual with a vested interest for those involved in the study (Harding, 1989, p. 9).

Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology: An Ethic of Personal Accountability. This last facet of Collins’ Afrocentric feminist epistemology notes that individuals who convey their thoughts through dialogue should be held accountable for what they believe. This belief

enables researchers to trust that a person's expressed knowledge claims connect to their core values, character, and ethics.

Narrative inquiry embraces this perspective and adds that individuals' viewpoints are not only valuable but also legitimate and accountable sources for theorizing alternative ways of understanding the meaning of larger social phenomena (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, 1996; Harding, 1987). Feminist scholars also add that this knowledge is credible for helping participants better understand themselves and their positioning in the larger society, and for helping others learn from the perspectives shared.

Along with a Womanist perspective this research study uses all four of these epistemological tenets—concrete experiences as a criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, an ethic of care, and an ethic of personal accountability—to validate Black women's knowledge claims. As Collins (2000) states,

In this alternative epistemology, values lie at the heart of the knowledge validation process such that inquiry always has an ethical aim. Moreover, when these four dimensions become politicized and attached to a social justice project, they can form a framework for feminist thought and practice. (p. 266)

Narrative inquiry, in this light, will advance a social justice project agenda because it affords the space for the researcher to connect, relate, and build relationships with Black women on deeper levels while working to understand their experiences as Black women leaders in urban education reform.

Research Methods

The researcher recruited study participants through culturally appropriate measures termed “community nomination” by Michelle Foster (1997). Through the

researcher's nationwide professional network of educators of color, several participants who met the study criteria were identified. All participants identified as African American or Black, are in school, regional, or district leadership positions, and define their pedagogy as radical and antiracist. Of the five identified participants, ultimately three agreed to participate in the study. All of the participants work for Mji Public Schools, an urban public school district in a mid-sized East Coast city. Pseudonyms were provided to protect the participants' identities.

The Participants

Minkah. Minkah is an ivy-league doctoral candidate and district administrator who created and directs a fellowship designed to train internal candidates for school leadership. In addition to her work with the Fellowship, Minkah also coordinates the district team that provides professional development and support to all school administration teams. She is in her early forties and identifies as a biracial African-American woman. Minkah came to Mji Public Schools to complete the capstone project for her doctorate and has over ten years of experience as a teacher and high school principal, all of which was in a large Midwest city.

Nyashia. Nyashia, who identifies as an African-American woman, is in her early thirties and currently serves as an assistant school leader at a Mji Public Schools middle school. She is a fellow in the school leader fellowship program that Minkah directs. All of her eight years of teaching and leadership experience was completed at her current school. Nyashia holds a master's degree from a local

university and plans to be a successor school principal for a middle school in Mji Public Schools.

Akilah. A co-principal at a Mji Public Schools elementary school, Akilah recently returned to the area after teaching and leading schools in cities in the South and Midwest. Like Nyashia, she is also a fellow in the school leader fellowship program Minkah directs. Akilah is in her mid-thirties and identifies as a queer, biracial Black woman. She has fifteen years of experience in education and plans to become a successor school principal for a high school in Mji Public Schools.

Data Collection

Data gathering occurred through in-depth narrative interviews and school/office observations. In educational research, these methods help researchers understand the “constructed nature” of pedagogy at deeper depths (Gilpin, 2003, p. 80). In their studies, Gilpin (2003) and Foster (1997), stories provide a window into educators’ experiences and the meanings they made of their practice. Teachers’ stories, in these studies, were used to understand the political nature of pedagogy and provide insights into their personal values, morals, and beliefs (Goodson, 1998). Also, these methods have been utilized to comprehend the social construction of schooling (Goodson, 1998), what practices work best with minority students (Ladson-Billings, 1994), and what knowledge is essential about teaching (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Observation and teacher narratives together provide insights on how to improve schools (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Goodson, 1998) and better support educators.

For this study, the researcher and participants met a minimum of four times. Minkah was the first person the researcher spoke with, in-person, to schedule time to conduct observations and in-depth interviews, as she was the first educator identified for the study. Before the study, Minkah and the researcher regularly discussed their feelings about education reform, racism, and their education philosophies and pedagogy. These discussions made her inclusion in the study, and its purpose, an extension of their professional relationship. While arranging to meet with Minkah, Nyashia and Akilah agreed to participate in the study. Both had professional ties with the researcher and were regularly accessible for both in-depth interviews and observations.

All three education leaders interviewed a total of three times. The first round of interviews occurred via Skype for Minkah and at Nyashia and Akilah's schools. Following these interviews, the researcher returned to their schools and district office to observe for a full day. The second round of interviews with Nyashia and Akilah were conducted at their schools and via Skype for Minkah within a week of the observations. All collected data was analyzed and then, about a month later, the third round of interviews was conducted, all via Skype.

In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were employed as the primary method of data collection. This type of in-depth interview borrows from the phenomenological tradition of interviewing where the main focus is to learn directly from individuals and how they make meaning of their lives as they know it (Seidman, 2006). Open-ended questions

were asked in a semi-structured interview format. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed into word files for later analysis.

The researcher utilized Seidman's (2006) three-tier approach to structure each interview, which consisted of three interviews with each participant. All educational leaders were asked the same initial questions, with follow-up questions varying depending upon their responses. The researcher used guidelines (see Appendix A, B, and C) to direct and focus the purpose of each interview. It also ensured that all participants provided answers to the research questions that guided this study (Seidman, 2006). The duration of each interview varied, with each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes.

Interview one centered on a "focused life history" (Seidman, 2006, p. 11). The participants were invited to talk about their life experiences through their early years as educators. The educational leaders were asked to speak about their experiences as children and as students through post-secondary school. After learning about their experiences with formal education, questions focused on what brought them into education reform and how their beliefs, values, and identities impacted their choices as educators. Appendix A provides an overview of the types of questions asked during the first interview.

The second interview asked the participants to reflect on their experiences in their careers in education and administration, including what influenced them to move into school and district leadership positions. Also, they were asked to speak about their leadership styles and dispositions, strengths and areas of growth, and challenges and

barriers experienced professionally. Seidman (2006) calls this the “details of the experience” interview (p. 12), as participants were asked to contemplate their experiences in education, with specific attention paid to their professional roles and how they, as individuals, approach those roles. To gather additional data following observations, interview two also included participants’ thoughts on their daily activities and interactions with staff, students, and stakeholders. When needed, they were probed to give examples of moments that stood out the most—the challenges they faced and how they felt these challenges impact their pedagogy. They were also asked to speak about their interactions with those they lead; their approach to leadership, especially how it has developed based on their experiences and learning; and the skills they believe are essential to being a successful educational leader in urban education reform. An outline of the types of questions asked during the second interview is provided in Appendix B.

Interview three, the final interview, asked participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences as educators, especially as school and district leaders, and the practical and philosophical approaches that have come to inform their work as educators. They were also asked to elaborate on questions that arose in their first and second interviews and required clarification, while also speaking to how their experiences in urban education reform impact the ways they approach working as school and district leaders. The guiding questions asked in this interview are detailed in Appendix C.

Observations & Field Notes

Participant observation assists the immersion of the researcher in the daily realities of participants in the study (Emerson, et. al., 2001). Along with the experience of participant observation, the researcher's written accounts of the events observed in the field are collected. Field notes, in these instances, are reconstructed incidents written into narratives that portray the meanings researchers make of their experiences. Emerson et al. (2001) explain field notes as "a form of representation, that is, a way of reducing just observed events, persons, and places into written accounts" (p. 353). These field notes – and the accompanying observations – served three main purposes in this study.

First, observations (in schools and offices) provided the context with which to address two of the study's research questions: (1) How do the experiences of these Black women educational leaders reflect the impact of race and gender on leadership practice in urban schools? (2) What competencies do these Black women educational leaders perceive as most critical to survival and success in an urban school and district? (3) What do these Black women educational leaders see as barriers and challenges to success as educational leaders? According to Clandinin and Connelly (1996, 1995), since educators' narratives are impacted by the contexts of their school environments, having direct contact with the school and district environments allowed for a better understanding of the context, history, demographics, and overall "feel" that affects how educators make meaning of their experiences.

Additionally, understanding the professional environments helped to inform better the analysis on the meanings participants made of their experiences and educators and education leaders. The observations also provided an opportunity to observe the leaders' approaches to leading, the topics they raised, and their overall interactions. These observations also facilitated the development of questions about their particular practices that were asked at the end of the observation.

Field notes were handwritten in a notebook and then entered into a digital document at the end of the day. The impossibility of writing every detail of the experiences with the participants during observations led to intentionally particular field notes. As such, the focus was on:

- *The physical arrangement of participants' offices, schools, and immediate communities:* The location and use of participants' offices were noted, as well as the observed demographics of the offices and schools. Also, information about the print materials, facilities, and presence of staff, students, and community members in the schools and offices (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996, 1995).
- *Interactions among participants, staff, students, and community members:* The researcher looked for the ways in which each education leader interacted with teachers, colleagues, students, and community members as they worked in their offices and schools. This included how they greeted people, engaged with people in classrooms and hallways, and how they managed and led throughout the day (Callender, 1997; Henry, 1998; Hope, 2005; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

- *Stories education leaders shared:* Observations and notes were taken on how participants used metaphors, moral teaching, and life stories to convey expectations and embody leadership, as these notes and observations provided a window into the views and meanings they bring to their work as school and district leaders (Dixson, 2003; Foster, 1997).

Data Analysis

In this section, a detailed account of the ways in which the participants' narrative texts were analyzed is provided. Cortazzi (1993) rationalizes narratives as not simply a way to communicate a list of events, but rather reveal the attitude of the individual and informs the listener of how to interpret the meaning of the story (Beck, 2010, p. 59). However, these meanings are frequently embedded within the narrative and require the researcher to conduct a content analysis, in which the narrative is divided into smaller subtexts and sub-stories, in addition to using a coding process to evaluate the structural components of the narrative.

Leiblich et. al.'s (1998) content analysis approach advises separating texts into smaller components of content to assist in sorting and categorizing long narrative transcripts. This method is most aligned with the study because of the structure and nature of the interviews conducted. For example, one interview session asked participants to speak about a series of events including their experiences as students, their experiences early in their education careers, and their perspectives on working in urban education reform in the United States. The content analysis method, in these

instances, allowed for the separation of the narrative into smaller subtexts or sub-stories as they surfaced in each narrative transcript.

The detailed method of analysis employed in this study is outlined below. Each step provides an account of how participants' narrative texts were analyzed.

Step One: Define and Sort Material into Content Categories

Each participant's interviews were coded separately using "principle sentences" to highlight a new or distinct idea or memory (Lieblich, et. al., 1998, p. 115). A term that was close to what each principle sentence was about was used to code them. Then, these codes were categorized by topic and defined based on the content in the category, with the frequency and significance of all codes in each category noted. Categories were also created for each participant's narrative to assist in capturing the unique topics each discussed.

Step Two: Selection of the Subtext

Based on the codes taken from each interview, each transcript was reread, and the text separated into broad categorical topics (e.g. participants' experiences as students; early experiences as educators; perceptions of education reform). These sections of subtext were then placed in a separate word file, sorted by category title, for each participant's set of three interviews. The original interview transcripts were kept intact for reference, as necessary.

Step Three: Evaluate Individual Narratives

Each participant's text was analyzed separately because each participant's narrative told its own story. As each text was analyzed, notes were made about (1)

what participants talked about the most, (2) the events that occurred during their experiences in education, (3) the perceptions and meanings they made of their experiences as educators and leaders in urban education reform, and (4) how they specifically addressed situations that arose during their careers in education. At this point, similarities and differences in topics discussed by all participants were also compared.

Writing Educators' Narratives

The analysis of the participants' narratives and the observations informed the writing of the final narratives. This last process, according to Clandinin and Connelly (1990), becomes complex because the final written narrative will consist of a reconstructed and reinterpreted text of the participants' spoken accounts. With this in mind, Clandinin and Connelly (1990) identify two methods to structuring and writing participants' narratives. The two methods in the structure are the *scene* and the *plot*. The scene focuses on the context, setting, and place of the story, including a description of the "unseen"—character descriptions and personalities—and the "seen" which are found in the participants' physical settings. It is also comprised of the researcher's interactions with the leaders; incorporating information about their body language and ways they reenacted particular memories. Some of the most valuable understandings of the participants' decisions, visioning, pedagogy, personalities, and mindsets were developed outside of the designated interviews. The seen and unseen interactions with participants that occurred at meals, while traveling, and in other in-between moments supported the development of a deeper contextual understanding of who they are as

individuals and the underlying meanings behind their work as leaders in education reform.

The method of the plot is comprised of the most prominent themes that emerged from participants' interviews (Cortazzi, 2001). Because many people tell disjointed stories, Clandinin and Connelly's (1990) notion of "annals and chronicles" was used to compose the final plot. Annals are a record of events that are remembered and described but have no apparent connection between events. Conversely, chronicles may have no apparent connection between events, but the meanings may be unstated (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990). The final written narratives took into account the ways the participants told full narratives (including events, time, place, and meanings gained from the experiences), chronicles (chronological events linked together with no stated meaning), and annals (stories that had no apparent chronological order or meaning). Ultimately, great care was taken to write narratives that closely reflected the education leaders' perceptions while incorporating researcher interpretation of their stories.

Similar sentiments are shared when Peshkin (1985) writes:

When I describe what I have seen, my results invite other researchers to look where I did and see what I saw. My ideas are candidates for others to entertain, not necessarily as truth, let alone Truth, but as positions about the nature and meaning of a phenomenon that may fit their sensibility and shape their thinking about their own inquiries. (p. 280)

It is in the spirit of these sentiments that the final narratives invite readers to explore, as did the researcher, the lives of Black women education leaders, their perceptions, and daily living experiences in urban education reform in the United States.

Identifying Myself as Researcher

One's personal experience represents a critical rationale and background for why we choose to conduct a particular study (Bernal, 1998). Also, our personal histories, invested interest, racial and cultural backgrounds play a complicated role in the analytical process (Bernal, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2000). It is for these reasons that this section is used to identify myself as a researcher and provide my personal reasons for conducting this study.

To deny one's cultural and historical background is to ignore the potential bias, privilege or contradictory identities we as researchers have, and ignores the multiple lenses that influence the research (Villenas, 1996). Furthermore, a key element of Womanist theory addresses the ways in which our personal locations, as female scholars of color, shape our work and positioning as researchers (Sheared, 2006). Presented below is my story of how I came to want to conduct this research study and its connections to my personal history.

My Personal Story and Connections to the Focus of This Research Study

I was born into a long lineage of Black women educators from southern Virginia who used their positions as educators to co-create liberatory spaces for their communities. Their work assisted in the creation of local Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the founding of native schools, the success of a number of community movements aimed at improving the education of Black children, and the continued growth and development of a family dedicated to Black liberation and self-determination. The intergenerational knowledge rooted in the theorizing of these Black

women educators and passed on to my mother's generation and then to my generation has been essential to my development as a Black woman. This knowledge, along with the mentorship of my mother and other strong Black women educators, undergirds my worldview and fueled my decision to become an antiracist educator committed to the liberation and self-determination of communities of color.

When I reflect on the people and moments that most indelibly impacted who I am and how I approach my life and work as an educator, they center on Black women educators. Their beliefs and visioning about the informal and formal education of children of color were always crystal clear, and those convictions helped create the spaces in which I safely navigated my childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. Moreover, when I entered the field of education, I knew it was my responsibility to do the same for new generations of children of color. However, as I progressed into teacher and then school leadership positions, I had no idea how fraught with challenges the work is, nor how to successfully handle this reality. I returned to the most important role models in my life to learn how to navigate the professional challenges, rooted in systemic racism, and to persist. It was this experience of not being prepared as a Black women educational leader that put me on the path that culminated in the development of this research study.

As a doctoral student in education, I began searching for academic studies on how Black women educators, especially as educational leaders, handled the challenges that seemed inherent in this work. I was looking for scholarship that codified the ways of knowing and experiences of educators like my role models. I viewed these women as

the “star teachers” Haberman (1995) described; they were effective and successful at what they did in schools and classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 1994). They created pedagogy and school missions and visions from the cultural frames of reference of Black communities (Howard, 2001), held relevant high expectations for students of color, understood the cultural backgrounds of communities of color, and used a political lens to motivate students of color to succeed in all of our pursuits (Henry, 1998). While some studies examined the experiences of Black teachers like my role models, I found very few about Black educational leaders. As Alston (2005) described, “there remains a paucity of research” (p. 675). My research experiences showed that there was a missing perspective, that the theorizing and essential knowledge of women educators of color like those in my life, was absent from the discourse. The silencing of the voices of the Black women educators in my life, and experiences like mine, led me to conduct this study because I see this knowledge as essential to the continued development and support of Black women educators and educational leaders.

My personal history and positioning as a Black woman educational leader provides me with cultural and professional lenses that allow me to understand the narratives of Black women educational leaders from an insider’s perspective (Bernal, 1998). In particular, Womanist theory aids in problematizing the location in which I enter this research and allows for my positioning and the perspectives of the educators in this study to be heard.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Suspicious Wisdom: Black Women and Their Approach to Leadership in Urban Education Reform

It means that you know danger without having to be taught... It is what June Jordan calls 'jungle posture'... what Ntozake Shange calls 'the combat stance'... It is like when Sojourner Truth said, 'Nobody lifts me into carriages or over mud puddles, but I am a woman.' You know where the minefields are... there is wisdom... You are in touch with the ancestors... and it is from the gut, not rationally figured out. Black women have to use this all the time, of course, the creativity is still there, but we are not fools... we call it the 'epistemological privileges of the oppressed.' How do you tap that wisdom—name it, mine it, pass it on to the next generation? (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1995, p. 59)

The Black women in this study root their work as educational leaders in the “epistemological privileges of the oppressed” described by Lawrence-Lightfoot. They employ this “suspicious wisdom” and approach the education of children of color as a way to tap into this wisdom and pass it on to the next generation because it is critical to the survival and success of communities of color. However, this aspect of the experiences of Black women educational leaders has gone virtually undocumented and unstudied, especially in the academia because the ways in which people of color theorize, as posited by Christian (1988) is different from that of the ways of knowing of mainstream academia. The privileging of traditional ways of theorizing invalidate and obscure the knowledges of Black women. The participants’ narratives demonstrate the tensions experienced by Black women in urban education reform while showing the ways in which Black women’s epistemologies generate possibilities for successfully navigating education leadership.

The following narratives are this researcher's attempt to understand the complexities of these three Black women's lives, from the experiences that led them into education to their work as educators and leaders. In addition, this chapter provides a narrative discussion of each educator to gain insights into the guiding research questions: (1) How do the experiences of these Black women educational leaders reflect the impact of race and gender on leadership practice in urban schools; (2) what competencies do these Black women educational leaders perceive as most critical to survival and success in an urban school and district; and (3) what do these Black women educational leaders see as barriers and challenges to success as educational leaders?

Minkah

An African Born in America

"My father didn't want us to have anything to do with Black Americans." –Minkah

Minkah identifies as a first-generation biracial African-American. She was born to a Zimbabwean father and white American mother and had what she describes as a "transient" childhood in which she and her seven younger siblings "bounced between Europe, Africa, and the United States." Minkah cites her father's strict ideologies about women and notions about Black Americans as the reason she "went to college as far away from home as possible...And the minute I arrived, I found the Black people on campus."

My father came to the United States after being expelled from his country for his anti-government views during the civil war. He sought political asylum in the United States and somehow connected with my mother in college. I am not really sure how that happened because my mother grew up in an entirely white

town in [the northern Midwest] and had no contact with Black people until she went to college.

According to my mom, she dreamt, as a child, that she would meet and marry an African. So I guess when she met my father she thought it made that dream a reality. All I know is that the two of them together, her with her dreams of having ten children with an African, and my father with his revolutionary ideologies steeped in traditional Shona culture and anti-government training in Africa made for a volatile pairing and my siblings, and I paid the price.

On top of the constant moving around during my elementary school years and the physical and emotional abuse we experienced at the hands of my father, my father made sure we had no contact with Blacks. We were typically the only people of color in our neighborhood, and our schools were all-white. So when it was time to go off to college, I applied to as many far away colleges as possible. I went to college as far away from home as possible. I chose to attend college at [a large predominantly white institution in the north east].

And the minute I arrived, I found the Black people on campus. I developed deep relationships with them, relationships I still have today. Because of my desire to connect with my Blackness, college is where I blossomed, where I found myself and began to understand the world. I was extremely curious about people who were different from me and that curiosity led me to volunteer at homeless shelters and tutoring programs in the city. I see those experiences as the reason I changed my major from pre-law to education, putting me on my current path.

Although the experiences that led Minkah to education do not explicitly outline a connection to previously highlighted themes of spirituality and surrogacy, she does connect her work in education to a pursuit for social justice in communities of color.

My family surely was not wealthy; I would consider us working class. But I do not remember wanting for much, materially, during my childhood. So seeing the disparities between my childhood experiences and those of the families I worked with in [a city in the northeast], I was driven to figure out why our experiences weren't the same, why some of us had and some did not. And education seemed to be an important part of the equation.

Driven by a desire to guarantee that people of color received and had access to the same things, regardless of location, Minkah began her teaching career in the north east city where her undergraduate school was located, upon completing her undergraduate coursework. However, a sense of duty and responsibility to her siblings soon brought

her back to the northern Midwest. It is at this point her home role of surrogate mother began to impact her vision of her role as an educator.

Early in my teaching career, I returned to [a city in the northern Midwest] to be near my youngest siblings because I wanted them to have a better high school experience than me, and eventually get the opportunity to go away to college like I did. As the oldest child, I was always tasked with the protection of my younger siblings, and that didn't change when I left home. But the shift back to my hometown led me to include my duties as a sister in my educational philosophy. I saw my younger siblings in my students and felt a stronger responsibility to give them the same opportunities at school that I wanted my siblings to have at their schools.

Although Minkah returned to the northern Midwest city she resided in before going to college, she chose to teach, and subsequently lead a school, in the inner city where the schools are minority schools. After teaching for several years, Minkah rose through the school's leadership chain from assistant principal to principal. It is during this time that she extended her educational philosophy to include the belief that she must stand in the gap and serve as a channel to make sure educators of color had an entry point into the field. While her school was a minority school, the staff was overwhelmingly white until she assumed the role of principal.

Shifting from the role of teacher to principal forced me to reimagine the possibilities of my work. I went from seeing my role being an agent for social justice through creating a classroom in which my students were equipped to realize their dreams because I was the best teacher for them to understanding my role as a gatekeeper—someone who used her power and access to get more teachers of color with similar educational philosophies into the profession and classrooms with students who look like them. During my time as principal, the school's teaching population shifted from about 98% white to 40% people of color. With this change in the demographics of the teaching staff, I saw firsthand how having a critical mass of like-minded people multiplied the impact of our shared goal to use our positions to achieve equitable educational outcomes for kids of color. This experience inspired me to return to school to gain the skills needed to serve as a more effective gatekeeper and pipeline creator.

This pursuit of additional skills led Minkah back to the northeast to gain her doctorate in educational leadership. Through this program, she was required to complete a capstone project. Minkah chose to use this project to develop her school-level pipeline vision into one that would impact an entire school district, illustrating Minkah's belief that as she gained more access to decision-makers, it was her responsibility to leverage that "power" to achieve more equitable outcomes for people of color, most specifically Black people. She relocated to the Mji, a Midwest city, and made her vision of creating a district-level pipeline for educators of color, specifically principals, a reality. However, this work was fraught with new challenges and traumas.

Cultural Clashes

The hypocrisy there is startling and it's a perpetual elephant in the room. And it doesn't get addressed or if it does, it gets addressed at a race and equity session and not in any other place. I think it's startling that we have a majority student of color, specifically, Black student base and then we have growing... I mean I think they've been able to hire or retain folks of color, but because there is either the reality or perception, because I don't remember the numbers, of increasing white staff which then leads to this racial imbalance or mismatch between staff and students. And yet there is all these, you know, other dynamics and things happening across the Mji space. There is just so much happening that it's hard to focus on the work because the work should be very values driven, but it's not a values driven organization. Values don't necessarily drive the organizational principles, except teaching and learning is such a personal process, and educating African American students is a moral imperative, yet, there is just a huge misalignment between the personal and organizational values that should be in place and driving everyone's actions and behaviors, and then what's happening and being discussed. I think it was emotionally and psychologically a very insane place to exist.

Minkah's description of the problems within Mji Public Schools illustrate her vision for how educational leadership should happen. She deeply believes in the "moral imperative" of educating Black students and sees her work as ensuring that the values

of people from the communities being served (e.g. Black people) are reflected in the work. This is illustrated in her cohort of school leaders that is made up of 90% people of color, mostly Black, and 10% white people.

The selection of a cohort that is majority of color posed a number of challenges for her and has placed her in direct opposition with her white, male supervisor. As she shared:

My supervisor regularly humiliates me in meetings with his peers by calling me out for things he feels I should not be engaging in as the director of this program, including serving as a mentor for some school leaders and providing input on things happening at the senior leadership level. He speaks to me in ways that come across as condescending and, honestly, degrading. Our working relationship has continued to erode as I operationalize the program and bring in more and more people of color. The first cohort had two white and ten Black school leaders and this second cohort has one white, one Latina, and eight Black school leaders. It is very evident to me that while the organization says it values diversity and desires to reflect the populations it serves, in practice, this is not the case. Our professional and person cultures clash because of this misalignment between theory and practice.

Minkah led similar work in a northern Midwest city with a much more diverse population with less Black students and received no “push back.” The shock of coming to a majority Black school district in on the East coast has been difficult for her. She is planning on leaving the district within the year and considers it a failure, even though the program will continue to function when she leaves. She is concerned about how well the leaders she’s helped cultivate will be supported in her absence.

Cognitive Dissonance: Leading Leaders into Dangerous Spaces

With her concerns about how the current cohort will fair, Minkah shared why she would not tell the cohort all of the things happening behind the scenes.

I can't really tell the cohort what is going on for three reasons:

1. I wanted to protect them and be the buffer between the organizational chaos and the sanctity and sense of calm and higher functioning of the cohort.
2. The challenge is to prepare them for the principalship, not discuss all of the wrong things, the malfunctionings of the organization.
3. It can be very emotionally taxing to be focused on that and talk about that, to try to problem solve and try to instill new values in an organization because that requires senior leader support and there isn't that – so what is the point. The more important thing to do is to focus on preparing the cohort to be high-functioning principals.

She explained this conundrum as “cognitive dissonance” because she is conflicted between doing what is values driven and doing what she perceives as best for the health and wellbeing of those in the cohorts. She attributes this cognitive dissonance to the racially unsafe space that is the senior leadership team of Mji Public Schools. The realities of having to choose between saving yourself from continued traumatic experiences and the pipeline of leaders of color she developed is source of deep conflict for Minkah and she describes it as “a no-win situation.” She goes on to explain that:

Unfortunately, that is often what educational leadership is for Black women, a no-win situation. We are torn between doing what is healthiest for us or enduring the traumas in the name of the moral imperative of educating our Black children. We end up robbing Peter to pay Paul and it should not be this way. There has to be a better way to support our Black leaders and educate our Black children.

Leadership as a Mother

Minkah made connections between the trauma experienced at work and the trauma experienced at home through her discussion of the impact of serving as an educational leader on her role as a mother. She is the only study participant with

children and her perspective on motherhood provides valuable context around the various challenges women face as leaders.

After becoming a principal, I married and now have two small children, a son and a daughter. I am so thankful for my husband because I still have not figured out how to balance my roles as leader and mother. The two roles often come into direct conflict with each other, and that reality is even more pronounced now that I serve as a district leader. The long hours and pressures of work affect my abilities to give my all to my children and husband.

My husband and I have tried various things to lessen the impact of my work on my home life, to no avail. We tried my husband not working, enrolling my children into the work daycare, and even bringing our mothers for long-term stays at our home to help with the children. Each of these “fixes” had positive and negative impacts on our home life, but none of them resulted in the kind of home life we envision. And unfortunately, the state of my home life impacts my ability to focus on the tasks at hand when at work.

I believe some women, fellow moms, in leadership at work understand this experience and the related traumas, but district leadership is still very male, so this understanding is not the norm and does not impact the decisions made about how we do our work.

As evidenced in Minkah’s description of her lived realities as both leader and mother, these two aspects of her life deeply inform the each other. Her feelings of inefficacy in one sphere lead to feelings of inefficacy in the other, and that cycle continues. Minkah uses her reality as “the impetus to create options for leaders in similar situations not to have to experience the same traumas.” Minkah stands in the gap for leaders and parents; her work as a leader is meant to not only impact the professional realities of others but the personal realities as well.

Unlike other careers, education demands that we bring all of us to our work. The moral imperative of our work means that giving anything less than 100% of our beings would seriously undercut our effectiveness. So, I use my personal and professional experiences to shape how I do my work. I am always looking for ways to amplify the positive experiences I’ve had and minimize the negative experiences.

The majority of the cohort of leaders in the fellowship are parents, and we include discussions about how leadership is impacting our roles as parents,

which help inform how we craft our visions of educational leaders and parents. This facet of our work is included as part of our personal and professional development. Working on ourselves is integral to our success as leaders, and I try to make that explicit for the fellows. We talk about our self-care plans, the things we do to maintain our sanity and find some semblance of balance in our lives. As leaders we have to model that for those we lead, especially knowing how traumatizing this work is, even in the best of conditions.

From yoga and other activities to maintain physical fitness and deliberate planning of professional and private time, Minkah continues to experiment with ways to more effectively balance her life. For example, Minkah schedules the days she works late so that she can be at home with her family, without bringing home work, the majority of the week. Intentionality in both professional and private spaces is the best way she sees educational leaders, especially women, managing the competing priorities they experience.

This year we contracted with a company to explicitly teach time management skills for the fellows. These sessions talked about how to manage both professional and personal time to experience a higher level of satisfaction in both areas. I am working on time management alongside the fellows and have seen some positive impacts in my life. The scheduling of long work days has freed up more time for my home life on the other days. I work until 8 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This shift in my schedule has lessened the amount of work I bring home with me, giving me more quality time at home with my husband and kids and more time for self-care.

Nyashia

Same Neighborhood, Different Opportunities

“No one understands what our kids and families experience better than those of us from here.” –Nyashia

Unlike Minkah and Akilah, Nyashia was born and raised in Mji. Her experiences closely align with the vast number of kids she now serves. This reality, her lived reality as a product of the institutions and neighborhoods of Mji profoundly impacts her

connections to her work in Mji, including her relationships with her students and families.

Look. I'm from here. Just like the kids and families I serve, I grew up in what people call a low-income community with all of the stereotypical challenges—no money, few resources, and the resulting dysfunctional family dynamics. My mom was an alcoholic, and my dad was away from the house a lot because he worked odd jobs when he wasn't at his day job.

And maybe even more important than all of that is the fact that at a very young age, my dad enrolled me and my siblings in a private school outside of my neighborhood to keep us from having to go to our neighborhood Mji Public Schools school. I saw firsthand how that changed what I was exposed to, what I got to do and see.

Nyashia's theorizing about her childhood experiences in Mji contextualizes some of the challenges Black people face in urban education (Perry, 2016a; Perry, 2016b; Perry 2016c). From zero tolerance policies and non-traditional public schools that recruit specific groups of high-achieving students from traditional public schools to the draining of "qualified teachers" and unequal funding models using taxpayer and federal funds, Nyashia's lived experiences provide one personal narrative of the actual effects of these macro-level experiences on the micro-level—one family and one neighborhood.

After my dad took us out of our neighborhood Mji public school, it didn't take long for me to see that even though I was still from the same neighborhood as my friends and relatives, I had very different opportunities. I never thought it was fair because I knew the only reason my opportunities were different as because my dad was able to scrape up the money to send us to a private school. I grew up before the time of charter schools, but you can insert charter school into my story, and you'll get the same situation. The bogus "lottery" system is like play Russian roulette with kids lives. That should not be the case. Kids should have the same opportunities regardless of the school they attend. Some of my friends are locked up or dead, and I know it's because of their experiences in school.

While this may sound like an "I made it out" story, Nyashia cautions against that assumption. She refused to leave and instead came back to the very neighborhood she

grew up in and the very Mji public school she would've attended for middle school to make sure her "unfair" advantages would benefit "her people."

Yeah, I parlayed my private school education into the opportunity to go away to [a very competitive college] in [a large northeast city]. I would not trade that experience for anything in the world because it made me who I am today. But, and this is a big but, I do not believe that I should've gotten this opportunity over my friends and family in my neighborhood. Nothing is special about me. We all deserve the chance to determine our destiny.

I told my dad before I left for college that I would be back. He told me to keep an open mind and wait to make that decision, but my mind was made up. I had to come back and take up the work of ed equity. My opportunities will count as more than something that impacts my life because I see myself in every little girl I serve, my family in every family connected to my school and community.

One of the biggest issues Nyashia noted about the way education is currently functioning in Mji is not only the reliance on "outside" professionals to educate Mji students but the preference of "outsiders" over educators who are products of Mji schools, especially those who graduated from schools run by Mji Public Schools.

I know good and well that they don't believe in their product because Mji Public Schools doesn't invest in the kids who graduate from their schools. What clearer message can you send about what you think of your schools? Now I'll admit that the district is doing a better job of hiring former students, but the preference is still for outside people.

What does that say to students in the district? Not only are our opportunities different as kids from Mji, but our opportunities as adults are affected, too. So I see my mission as a "for us by us" type thing. When I say for us by us, I mean it in two ways—for us by us meaning Black people from Mji and for us by us meaning Black people as a larger community. So we have to love and support each other and soak up every opportunity we have to positively change the realities for our babies. That's what I preach, and that's what I live.

Upon completing her undergraduate degree, Nyashia returned to Mji and began working as a teacher on a provisional license. While she did not major in education in undergrad, instead majoring in communications, she quickly joined an alternate certification program and joined the staff of her childhood neighborhood's public

middle school. Early in her teaching career, she demonstrated the ability to help all students, regardless of their history of academic achievement, experience success in school. And as she explains, this led to more opportunities to gain additional skills.

The more I proved myself as a teacher, the more attention they paid. I think it's because they had really low expectations of me because of where I'm from. But I didn't care because I'm all about getting as much as I can get so I can be better at my job. They can see me as a magical negro for all I care, just as long as I'm given professional development and access to the keys.

Proving that little Black babies are capable led to a full scholarship to get a master's degree from [a local Mji university]. I jumped on the opportunity and didn't look back. I ended up with a master's in Educational Leadership and more opportunities to take leadership roles in my school. I ended up as the Assistant Principal after six years of teaching, and that led to the opportunity to join Minkah's fellowship program.

“We gotta do this for ourselves”

During her six years of teaching, Nyashia learned that successful teaching of students of color had to take a holistic approach, incorporating the entirety of students' experiences and identities. She believes that the academic portion of the curriculum is irrelevant if the rest of students' lives and identities were not connected to it. King (1994) describes this as “the particulars of black life and culture,” and explains that this, coupled with an understanding of “the particular historical significance of the transformative presence of African American people in America” is essential for Black students to thrive in school (p. 30). Nyashia incorporated teaching about stereotypes to help students develop their self-confidence and positive self-images. As she explained:

It is important for me to show my students what stereotypes are and challenge these stereotypes every day, especially as a Black person. I don't believe it's possible to help students learn things like self-respect, self-confidence, and self-efficacy if I am not actively speaking with them about and challenging things like stereotypes. If all they know of who they are as Black people is negative or

stereotypical, like 'Being Black means being good at dancing' or 'I'm Black because I talk loudly' or 'Being Black is being ghetto,' then they're going to try to live up to those beliefs and prevent themselves from realizing their full potential as a unique person. So, I work really hard to show them that who they are is ok, and because they are Black, who they are is being Black, even if it doesn't fit the stereotypical views of Blackness. I like to read them this quote to get them to understand the strength of character of our people, 'All that your ancestors had to go through for you to be here...and you doubt yourself? *How dare you.* You come from a legacy of survival that is to never be questioned.'

Her discussions with students, Nyashia tells them that there are many ways to succeed that do not involve rapping or playing sports. She also helps students to analyze the behaviors they exhibit that are rooted in stereotypes and how these behaviors help to reinforce students of color.

Nyashia is not afraid to tackle stereotypes with her students and sees explicit discussions about subjects like race and gender as essential to helping students develop the critical analysis skills necessary to challenge these societal views and make change in their communities.

We have those discussions regularly. It is essential they know about how the stereotypes they believe about themselves impact them. Another quote we say often is, 'Watch your thoughts, for they become your words. Watch your words, for they become your actions. Watch your actions, for they become your habits. Watch you habits, for they become your character. Watch your character for it will become your destiny.' This quote exemplifies my beliefs about the importance of our thinking and speaking about ourselves. When I connect this with our discussions, I think it helps students connect some dots.

This was evident when Nyashia led a town hall meeting with students. During the discussion about stereotypes, she asked the students to select how likely a person is to go to college or jail, based on a scale of 0 to 10. In small groups the students discussed how likely the person, one from each of the generic racial/ethnic categories – Black, white, Asian, Hispanic, Native American – is to go to the two locations. The responses

illustrated the internalized racial inferiority students held about themselves and other people of color. All of the small groups rated the white and Asian person as likely to go to college with a numerical ranking of at or above an 8. And all of the small groups rated the Black and Hispanic person as likely to go to jail with a numerical ranking of 9 or 10. Some groups put the Native American in the middle, not more likely to go to jail or college, and some groups placed the Native American as more likely to go to jail than college. Nyashia then discussed with students why they ranked people in this way and highlighted the way that mindset can affect how they approach school and other areas of their lives. The discussion helped students begin to identify their negative self-images and in the final activity they began to identify positive things about themselves to replace these negative ideas, especially around academic success. After the town hall she commented:

We gotta do this for ourselves. I have students who say, 'a D is passing, so I'll take the D.' I continually ask them why they don't push for more. I ask them, so if you went to a restaurant and it had a D grade, or to a doctor for surgery and he got all Ds in medical school, would you want to go to either? They say 'no way.' We talk about how they can use that logic to set the bar higher for themselves. I am constantly trying to find examples to illustrate how thinking the best of, expecting the best of themselves is the the best thing for them. Right now it seems to be sinking in with some of them. I know I cannot want their success more than them and I need them to stop drinking the Kool-Aid that tells them that they're only worth Ds.

Based on the changes in her students' behaviors and attitudes toward learning, Nyashia found that her students have been receptive to these conversations.

She's seen the most growth in her students' attitudes and behaviors in their single-gender advisory classes. The advisory groups meet every day for approximately 45 minutes and the curriculum, developed and written by Nyashia, focuses on topics like

the histories of people of color and adolescent identity and healthy self-esteem development, including themes like friendship, anger management, peer pressure, and hygiene. Nyashia's students commented on the changes in their behavior based on their experiences in advisory. She shared:

When students give me feedback on their advisories they say things like, 'My mom is noticing that I'm doing a better job with my anger. I don't talk back as much and she told me she appreciates it.' Getting comments like that from my students helps me know these discussions are making a difference. These comments push me to want to do more, to continue to find ways to positively impact students as whole people.

The Setup

When speaking about her movement from teaching to shared school leadership, Nyashia expressed feelings of being "setup." She shared that she felt like she was placed in the position by a supervisor who did not believe in her abilities because of her "lack of polish." As she explained:

I'm from Mji and don't speak in a way that is considered "professional" by white people in the district. Hell, even some Black people look at me like I shouldn't be here. Unfortunately, I haven't learned to code switch and make white people comfortable with me. Instead of looking at how well I build relationships with my students and families, I'm judged on how well I present to white people in positions of authority. So I know that I wasn't promoted for my benefit. Something just doesn't feel right, so I am making sure I cross my t's and dot my i's.

Nyashia relies heavily on her interactions with both Minkah and Akilah to navigate her experiences with her co-school leader who promoted her. The relationships she has with people she deems more experienced are essential to her self-care.

I don't know what I'd do without my friends in this work. My relationships with people like Minkah and Akilah keep me sane when I feel as though I am losing my mind. People are really slick with their slights and that makes me really sure

they know what they are doing. It's unfortunate because that makes it impossible to feel safe reaching to people, other than my friends, when I need assistance with things.

She is positioned to take over for her current co-school leader when he is promoted to a senior district position next year, so she is excited about the opportunity to be in Minkah's program. Nyashia still expresses the desire for more support and development, and believes that she is not receiving it because of her race, gender, and place of origin. As she posits, "I know people who have more experience than me who receive weekly or biweekly visits from district leadership coaches. It seems like people take a vested interest in certain people, like there's a hidden pipeline." Nyashia's analysis of her situation as an educational leader illustrates the ways in which Black women deal with various conflicting messages and emotions that negatively impact their ability to best serve their school communities.

How I Deal Because We Aren't Wanted Here

Don't get it twisted, the way they're treating me is just as much about being from Mji as it is about being female and Black. Proving that people from the neighborhood, no matter how educated, can't be successful helps make their case for bringing in more white outsiders. They look at us grown folks from here like we're children who need them to survive and be successful. I ain't with it; they can miss me with all of that.

Nyashia's understanding of how she is viewed as a person and a school leader provides context into how and why she navigates her career the way she does. She is guarded and trusts very few people. Her suspicion is palpable, and she is almost single-mindedly focused on explicitly getting results while subversively doing the work of

making sure her students and families know their worth, understand the system and have access to opportunities to make their lives what they choose.

I know how this system works, so I know I have to do while I'm working in it. My job is to make sure that my people know the same and we are working together to make our lives different. I work with who I have to work with, but I don't trust most people. I know that even many of my own people don't love me, or themselves.

Minkah tells me that I'm taking to the level of paranoia, but I see it as necessary for survival. Don't get me wrong, I love my job and enjoy working with a lot of my co-workers. And I have a full life that helps me keep the challenges of my educator life in perspective.

To offset the stressors of her career, Nyashia has a robust personal life that allows her to decompress and take care of her mental, physical, and spiritual well-being. She describes her approach to self-care as the "only way I'm able to give my school my all."

Maybe it's because of what I watch my parents go through because of the stresses of poverty, racism, and other things we Black folks experience on the daily. My dad was a rager; he would come home and snap on us. My mom is an alcoholic to this day. She drinks her stress away. Both of them take things out on each other and the whole house is dysfunctional. I love them both, but I know that I do not want to repeat how they choose to live.

So I make sure that anything I can control that could stress me doesn't and those stressors that I can't control are channeled into my hobbies. I am active in my church; I have regular girls' nights with my close friends; I make sure my house is an oasis for me; and I workout, dance, eat good food, travel, and spend time with my loved ones.

Like Minkah, Nyashia sees self-care as an essential facet of her career. While she is single, she has a robust family life, finds solace in the activities she enjoys, and prioritizes her personal life as a way to deal with the oppressive experiences she deals with at work.

Akilah

Planting Seeds and Changing Trajectories

Akilah is in her mid-thirties and identifies as a biracial Black woman. She has been teaching for over fifteen years and is currently working to become a successor principal for a high school in Mji Public Schools. She spent the first part of her childhood in the Caribbean, and she moved to the United States right before her ninth grade year in high school. She always wanted to be an educator because, as Akilah noted:

My childhood was surrounded by women who were always teaching everyone. It was their divine purpose in life. My grandmother and tantes theorized about their lives and the lives of those around them while they worked in the garden, cooked, cleaned, and chatted with each other. I saw this knowledge as the gospel. They were so powerful to me because they took care of everyone and taking care of everyone came from this knowledge. And it wasn't necessarily the knowledge I got in school, even though my teachers also invested in all of us students. It was from inside of them and it helped them survive everything – from the sou-sou for financial stability to the homeopathic medicinal interventions that kept us physically strong. I especially found their understanding of the world useful when I relocated from the Caribbean to the United States. I valued who I was, and even though that was challenged and shaken by my experiences in US schools, I know that it is what the seeds they planted in me that helped me deal with the traumas of immigration and alienation without completely losing myself.

With becoming an educator firmly planted as a goal and her divine purpose in her childhood, Akilah relocated to the United States planning to pursue a post-secondary degree as an educator. However, as she describes it, her trajectory was changed because of her experiences with schooling in the United States.

Moving from a religious school that was all girls and all people of color to an all-white, co-ed, suburban school in the United States was one of the most profoundly traumatic experiences I've had in my life. From shaking my understanding of my identity and learning all of the negative things people think about Black people to experiencing teachers who did not value me and the

hidden messages that I was wrong for valuing Blackness, I learned that schools don't necessarily have to be safe spaces that validate students. My interactions with teachers were so negative that I began to question my desire to be a teacher. High school changed my trajectory and pushed me away from my purpose, but thankfully I found my way back.

These experiences, which changed her trajectory, led Akilah to declare pre-med as her first major in undergraduate school. After spending three years completing a double bachelor's degree in Chemistry and Microbiology, Akilah found her way back to education after experiencing a lack of fulfillment working in a laboratory.

While working as a scientist and studying for the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT), Akilah found herself working with young people as a tutor. She volunteered as a tutor with a local program focused on providing young people of color with support in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). She worked in local middle and high schools throughout Mji. These touch points with middle and high school students reminded her of her childhood dream of becoming an educator.

Working with those students underscored how much I hated working as a scientist. Even though I was working with the same content, applying it in a lab was meaningless compared to using it to help students learn something that had the potential to change their lives. It was this time in my life that helped me course correct and get back to my childhood dream of teaching.

Akilah applied for a provisional license and began teaching math and science in a Mji Public Schools high school. While teaching, she went back to school and acquired a second bachelor's degree in Special Education. She continued to teach and "learn more about how US education damages children of color," which pushed her to gain more formal training, culminating in a master's degree in Special Education.

Akilah shared that it was both her experience with people “planting seeds” and “changing her trajectory” and the desire to be “both a seed planter and shield” for her students that kept her committed to the field of education through all of the challenges.

bell hooks’ and Paulo Freire’s notion of education as the practice of freedom that continues to keep me in this fight. Through all of the iterations of white, neo-liberal education reform and all of the assaults on me as a Black woman, it is my commitment to serving as a seed planter for my students as the women from my childhood did for me, and shielding them from the trajectory changing education I experienced here in the United States that keeps me committed to serving communities of color as an educator.

Co-Creating Spaces for Liberation

Worrying about the kids in my classroom hasn’t ever been enough. I know I needed to do more with all I’ve been given, so I took this big step and ventured into school leadership. A lot of people said it was going to be the death of my career in education, but I still believe this is part of my purpose, so here I am.

Upon completing her first year as a school leader Akilah considered quitting the profession because of what she called “serving as the Black scapegoat.” She was named the school leader after the firing of the school leader, on the spot for state testing violations, at the school where she taught for five years. Before the firing of the previous school leader, there were some incidences of conflicts between him, a white male, and the community, which is predominantly Black. She explained:

Every time something crazy went down with parents or other family members, I was expected to smooth things over after the fact. He’d say something “accidentally” disparaging to one of our parents and then send me in to clean things up. As the Black teacher with strong relationships with my students and the community, I was seen as the miracle worker. I think this created a lot of resentment in the school leader and other people down at the central office. Several people told me they are gunning for me because I’m outspoken when I’m called to clean up these messes, but then I was asked to be the school leader. I was pleasantly shocked for about a split-second before it hit me that I was being moved into this position to take a fall. And after a few months on the job, it was clear that I was right because I had no support that school leaders in Mji

Public Schools typically receive. I'm serving as the Black scapegoat so that when I fail and the next white person comes in to take over it'll be received differently in the community.

However, Akilah is now a part of Minkah's cohort of future school leaders. She made the decision to continue to serve as a school leader in Mji Public Schools, even after what she experienced during her first year as a school leader.

Akilah's decision to persist in school leadership happened because of her interactions with Minkah. She described Minkah as the one Black woman in Mji Public Schools who gave her hope for the future of education in Mji.

I have faith in Minkah because she knows why we do what we do. Minkah is creating a program that will allow us to collaborate and gain the skills needed to do the work we know is life or death for our students. We need whole schools that see our kids as whole people with value, and that requires school leaders who have the vision to make that happen.

Her description of the vision necessary to lead the kind of school she described connects to the "epistemological privileges of the oppressed" that Lawrence-Lightfoot (1995) described (p. 59). Moreover, this vision is what Akilah wants to use to "co-create spaces for liberation."

I am about the liberation and self-determination of Black people, and I see education as essential to that pursuit. There is so much need in the Black community to unlearn and relearn things. We have generations of experiences with broken promises in relation to education, and all systems here in the US. It's going to take years of unlearning and relearning to change our mindsets, our understanding of ourselves, and how we see and relate with each other. Schools, the right schools led by the right people, can do that.

According to Akilah, some teachers in Mji Public Schools, like her, were quietly doing this work in their classrooms, but the schools mitigated the impact. As Caruthers (1995) explains, schools have historically either employed a "very sophisticated system of mis-

education aimed at a small Black elite” or involved themselves in the “process of diseducation aimed at the Black masses” (p. 45). Akilah often spoke to the “diseducation” of Black communities through schooling and its effect on parents, families, and students.

School leadership is about co-creating liberatory spaces for people of color to unlearn their miseducation and relearn who they are and what they are truly capable of, it’s this academic excellence, when leveraged, that can be the power we need to continue the work of our ancestors and current elders in the community. While I know that the solutions to the complicated problems our communities face will not come completely from those of us choosing to work within the system, I believe that they cannot be developed without us. We must use the masters’ tools while finding and creating new tools.

There’re Layers to This

“When you push against the system, the system claps back.” –Akilah

Akilah’s understanding of how schooling functions for Black students—miseducation, devaluation, reification of systemic racism—is antithetical to what educators in the urban education reform movement believe. However, recent revelations about the ways in which urban education reform functions in Black communities, including the recent NAACP and Black Lives Matter call for a moratorium on charter schools, support Akilah’s theories about both the problematic nature of schooling in Black communities and the “clap back” of the system when it is challenged (Perry, 2016a; Perry 2016b; Perry 2016c). As Perry (2016a) explains,

The weighty and heavily financed attack on the NAACP waged by the charter lobby reminds residents of New Orleans, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles and other reform cities that charter advocates will try to overwhelm anyone who simply disagrees. And this is where the charter community has lost its way. Instead of charters being a source of innovation as the early rhetoric pronounced, charters have become wrecking balls to any dissent...We’ve grown

accustomed to the charter-community tactic of shaming black folk, including the shameful, defamatory posts that facilitated attempts to discredit the organization that delivered *Brown v. Board* and other major policy advancements.

Unlike the subversive ways in which Minkah and Nyashia navigate their missions as educational leaders, Akilah is more explicit about her mission and its enactment in her school. She describes the work as having “layers.”

This work isn’t one-dimensional or just about racism. A complex, multifaceted issue like that of inequitable educational outcomes for Black kids and communities requires a number of solutions from a number of angles. There’re layers to this work. As an educational leader, some of the work I do is to directly address some of the challenges while others are more indirect and in concert with other people and institutions. I see it like a big onion, some of the layers are further from the core, but all of the layers belong to the same organism.

The direct addressing of specific challenges, as Akilah describes it, consists of “naming and actively finding solutions to dismantle” them. The naming, she says, is the dangerous part of the work because “to directly confront the face of inequity by naming the issue and its source creates discomfort for those who are used to privileging their comfort over Black lives.”

I’ve learned that I cannot ever be tied to outcomes because losing my job is a very real reality. After naming things like my commitment to ensuring that education reform organizations are no longer necessary because my goal is that communities of color will ultimately have the agency and resources to address any inequities they have from within without the reliance on people from outside the community, I’ve become a “problem” for those in power in my organization. I understand that power does not concede without demand, and so I am not under any delusions that individuals in power, will voluntarily move out of the way.

More importantly, my stance on Black self-determination and liberation, resulting in the removal of white people from school leader positions in Black and Brown schools has made me very unpopular.

Akilah's stance is not unique in the Black community. As Perry (2016c) outlines,

We are not going to fire, expel or replace our way to a healthy community. A more effective strategy is to build a power base for the black community through quality, black-led educational institutions. Charter schools can be part of the solution, but first education reformers need to take a hard look at how they operate in black communities and decide if they really believe black lives matter more than test score gains.

However, Akilah's willingness to, while working for an educational organization, stand up and "speak truth to power" about something that makes many people in powerful positions extremely uncomfortable, is unique. However, her rationale for this stance is not only something she speaks about, but it is also tattooed on her body in the form of the Audré Lorde quote, "I am deliberate and afraid of nothing." She reasons that this willingness is integral to modeling what is necessary for her students, families, and staff.

After almost 20 years in this work, I am unwilling to be anything other than unapologetic in my stance and authentically walk in my truth. I spent the majority of my career wearing a mask and not being authentic out of fear of reprisals. No more. I cannot ask my students, families, and staff to be something that I am unable to model myself. So, I take every opportunity to name the why behind what we do, everything we do. There is power in authenticity, and I believe it makes the academic pursuits of my students that much more relevant.

I tell them that I have a Ph.D. because academic excellence is power. Having a seat at the table where I am in earshot of those making life and death decisions for our communities is invaluable in our fight for equality, our fight for liberation and self-determination. And I want to make sure my babies have a model of this power so that when it is their turn they can say they've seen an example. Of course, some of my Black colleagues argue that placing myself in harm's way, dancing with the real potential to lose my current position is not the most effective use of the power and access I have now. But I beg to differ because I believe that to whom much is given, much is required, and fear does not factor into that equation.

The layers, both of the issues and the challenges that Akilah faces through her approach to educational leadership are numerous and complex. They require a significant level of

strength and a developed critical analysis of the systems of oppression at work. To have the strength and energy to necessary, Akilah practices what she calls “radical self-love and radical self-care.”

Radical Self-Love and Radical Self-Care

As Audre Lorde explains, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare” (Mirk, 2016). In line with this reasoning, Akilah views valuing her life over “white feelings” as a “revolutionary act.”

It’s not hard to see that Black lives don’t matter in this country, so I know that my life doesn’t matter to those in power. The system expects me to allow myself to get weak and not be on my A game. Ultimately, the system values white feelings over Black lives. So every action I take to be at 100%, to value my life, is an act of defiance, a revolutionary act.

To practice radical self-love and radical self-care, Akilah has a strong support system consisting of childhood friends, family, and members of the activist community. Akilah is also active in the movement for Black lives and leverages that work to vent many of her frustrations as an educational leader. “I channel all of my rage and frustration into my community organizing work.”

Outside of her community work and system of support, Akilah uses hobbies like dance classes, going to the gym, running ultra marathons and triathlons, and group sports such as flag football and indoor soccer to keep herself “sane.” The other important aspect of Akilah’s self-love and self-care practices are regular appointments with a therapist and “quiet activities that center” her like yoga, reading, and meditation.

I struggle to combat the anti-Blackness I have within me. I do not have the highest self-esteem, and I know how important it is to love myself. So I see my therapist at least twice a month. I am working to change my internal dialogue

and treat myself with more kindness. The other quiet activities that center me—yoga, reading, and meditation—help me to remain focused while constantly developing my understanding of the gravity of this work.

Mirk (2016) highlights the connection between the work and self-care,

‘You cannot be good to other people if your health is declining. You cannot be good to other people if you’re miserable. You cannot be good to your children if you have them, to your spouse if you have one, to your job and your career if you are not emotionally and mentally and physically healthy.’ So prioritizing self-care and prioritizing health allows you to be a better member of your community. And I think that is especially important for Black women when we take on so much of other people’s loads, that we make sure that we are also healthy too.

Akilah’s theorizing about the connections between her work as an educational leader, community member, and self-work demonstrate the thorough understanding today’s Black women educational leaders have about the dynamics at play in their lives. This is made evident in a talk Angela Davis gave in 2014. She shared that “the biggest thing she had learned from the youth of today was self-care” (Mirk, 2016).

Self-care has to be incorporated in all of our efforts. And this is something new...This holistic approach to organizing is, I think, what is going to eventually move us along the trajectory that may lead to some victories. (Mirk, 2016)

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, CONCLUSIONS AND STUDY LIMITATIONS

Discussion

This study examined the narratives of three Black women working as educational leaders in urban education reform. All of these educational leaders worked in Mji Public Schools and had a considerable amount of experience in the field of education.

Minkah's work focused on developing other educational leaders of color; Nyashia was a school leader at her current school and was in Minkah's leadership cohort to become a successor leader at another Mji Public Schools middle school; and Akilah was a successor leader after teaching at the school for five years and was in Minkah's leadership cohort to more effectively lead her current school.

This chapter discusses four prominent themes that emerged in all of the educational leaders' narratives, (1) The leveraging of suspicious wisdom, (2) Standing in the gap for teachers of color, (3) the toll of Racial and Gender Battle Fatigue, and (4) Embodying a Womanist pedagogical tradition. The first theme contributes to current literature by connecting the personal experiences of Black educational leaders with their pedagogical practices in a way that illustrates how experiencing oppression can be leveraged to assist future generations in naming and avoiding the dangers past generations experienced. While many studies in this field, including this study, discuss women's experiences in educational leadership based on their identity as women, this study attempts to analyze their experiences at the intersection of race and gender, without privileging gender over race.

All three participants in this study also viewed their work as educators to create and maintain a pipeline into teaching and educational leadership for other people of color, especially women. Minkah's creation of an educational leadership program was rooted in this notion, and Nyashia and Akilah's participation in Minkah's program was specifically because of her identity as a Black woman and understanding of their experiences in education. This researcher posits that understanding this work as a viable option is critical to creating the types of sustainable options necessary to address the lack of people of color in education and educational leadership.

The third theme focuses on the trauma experienced by women of color who choose to do this work, especially when connecting it to activism and challenging systems of oppression. Using RBF theory to analyze the experiences of Black women educational leaders allows for the identification of the real ways that seemingly innocuous interactions impact their psyche and physical health. This both highlights the impacts and underscores the seriousness of microaggressions in these spaces.

Finally, the last theme centers on pedagogical practices and the similarities between the three participants. This theme appears to reflect the Womanist perspective, as the participants employed an ethic of care "to develop trusting relationships with their students" and teachers (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Irvine, 2003; Ware, 2002, Witherspoon & Arnold, 2010). Also, these educational leaders attempted to employ pedagogical practices that addressed the whole child, using their schools to name and disrupt stereotypes and the systems of oppression experienced by

people of color, while incorporating the histories of people of color (Howard, 2001; King, 1994).

This study is distinctive in its attempt to fill the void in our understandings of the connections between Black women educational leaders' epistemologies, pedagogical approaches, activism, and related trauma. Current literature on Black women educational leaders tends to focus specifically on their epistemologies or pedagogical approaches exclusively without connecting them to each other or related concepts. As Horsford & Tillman (2016) explain,

While this growing body of work has expanded our understanding of Black women educational leaders in important ways, research on how the intersectional identities of Black women inform their leadership in school and school communities warrants greater study. (pp. 1-2)

Intersectionality is a socio-cultural theoretical framework that focuses on the interlocking systems of race, gender and social class (Byrd & Stanley, 2009; Davis 2012). Although the term intersectionality was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, one can trace its origins back to Maria Stewart in 1832 (Jordan-Zachery, 2007). Stewart, a Black woman, articulated a critique of difference and challenged the functioning of race and gender which eventually evolved into the concept of intersectionality. When Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) argued that race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's employment experiences, she coined the term intersectionality. As Brooks (2012) stated, "slavery and residual effects left of that significant facet of American history on Black Americans is primarily why intersectionality was conceptually born out of the study of Black women and Black Feminist Thought" (p. 39).

The convergence of race, gender, and social class forms a dynamic interlocking system referred to as intersectionality (Stanley, 2009). This interlocking system gives voice to Black women on encounters with intersectionality in their leadership development. Theories of intersectionality provide a framework for the exploration of multi-dimensional research variables and provide an approach that grew out of feminist and Black feminist standpoints (Witherspoon, 2009). Intersectionality helps explain the ways in which social and cultural (e.g. race and gender) constructs interact and are useful in better understanding the complexities of what Black female leaders face in the workplace based on their dual status (Lloyd-Jones, 2009). This research is needed to provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which racism, sexism, classism, ethnicity and other social realities impact an individuals' lived experiences in the workplace (Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009).

The gender differences coupled with race, in intersectionality, permeate perceptions, and attitudes that contribute to the death of Black women at the executive level (Stanley, 2009). When race converges with gender, a dichotomy surfaces for Black women, resulting in a double standard which reduces access to leadership positions and generating ambivalence about their ability to lead. "Women and minorities may experience interrelated barriers that restrict advancement at the individual, group, and organizational levels" (Davis & Maldonado, 2015, p. 56).

Intersectionality theories articulate a framework for understanding the complexities of Black women's identities and experiences (Horsford & Tillman, 2012). Parker (2005) described intersectionality as a way of interpreting and analyzing the

experiences that Black women encounter while holding positions of authority in White organizations. As the intersection of race, gender, and social class, social realities are shaped to inform multiple dimensions of the lived experiences of Black women (Parker, 2005). One's history, culture, and values provide a frame of reference for making meaning of common experiences (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Therefore, Black women view the world from distinct perspectives within the confines of the larger social structure of race and gender, based on their social positions (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003).

While research literature exists on intersectionality (Alston, 2005; Byrd, 2009; Collins, 2003; Horsford, 2016; Stanley, 2009), few scholars have addressed leadership development for Black women using the perspective of intersectionality. It is critical that the lack of research in this area be addressed, to understand better the professional development of leaders positioned at the intersection of race, gender, and social class. This research offers the opportunity for new perspectives of Black women in regards to workplace values and beliefs. From this paradigm, research seeks to explore the study of domination, oppression, struggle, and alienation within institutions, organizations, and social groups for the purpose of social change, emancipation, and transformation (Creswell, 2012). This researcher hopes to leverage this paradigm to not only deepen the understanding of Black women educational leaders' experiences and motivations but also how to better support them. As Walker (2009) points out, "the attempt to understand intersectionality is, in fact, an effort to see things from the worldview of others and not simply from our own unique standpoints" (p. 991). In essence, intersectionality articulates a politics of survival for Black women.

Suspicious Wisdom

bell hooks (1984) argued that “Black women must recognize the special vantage point our marginality gives us and make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist and sexist hegemony” (p. 15). This study’s participants employed this suspicious wisdom to both construct a vision for their schools and navigate the space as educational leaders. Almost all organizations’ influential networks are male dominated, and entry into these networks is often difficult to access. This study found that Black women face exclusion from informal social networks and did not easily gain membership to the “good old boys” club.

Through Minkah’s program, the participants confirmed that having sponsors willing to advance their careers was essential to gaining access to opportunities for career advancement. These sponsors are frequently White men who were the decision makers and in positions of authority within the organization. For example, Minkah shared that her program was only possible because of the support of her White male supervisor, a senior leader in Mji Public Schools.

When I first came up with this idea, it was hard to get anywhere with any of the decision makers. I assume that was because of my identity as a Black woman. However, once I gained the support of my supervisor, doors opened, and things happened.

Women see work in a more holistic manner, but they must be aware that often their decisions will be incompatible with the male-dominated business culture (Evans, 2000). Hence, it is important that women leverage their suspicious wisdom to thoroughly understand the rules and use the playing field to their advantage. This study found that Black women developed strategies to interpret the organizational bureaucracy and

learned to identify how the internal politics operated. By skillfully learning how to play the game, Minkah, Nyashia, and Akilah learned to become more politically savvy and navigate around organizational “minefields” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1995). All participants felt that while playing the game through the use of suspicious wisdom, they would always maintain their integrity and never compromise their ethics, as playing the game was connected to their epistemologies as Black women.

As Black women, the study’s participants understood the delineation between how men played the game and how they should play it. Minkah expressed that the playing field is not ever level. However, their presence at the table was essential to make their presence known. As Minkah shared:

As the only Black female senior director, I find myself using my understandings of how to navigate the work culture at home. My husband tells me that I often speak over and interrupt him. I have to be conscious of that because when I’m at the table at work if I don’t speak up, then I won’t get a word in at all.

Akilah expressed:

Being in a leadership position as a Black woman, I need to do a better job of recognizing that there is a game. The same old game is continually played, just with different pieces. We are victims of the race card and experience further victimization because of our gender. People with –isms ideas move from one group to another. They get tired of you and then move to attempt to empower a different group of individuals in ways that are disadvantageous to you.

Nyashia explains that:

I’ve experienced the bias of being asked to take notes because I am one of the only women in the room during our cluster school leader meetings. Are we the only ones in the room capable of taking notes? It’s those little things that make it clear to me that even if I’m a leader in the room, I am continually seen as unequal to the men. These experiences remind me that I am not just a Black woman, I’m a Black woman in a very specific position in this organization. My responsibility shifted because it’s not just about me. I have to make sure they see other women like me who are capable of doing the work while bettering the

organization as a leader. I have to fight the struggle for other women of color as well.

When wisdoms collide. Although the women in this study shared a great deal in common outside of their professions, as complex beings, there were points in which the three of them vehemently disagreed with each other and served as individuals who reified systems of oppression in each other's lives. This tension was most evident in three areas of their conversations: respectability, sexuality, and notions of Blackness.

The first sign of tensions between the two of the participants occurred during a weekly fellows meeting. The fellows met every week for several hours to engage in professional development, practice skills, and give and receive feedback both peer-to-peer and supervisor-to-peer. At one of these sessions, Nyashia received feedback from Minkah about her physical appearance.

Minkah: Nyashia, after visiting your school for our monthly leadership observation, I'd like to discuss professional appearance expectations with you. I understand that you are a young principal who stays up-to-date on the current fashion trends. But in our line of work, our appearance influences how people see us as leaders. Do you understand what I am trying to say?

Nyashia: Are you trying to tell me that you believe my appearance is unprofessional?

Minkah: Well, no. I would not say unprofessional. I would say it does not convey that you are a principal. You blend in with your teachers, and it is important that you stand apart from your teachers, that students, families, and staff can identify you as the principal.

Nyashia: So you are talking about my overall appearance?

Minkah: No, I believe your attire is acceptable as long as you choose a different hairstyle. Perhaps pulling your hair back and off your face would address this issue.

Nyashia: So you want me to wear my hair like you do?

Minkah: Not exactly, but perhaps in a similar style.

Nyashia: Umm, I don't think I should have to pull my hair back to be considered professional. I get my hair done every two weeks and it always looks presentable to me. I get compliments on it all of the time. And there are plenty of principals who wear their hair down.

Minkah: Yes, your hair is beautiful, and you are right, other principals wear their hair down. I just think that for you, it would be helpful for your reputation and how you are received to change your hairstyle. I want you to take advantage of everything so that you are successful as a principal. Take some time to think about the feedback and we can talk about it more later if you would like.

The tension in this conversation stemmed from Minkah's belief that respectability politics play an essential role in how Black women educational leaders are perceived, both by people in their own communities and those in other communities. Paisley Harris (2003) explains the "politics of respectability" and its connection to the Black church:

The politics of respectability entailed 'reform of individual behavior as a goal in itself and as a strategy of reform.' Respectability was part of 'uplift politics,' and had two audiences: African Americans, who were encouraged to be respectable, and white people, who needed to be shown that African Americans could be respectable. African American women were particularly likely to use respectability and be judged by it. Moreover, African American women symbolized, even embodied, this concept. Respectability became an issue at the juncture of public and private. It thus became increasingly important as both black and white women entered public spaces. (p. 213)

One can see how Minkah's embodiment of respectability, as highlighted by the reference to how she wears her hair, and her judgment of Nyashia based on the same respectability she is embodying, based on the nature of the feedback in the conversation.

While Nyashia did not change her hairstyle based on Minkah's feedback, the conversation illustrates the ways in which age, class, and location play a role in how Black women relate to each other. Minkah is about 20 years older than Nyashia, from a completely different part of the country, and comes from a higher socioeconomic class than Nyashia, based on their self-reported classes. All of these differences in identity converge to influence how both women see each other. Moreover, this feedback conversation underscores Nyashia's theorizing about her perceived "lack of polish" in relation to other Black women principals.

Another point of contention between the participants was in relation to sexual orientation. Akilah identifies as a queer Black woman, and is the only member of the LGBTQ+ community in the cohort. During a cohort discussion about authenticity in leadership and how much is too much to share with staff, students, families, and the larger school community, the conversation shifted to whether or not people should, or even could be openly LGBTQ+ as a principal. Both Nyashia and Minkah's perspective on the situation was not received well by Akilah.

Nyashia: Look, y'all know I'm as real as they come. I don't hold any cut cards and I let everybody know what time it is. But I do not think that your sexual preference should be part of that conversation. I just don't see how it's relevant.

Akilah: Wait, so you mean to tell me that as a queer woman if I wanted to make small talk about my same-sex partner, just like you heterosexual folks do, that you would deem my conversation inappropriate?

Nyashia: I mean yeah, I don't think it's appropriate to talk about that with people, especially staff, students and families because you never know how they may take that.

Akilah: So you mean to tell me that if I did the same thing that Minkah does all the time when she tells us about her husband and kids, but my situation is as a same-sex couple, I'm wrong?

Minkah: I don't necessarily think anyone is saying that it is wrong. I believe this is more a conversation about how appropriate it is. It is unfortunate, but not everyone is accepting of the LGBTQ+ community. So it may not be the best idea to have those kinds of conversations with people whose values and beliefs are unclear.

Akilah: Wait a minute. If they are sending their most valuable possessions, their kids to me to educate, then they should be ok with who I am. I should not have to worry about the pictures of family I have displayed in my office or the way I speak about my partner because of potential discomfort to homophobes. I really need us to do some more work around homophobia and transphobia in the Black community because this conversation is absolutely mind-blowing.

Akilah's experience of alienation and discrimination during this discussion stresses the multiple ways that Black women's complex identities play out in ways that potentially privilege and oppress them, depending on their positionality. Hill (2013) explains the othering individuals like Akilah face:

Bisexual and transgender persons of African origin are even further marginalized, underserved, and understudied [than their lesbian and gay counterparts]. Even in 2012, much of what we know about black LGBT people is more anecdotal than analytical. What is often perceived is either seen through the lenses of white queer racism and/or black compulsory heterosexism. Black LGBT persons are often invisible within the two communities and/or too frequently living a bifurcated existence in both communities...In essence, the black gay experience is confounded by race, class, gender bias, and assimilation across and with these variables...LGBT people of color are simultaneously present and excluded in neighborhood where they live, and in mainstream LGBT organizations. (210)

The cohort's conversation about the acceptability of Akilah's openness about her queer identity, as an educational leader, contextualizes the exclusion and invisibility experienced by LGBTQ+ people of color. The expectation that Akilah, unlike her heterosexual counterparts would keep her significant other and family life a secret

shows how she, and LGBTQ+ Black women specifically are silenced by other Black people. Hill (2013) provides context about this phenomenon,

There is some differential bias toward lesbians in general and perhaps, black lesbians in particular. Women as a devalued class in general, are viewed as even more so without the benefit of male acknowledgement. A woman's value is too often still measured by a husband, boyfriend, or male companionship. Lesbian sexuality is invisible or exists purely for male pleasure. Cohen (1997) urges society at large to reject heteronormativity and to embrace multiple and intersecting identities and power. (213)

Add to this equation the notion of the politics of respectability that Nyashia experienced during the feedback conversation and the complex web of how Black women relate to one another across difference becomes even more evident. Nyashia and Minkah's sentiments about "appropriateness" and concern for others' values and beliefs over Akilah's sheds light on the invisibility of Akilah's queer identity. The three participants have a shared bond when navigating their shared identities as Black women living in the United States, but complicating those identities with aspects like class, sexuality, and age quickly shift the bond and show how some of the participants' identities privilege them over others. This also evident when the notions of Blackness are complicated.

The final big point of contention between the three participants was around notions of Blackness. With both Minkah and Akilah having experiences with non-US notions of Blackness, the narrow constructions of Blackness in Nyashia's conversation led to some tensions. During a conversation about how Black kids act, based on their understanding of Blackness, differences of opinion became very evident.

Nyashia: I mean we all know what Black kids need to be successful in school.

Akilah: When you say Black kids, who exactly are you speaking of? Here in Mji we have a large population of foreign Black students from different parts of Africa and the Caribbean.

Nyashia: Yeah, true, but they're still Black so ultimately they need the same things.

Akilah: No, I can't agree with you on that. As a West Indian who immigrated to the US, I can say that my experience as a foreign Black was very different than that of my Black American friends and family. The experience of being Black in a majority Black country is different than the experiences that Black Americans have here.

Minkah: That's important to talk about, not just for our Black students, but all of our students of color who are frequently lumped together. The various identities of our students have to be included in all conversations about what's best for our school populations.

Akilah: Just think about the language support needed for Blacks coming countries in which English is not the primary language. Going off of Nyashia's theory, none of them would get ELL supports because they'd be lumped in with African-Americans.

Nyashia: Yeah, okay. I see that difference. But other than that, they're still Black just like African-Americans.

Minkah: No, that's not necessarily true. They do not have to see Blackness in the same way that it is viewed here in the US. In many countries outside of the US, the Black experience is vastly different than it is here in the US.

Akilah: Nyashia, the many things African-Americans take for granted as cultural capital, we foreign Blacks have to learn and develop just like anyone else coming to the United States. I had to learn all kinds of stuff that was every day knowledge for my students and their African-American communities—foods, dance, musicians, cultural mores, etc. I really hope we'll talk about this more because I think it's really important to have a deeper understanding of the varied experiences of Black people around the world.

As shown in this exchange, Blackness often is used in a way that constructs it as a monolithic experience, excluding many while including a few. The importance of Black people in gaining a better understanding of how Blackness, both within the United

States and outside of it, is not the same experience for everyone, is incredibly important, especially as it relates to education and activism. Thornton et. al. (2012) shed some light on the nuances of Blackness based on country of origin.

Black Caribbeans bring to this country divergent experiences with race when compared to native-born African Americans. Vickerman (1999, 2001) describes men who must relearn the meaning and practical cost of African ancestry within the United States while acquiring a newly racialized identity. Their homeland is a place where Blacks are enmeshed in every part of the social hierarchy, and social class dominates. In their new home, they are concentrated at the bottom because of their race. These pressures lead to a seemingly contradictory stance of ethnic separatism versus racial solidarity. But the reality is that these identities shift with time and context. Thus 'Blackness' here is complicated, with most reporting being Black and West Indian rather than either-or (Bryce-Laporte, 1993; Butterfield, 2004). (pp. 751-752)

Again, the intersection of the multiple identities of the participants come into play as tensions surface because of conflicting ways of knowing. The locations from which this study's participants theorize is directly related to their identities and therefore clash and conflict with each other. However, even with these tensions, the participants show alignment on how they see their roles as gatekeepers for the next Black educators.

Standing in the Gap

And she [Black woman] had nothing to fall back on; not maleness, not whiteness, not ladyhood, not anything. And out of the profound desolation of her reality she may well have invented herself. (Morrison, 1971, p. 63)

Minkah, Nyashia, and Akilah all speak to standing in the gap or practicing what Horsford (2016) calls "bridge leadership." Black women leaders have, historically, stood in the gap and served as bridges to leadership. They "[serve] as a bridge for others, to others, and between others in multiple and complicated contexts over time" and this

type of leadership can “serve as an effective model for leading today’s diverse and dynamic school communities” (Horsford, 2016, p. 2).

Through her belief of standing in the gap, Minkah served as a district educational leader by creating a formal pipeline for people of color in Mji Public Schools. She operationalized her understanding of the importance of serving as a bridge for other leaders of color by formally identifying and mentoring educators of color as they navigate the educational system. As she explains:

To me, serving as a Black woman educational leader means helping to create a critical mass of individuals not only dedicated to the work of educating children but whose values and practices are aligned in a way that helps us redefine how schools operate for all involved.

As complicated as the context of Mji Public Schools was, Minkah chose to advocate for and people of color, regardless of the perils. In this way, she continues a long tradition of Black women standing on the front lines of major issues affecting their communities.

Nyashia and Akilah’s continued commitment to serving as pipeline creators and maintainers is a direct reflection on Minkah’s mentorship. They both attributed their desire to move into and stay in leadership directly to Minkah. Knowing firsthand about the “double barriers which lead to disadvantages as a result of multiple marginalized identities,” Minkah, Nyashia, and Akilah all spoke about how they want to alleviate the “isolation, exclusion from informal networks, and systemic discrimination” faced by Black women educational leaders (Davis & Maldonado, 2015, p. 51).

Historically, education has served as familiar ground for Black women since it was always a respectable profession for Black people to pursue. In the nineteenth century, Black women served as teachers among free Black people before and after

emancipation; however, few achieved positions higher than those employed in Black elementary and secondary schools (Benjamin, 1997). In 1933, *Higher Education of Negro Women* was published by Lucy Slowe in the *Journal of Negro Education*. In it, she argued for the necessary preparation of Black women for the modern world (Cardwell, 2008).

Research shows, according to Catalyst (2010), that a lack of mentoring opportunities is frequently a barrier to women and people of color advancing in their careers. In this study, Minkah, Nyashia, and Akilah's experiences showed that Black women recognize the fundamental role of mentoring other Black women, even though not enough mentoring relationships are created and maintained to prepare Black women for leadership roles. By standing in the gap, the experiences of Black women leaders could provide a roadmap for Black women aspiring to advance in education.

This study's participants consistently emphasized the importance of providing guidance to other Black women with the purpose of adding value to the success and development of future Black women leaders. Also, they stressed the importance of receiving guidance from Black women leaders to continue their development in the inhospitable spaces of leadership in major educational institutions and organizations.

As Minkah expressed,

Mentoring is critical to the sustainability and increase in the number of women in leadership positions. These women should not only be in school leadership; they should be directors, chancellors, and superintendents. Women should be pigeon holed to working in one specific space in education.

Each participants' experience could serve as a basis for programming designed to help Black women safely navigate spaces in education reform, from early in their careers through senior leadership.

Racial Battle Fatigue

In contrast to dominant notions that educational institutions and organizations are open, tolerant, and meritocratic (Feagin et. al., 1996), people of color in these spaces frequently experience racial jokes, loneliness, isolation, invisibility, or hypervisibility, which is often accompanied by professional costs and mental anguish (Allen et al., 1991; Feagin et al., 1996; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Nettles, 1990; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Smith et al., 2007; Willie, 2003). Several factors influence the work climate for people of color including: (a) structural diversity (i.e. the proportion of specific groups of color in the organization), (b) the historical legacy of inclusion/exclusion of racial groups, (c) the psychological climate, including perceptions of racial/ethnic tension and discrimination, and (d) social interaction among groups in the workplace (Hurtado et al., 1999; McCabe, 2009). These factors are especially relevant to microaggressions since microaggressions occur in interactional settings.

The participants, Black women in educational settings, experienced microaggressions tied to their specific racial and gender identities. This was made evident in Akilah's narrative about her experiences in high school and as a school leader, Nyashia's description of how she was "set up" in school leadership, and Minkah's discussion of the problems found in district leadership. In educational settings, the participants described a range of microaggressions, including having their opinions not

taken seriously by people of other races and feeling alienated in spaces based on individuals' unwillingness to sit near them. The subtle nature of microaggressions, however, make it easy to doubt their existence or to dismiss them as innocuous, which contributes to their power.

The participants in this study referenced often feeling the expectation to serve as a spokesperson for their race or their race and gender group. Minkah felt that the daily pressure of "just being the spokesperson for the Black race, being the only person of color at the table is very frustrating." Experiences such as Minkah's, covert verbal and non-verbal indications on the part of peers and others that they are different, leave Black women with a sense of anxiety and isolation. In this way, these racial and gender microaggressions take a toll on Black women's mental and emotional well-being. All three participants reported feeling isolated, burdened, and alienated by the task of representing their racial or race-gender group. These feelings became more intense as topics of discussion focused on race, as Akilah explained:

It's incredibly difficult, especially if you're talking about or dealing with anything related to race when you are the only person at the table because it feels like everything you say has to become representative of your whole culture, and that's a huge burden to carry. No one I know who is Black and woman in leadership in Mji Public Schools thinks alike. I'd venture to say that no group of people all think alike. I'm sure no one's family all thinks alike, so imagine having to carry that burden on your shoulders.

Within the majority-white institution of Mji Public Schools, the participants feel the "burden of representation" particularly heavily. They expressed their doubts about whether their contributions were ever taken serious and about their place in the organization.

Because racial and gender microaggressions are covert and subtle insults and often invisible to the perpetrator, they are difficult to cope with. Nyashia shared, “I really tried not to seem paranoid by responding to a microaggression in the moment.” The fear that white people might regard responses to these microaggressions as “paranoid” is not unfounded (McCabe, 2009, p. 143). Evidence from an exchange between psychologists in a professional journal shows the “powerful emotion reactions” whites have to being implicated in racism (Sue et al., 2008, p. 277). Similar to people of color in the Sue et al. (2008) study, this study’s participants said their reports of microaggressions were labeled “irrational,” “ridiculous,” or “pure nonsense.” The vehemence of the responses illustrates why those on the receiving end of the microaggressions would be very cautious about responding to or reporting a microaggression. “The covert character of microaggressions gives them power to psychologically affect recipients and limit their ability to respond” (McCabe, 2009, 143).

However, Minkah, Nyashia, and Akilah found several ways to cope with these experiences, including bonding together around similar experiences. The bonding that happened as a result of microaggressions provided some support structure to help the participants through the unwelcoming spaces of Mji Public Schools. Martinez Aleman (2000) found that women of color sought friendships with each other to give and receive encouragement and support related to bigoted incidents. While Minkah, Nyashia, and Akilah reported appreciating the support of each other and other people of color, they also expressed a high level of fatigue, stress, and frustration because of their experiences with microaggressions. They exhibited signs of RBF through mental

and physical exhaustion and feeling out of touch with reality at times. As Nyashia explained, “sometimes I felt like I was going crazy because no one was around to confirm that I experienced the microaggressions.”

On Black Men. While this study focused on the experiences of Black women educational leaders, it is important to discuss how Black men show up in their experiences. The three Black women educational leaders in this study interacted with Black men in a number of ways—as their supervisors; principals; colleagues; leaders of the schools where they send their children; wives; girlfriends; friends; and cohort mates. For this study, this researcher examined the roles of Black men within their school settings, as direct reports and students.

One specific example of the ways in which men showed up at Nyashia’s school is discussed in the Holistic Pedagogical Approach section below. For Minkah and Akilah, their interactions with Black men were self-described as problematic. As Akilah explained,

I’m sure that most people perceive the plight of Black men as more fraught with problems than it is for Black women, but I believe that Black men have it easy in this female dominated field. Black men are not perceived as the threats that we are. They have access to patriarchy and the male-dominated ways of knowing of the decision makers and are seen as exceptional when they do anything resembling work. While I find them integral to my school because of my students’ need to see and interact with them, I also find it difficult to manage them because, in my experiences, they challenge my authority and expertise in very passive aggressive ways.

The researcher witnessed one such interaction when Akilah held a biweekly coaching meeting with one of her Black male, upper elementary school teachers. During the meeting, the teacher provided some push back on Akilah’s feedback. Akilah shared with

the teacher that during the 30-minute observation that “3 of the 5 students in the small, guided reading group were off-task for over 12 minutes.” The teacher expressed doubt at this data and said that Akilah was unclear about how the students labeled as off-task demonstrated engagement with the lesson. Even after analyzing the students’ work, and highlighting that it was either incomplete or incorrect, the teacher still expressed his dissatisfaction with Akilah’s feedback.

After Akilah left the coaching meeting, she shared her feelings on the interaction,

I make sure that I always have concrete data and evidence in which my feedback is rooted because this is a regular occurrence. We rarely get through a coaching session in enough time to role play and practice the skill highlighted as a key lever to improve practice. I do not, by any means believe he is an ineffective teacher, as he very strong relationships with his students, families, and staff, but continual growth is the hallmark of a profession, in my opinion. His unwillingness to take and implement feedback is problematic and is preventing his students from having the best teacher possible. This is especially troubling for me because he, as a Special Education teacher, works primarily with young Black boys who are already experiencing the type of labeling and housing that diminishes their chances to experience success in school.

Nirmala Erevelles (2014) in her chapter entitled, “Crippin’ Jim Crow: Disability, Dis-Location, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline,” provides additional context that supports Akilah’s sentiments.

The school-to-prison pipeline is a “multidimensional process that funnels large numbers of minority students from the classroom into the adult prison system” (Aul IV 2012, 180). This trajectory maps out the problematic continuities between mass schooling and mass incarceration, where one subset of students located at the complex intersection of race, class, and disability find themselves as social outlaws for almost the entire span of their lives in school and thereafter. Here, I invoke the school-to-prison pipeline not merely to refer to the education and criminal justice system but also to the complex network of laws, rules, and policies supported by the exploitative political economy of late capitalism that Michelle Alexander (2010) has called the New Jim Crow. (p. 82)

Erevelles connections between the ways in which Black male bodies in schools are oppressed and marginalized, leading to poor outcomes like incarceration demonstrate the reasons for Akilah’s sense of urgency when coaching a Black man who is working with Black male students. As Akilah names it, “this work means the difference between life and death for our babies.” T. Elon Dancy (2014) describes it as “The Adultification of Black Boys” (p. 49).

In his groundbreaking book *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W.E.B. DuBois asked a rhetorical question that seems as relevant as ever today: How does it feel to be a problem? To be sure, there is a profound difference between *having* a problem and *being* a problem. While all may have problems, Black male existence itself is a problem within a white gaze (DuBois, 1903). DuBois’ ominous question captures the kind of brutal way in which American institutions view and contain Black male bodies post-enslavement. (p. 49)

Just as Black boys are posited as being problems within U.S. institutions like schools, this researcher argues that Black women are posited as problems within the same institutions with Black men often functioning as perpetrators of systemic oppression. Black women’s success and failures, every contribution, is used against Black women as something problematic within the system. Moreover, Black women are typically pitted against Black men in this oppressive dynamic.

In Minkah’s experiences, as the supervisor of Black men in the cohort, with no Black male colleagues at her same level, Black men serve as the “exemplary negroes” necessary to prove what is possible for Black people in educational leadership. The Black men in her cohort pose, as she describes, “less of a challenge than the Black women in the cohort.” However, this researcher argues that this is a reality because of

the way in which traditional pipelines do not allow for the kind of cultural acclimation necessary for many Black people to experience success. With patriarchy undergirding these traditional pipelines, Black males have some advantage to experience success in ways that Black women do not.

This researcher found that observing these interactions was triggering. As a school leader and Black woman, the experiences of the participants were very familiar to the researcher. The difficult managing Black men, the push back, the perceived unfairness of the quick career advancement and easy of navigation through the system was like *déjà-vu*. And this coincidence in experiences was not lost on the researcher; it spoke to the commonalities between experiences for Black women educational leaders.

Embodying a Womanist Pedagogical Tradition

There is evidence that this study's participants employ similar Womanist pedagogical approaches to Black educators in other studies (Callender, 1997; Gilpin, 2003; Henry, 2005). The educational leaders in this study display an ethic of care which undergirds their educational philosophies to educating Black students, a holistic pedagogical approach that focuses on educating the whole child, and the integration of activism in their visions.

Ethics of Care. Ware (2002) explains that caring educators give time to students both in and out of the classroom, prioritize listening to students' problems, encourage the personal growth of students, and deeply believe in the personal and academic success of students. Also, when educators feel a sense of responsibility for and connectedness to their students, caring is established (Foster, 1991). As Collins (1991) notes, this ethic

of caring is central to the professional lives of Black women and suggests that "personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process" (p. 219).

Hence, the educational leaders in this study see the importance of developing caring relationships with students. For example, Nyashia and Akilah talked about the difficulty her teachers had with demanding than the minimal expectations from students when they had not developed caring and trusting relationships. For Minkah Nyashia, and Akilah, their ethic of care pedagogy was evident in their commitment to doing "whatever it takes" to ensure the learning of their students, whether adults or children.

Akilah's ethic of care pedagogy is rooted in her spirituality and belief that serving as an educator is her divine purpose. The connection between her spiritual lens and educational philosophy reflected the literature on Black women educators and their view of the work as a "sacred calling" (Irvine, 2003; Loder, 2005). All three participants, through their discussion of the moral imperative of teaching, see their work as educators as not a job, but an endeavor that has a spiritual purpose. The participants' narratives point to their belief in the importance of establishing a pedagogy rooted in an ethic of care to serve their students best. As Witherspoon & Arnold (2010) explain, this study's participants "not only believed in ensuring the academic well-being of their students, but also in providing holistic care of mind, body, and spirit" (p. 224). Through an ethic of caring, Minkah, Nyashia, and Akilah sought to address the interlocking

systems of material, community, and spiritual realities. Through their words, they demonstrate the depth of their caring.

Holistic Pedagogical Approach. Holistic pedagogical approaches provide students with the soft skills required to navigate both academic and personal spaces (Howard, 2001). These approaches help students develop intellectually and socially. Howard (2001) explains that these approaches also assist in developing the intellectual capabilities as well as the social skills necessary to complete cognitive tasks and navigate norms in different spaces. The holistic approach was most evident in Nyashia's narrative. She explained that solely focusing on academic curricula was not enough to ensure students could experience success in society. Hence her advisory curricula incorporated the histories of people of color and lessons on positive self-image, critiquing stereotypes and societal messages about people of color, and helping students hold themselves to their highest capabilities. This curriculum demonstrated Nyashia's desire to ensure that curricula addressed the whole student.

Although the focus of Nyashia's holistic approach to curricula was in advisory classes, the most salient example of her implementation and the impact of the holistic curricula was during a town hall meeting in which this study's researcher was observing Nyashia. The town hall meeting described below was not the first town hall meeting the researcher had observed at Nyashia's and others' schools, however this town hall was different for a number of reasons—students were actively engaged and participated in small groups with minimal supervision; the student thinking shared with the whole group was both thoughtful and pushed people's thinking; and the interactions between

students and adults and students and their peers was responsive and productive in ways that educational leaders describe in textbooks.

The town hall at Nyashia's middle school is a regularly scheduled event that happens weekly. The entire school gathers in the gymnasium and participates in whole and small group discussions around things like current events, identity development, and experiences related to their identities. For this town hall, the conversation focused on stereotypes, internalized racial oppression, and how students view themselves and each other.

Each class entered the gymnasium and sat in designated areas, based on grade level and teacher, on the gym floor. Teachers remained around the gymnasiums' periphery with the two Deans of Culture—two tall and stocky Black men—on hand to address and “discipline” issues. The fact that the Deans of Culture in Mji Public Schools, and many of the surrounding school districts, are typically Black men demonstrates another way in which Black men and women are institutionalized within the institution of schools. Black men are positioned to police Black children's behaviors, serving as the “muscle” for Black women who are tasked with all other aspects of Black children's lives at school.

Interestingly, the Deans of Culture were not necessary for the duration of the observed town hall. After Nyashia introduced the activity: ranking which students, based on their racial descriptors, were most likely to least likely to attend college and which were most likely to go to prison. The students used visual representations of the students to determine, as a group, the rankings. The racial categories provided were

white, Black, Asian, Latinx, and Native American. All of the images were boys for the college question and girls for the prison question, which led to some interesting conversations about how gender affects these experiences. Students spoke about their stereotypical associations of girls with college and boys with prison.

While Nyashia and other members of the staff circulated to engage in conversations with the students, the researcher did not observe one instance of off-task behavior or side conversations. The students were diligently working on the task, with all but a few groups placing the students in the following orders:

- College: (most likely to least likely) white male, Asian male, Native American male, Latinx male, Black male
- Prison: (most likely to least likely) Black female, Latinx female, Native American female, white female, Asian female

After completing the activity, several groups shared out their rationales for their rankings with all of the answers being justified through the use of stereotypes like, “Asian people are really smart” and “Black people are always getting harassed by the police.”

Nyashia then led combined small groups in discussions about how stereotypes affect the way people see themselves and each other. Students provided thoughts like, “Good stereotypes would make me feel good and make me feel pressure to always live up to it” and “Bad stereotypes, like almost all of the stereotypes about Black people, make me feel bad about myself and people who look like me.” As the students shared

their responses with each other, the small groups talked through ways to help themselves and each increase their self-esteem.

The town hall ended without any disruptions or “behavior incidents,” students sang their class chants and then shared shout outs with each other. Nyashia’s approach to the town hall demonstrated that students could and would rise to the occasion when adults believed they would. The examples of leadership and critical thinking displayed in the town hall showed that Nyashia’s approach not only helped cultivate self-esteem but also the kind of leadership skills necessary for students to confidently enact change in their communities.

Integration of Activism. Through the participants’ narratives, it is clear that their activism is connected to their pedagogy, similar to many Black women educators (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). This integration is based on their commitment to respond to issues of inequity, like race and gender oppression (Dixson, 2003). Also, based on the literature, this activism through education is guided by an approach that is sensitive and supportive to anti-racism, including the eradication of oppression of students of color.

Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002), note that

Womanist teachers see racism and other systemic injustices as simultaneously social and educational problems. Consequently, they demonstrate a keen awareness of their power and responsibility as adults to contest the societal stereotypes imposed on children. (p. 77)

As evidenced in her narrative, Nyashia is deeply committed to challenging things like stereotypes and their influences on students’ understanding of themselves and their worlds. She shared that since negative stereotypes were often closely linked to images of Black people, it was her responsibility, as a Black person, to combat these images

directly through conversations and the development of curricula, with the hopes of seeing positive changes in her students' self-image and behaviors. Her intimate understanding of the treatment of Black people undergirds her drive to speak out against stereotypical images of Black people.

Akilah, on the other hand, leverages her personal experiences with bigotry and systems of oppression during her high school years to drive her activism. She uses her experiences to help Black students name and analyze their experiences. Her activism focuses on pushing students to use their academic excellence to develop a critical lens about the barriers and experiences in their communities. Both educational leaders use a clear commitment to activism to transform their spaces in education into sites for anti-racist discussions and work. They also endeavor to increase students' consciousness about issues of injustice, especially in regards to how race and gender shape the realities of them, their communities, and other people of color.

Strong Black Women's Meetings: In Dialogue with the Researcher

As referenced earlier, the most salient dialogues had between the participants and researcher were outside of interview times. The conversations had during lunches and drives to and from different work locations were some of the most fertile to assist in the understanding of the participants' experiences and views. After having a couple of informal meetings, the researcher and participants began calling them "strong Black women's meetings" because of the belief that one must be strong to venture into educational leadership, especially as a Black woman. Our conversations centered on things as varied as meal planning and manageable hairstyles to sustainability and

venting sessions. One of the most enlightening and insightful conversations we had was about sustainability as an educational leader.

Researcher: What keeps you coming back to this role, day after day, year after year?

Akilah: Hah! I wish I had an answer for you. I honestly think we have to be a little “off” to keep coming back for this kind of punishment. I could say the typical and generic thing, it’s the kids, but everyone knows they’re at the center of any reason an educator does anything.

Nyashia: Yeah, of course it’s the kids but it’s more than that for me, and would venture to say all of us. For me it’s the challenge. Some days I’m proving myself wrong by making it to work.

Minkah: That is so true! Stepping up into this role has been a proof point for me. I didn’t know I was built to withstand this kind of pressure, but I keep amazing myself by showing up every day and giving it 100% of my energies even when things are less than ideal.

Researcher: Is there *one* thing to which you attribute your motivation?

Minkah: I’d say it’s my children. I am modeling for them what excellence looks like.

Akilah: Hmm. I hate to say it, but the naysayers. I know there are so many people expecting us to fail and the more I kill it, the more I know I’m pissing them off. That’s some real motivation for me right now.

Nyashia: I show up for my community. I was born and raised right here and the better I do as a native, the more examples the kids who are natives have to draw on.

This brief excerpt of one of our conversations gives additional insights into the character and motivations of the Black educational leaders centered in this study. They each have a clear idea of what it is that keep them showing up each day, ready to do their best.

This seemingly simple aspect of their psyche gives a glimpse into the mindset necessary

to effectively do this job, even in the face seemingly insurmountable pressures and trauma.

Implications for Practice

Understanding the experiences of Black women in educational leadership is necessary for improving leadership development opportunities for all educational leaders. It is still true that Black women are not adequately represented in leadership positions in education. This reality exposes some of the barriers Black women face while researching their experiences provide an understanding of their contributions as a collective group in leadership positions.

With the research on the impact of race and gender on Black women's leadership development still understudied, this study provides a framework for understanding their experiences and theorizing. This study also serves as a reference point for those seeking to eliminate barriers that prevent the upward mobilization of Black women in their educational organizations.

Through an analysis of the experiences of these participants, it is clear that Black women who aspire to become educational leaders have to be willing to move outside of their comfort zones to establish a necessary network of people who are both different than them and hold senior positions. Establishing strategic relationships is an essential tool for Black women educational leaders to gain access to promotions and various career opportunities. Through the creation of more responsive and less traditional pipeline programs like Minkah's, educational organizations can build openings for people of color to climb the ladder to higher levels of leadership.

Also, allowing space and time to truly understand the narratives of Black women, the source of their theorizing, is essential in creating programs and opportunities that are inclusive and responsive enough to ensure the success of people of color in education, especially leadership. Without the inclusion of other epistemologies into the way educators see education and the preparation and support of educators, it is virtually impossible to experience the level of success through the creation of the kinds of “pipelines” necessary to ensure better selection, preparation, and outcomes for educators and therefore, students of color.

Conclusions and Study Limitations

The Black women educational leaders in this study demonstrated a strong commitment to activism through aligning their educational philosophies, spirituality, and missions of their schools, with social justice. They indicated a deep desire to help their students, and each other, better their worlds. While these leaders did not say social justice by name, their beliefs about schooling and educational leadership extended to what they saw as equity. Their notions of social justice did not connect with “following the rules.” As Akilah stated, “sometimes you have to break the rules to achieve the mission of co-creating liberatory spaces for students of color to realize their potential.” Minkah, Nyashia, and Akilah acted individually and collectively to counteract the effects of policies dictated by local, state, and national policies that did not meet the needs of their students without violating laws. For example, Nyashia and Akilah both reinterpreted discipline, retention, and homework policies in ways that provided opportunities for students to succeed.

As the literature on educational leadership continues to move in the direction of a social justice framework, the practices of educational leaders will become more of a focal point in the analysis of how school leaders both engage in and facilitate engagement with activism and social justice. The experiences of this study's participants consistently served as a foundation for activism and social justice in schools, served as a source of resiliency and protest amidst racism and sexism, and provided new narratives for research and methods in how to support the development of leaders of color in education. Through an analysis of Minkah, Nyashia, and Akilah's experiences, this study helped counter the traditional hegemonic ideals and highlighted that there are no fixed ideas in performance, research, and agency in the field of educational leadership.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol #1 (Pre-Observation/Shadowing)

1. Demographic information (e.g., full name, date and place of birth, marital status, number of children, etc.)
2. General family information (e.g., number of siblings, mother's occupation, father's occupation, etc.)
3. What was life like growing up in your family?
4. Describe your schooling experience from primary through tertiary schooling.
5. Did anyone have an influence on your education and subsequent education choices? Did any significant societal forces impact your educational career?
6. Information about educational attainment (e.g., degrees earned, institutions attended, etc.)
7. What led you into education/education reform?
8. How has your positionality impacted your choices as an educator?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol #2 (After Week One of Observation/Shadowing and Debriefs)

1. Reflect/share stories about the early stages of your career in education.
2. Reflect on the defining moment when you decided to pursue an administrative position.
3. Reflect on the various administrative positions you've held.
4. Reflect on your daily experiences as a school/district leader.
5. How would you define your leadership style?
6. What influences your disposition towards leadership?
7. What would you characterize as your strengths and weaknesses as an administrator?
8. What challenges/barriers have you experienced as an administrator?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol #3 (Post-Observation/Shadowing and Debriefs)

1. How does your personal identity surface in your experiences as an administrator?
2. Reflect on any experience(s) in which your positionality has influenced your experiences as an administrator.
3. How do your experiences as a Black woman influence the way in which you lead?
4. How are these influences suppressed?
5. Given the experiences you've had in education how do you see these experiences shaping your future work as an educator?
6. What lessons have you learned along the way about the best way to teach students of color in your school?
7. What skills, pedagogical approaches, and attitudes (specifically about students) do you think an effective teacher needs to have in your teaching environment?
 - a. How have you come to identify these?
 - b. How do you employ these in your work as an administrator?
8. What factors do you think have influenced and shaped who you are as an administrator today?
 - a. How do you see your gender shaping how you approach your work as an educator?
 - b. How do you see your ethnicity, place of birth, prior experiences in education as influencers in your practice and approach to leadership?

Appendix D: Participant Demographic Form

Name _____

Preferred Telephone Number _____

Please share the best time to call. _____

Preferred Email Address _____

School Leader Information:

How do you racially identify? _____

How many years have you been in education? _____

How many years have you been in administration? _____

School Information:

School Name _____

School District _____

School Address _____

What is your current position title? _____

Total number of students in your school _____

Student demographic information – racial and ethnic makeup of school:

Appendix E: Participant Consent Form

Glass Ceilings & Bottomless Floors: Black Women's Experiences in Education Reform Leadership

Research Site: Public & Charter School Districts in California, New York, and Washington, DC

Investigator: The following investigator is available for questions, Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Alicia Nance

LSU, School of Education

Peabody Hall

(917) 702.5654

anance2@tigers.lsu.edu

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study is to examine how Black women in school or district administration in public and charter school districts navigate the movement from articulation to enactment amidst the neoliberal education reform landscape to implement culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy and meet the needs of scholars of color.

Inclusion Criteria: Women you identify as Black and are employed as school/district administrators who accept investigator's invitation to participate in the study.

Exclusion Criteria: None.

Description of Study: From March-August 2015, 1-3 Black women in school/district administration will participate in interviews and shadowing and debriefs with researcher. The administrators will meet with the researcher to discuss their experiences, thoughts and actions.

Benefits: The results of this study will be shared with educators interested in education reform and school and district leadership.

Risks: There are no known risks.

Right to Refuse: Participation is voluntary, and a participant will become a part of the study only if she agrees to participation. At any time, the participant may withdraw from the study without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.

Privacy: Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Participant identity will be protected through the use of pseudonyms that will represent the participants in discussion of research results. Participant identity will remain confidential unless law requires disclosure.

Financial Information: There is no cost for participation in the study, nor is there any compensation to the subjects for their participation.

Signatures: The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I will participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F: Signed IRB Application

Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/ projects using living humans as subjects, or samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

LSU
 Institutional Review Board
 Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair
 130 David Boyd Hall
 Baton Rouge, LA 70803
 P: 225.578.8692
 F: 225.578.5983
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

– Applicant, Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts B-F, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit the completed application to the IRB Office by e-mail (irb@lsu.edu) for review. If you would like to have your application reviewed by a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee before submitting it to the IRB office, you can find the list of committee members at <http://sites01.lsu.edu/wp/ored/human-subjects-screening-committee-members/>.

– A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:

- (A) This completed form
- (B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1&2)
- (C) Copies of all instruments to be used.
*If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.
- (D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)
- (E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: (<http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php>)
- (F) Signed copy of the IRB Security of Data Agreement: (<https://sites01.lsu.edu/wp/ored/files/2013/07/Security-of-Data-Agreement.pdf>)

1) Principal Investigator: Rank:

Dept: Ph: E-mail:

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each

*If the Principal Investigator is a student, identify and name supervising professor in this space

3) Project Title:

4) Proposal? (yes or no) If Yes, LSU Proposal Number

- Also, if YES, either
- This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant
 - OR
 - More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology students)

*Indicate any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18 the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the ages, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature Alicia D. Nance Date 13 February 2015 (no per signatures)

**** I certify my responses are accurate and complete.** If the project scope or design is later changes, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Screening Committee Action: <input type="radio"/> Exempted <input type="radio"/> Not Exempted		Category/Paragraph <input type="text"/>
Signed Consent Waived?: <input type="radio"/> Yes or <input type="radio"/> No		
Reviewer <input type="text"/>	Signature <input type="text"/>	Date <input type="text"/>

Continue on the next page

Part 1: Determination of "Research" and Potential For Risk

- This section determines whether the project meets the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) definition of research involving human subjects, and if not, whether it nevertheless presents more than "minimal risk" to human subjects that makes IRB review prudent and necessary.

1. Is this project involving human subjects a systematic investigation, including research, development, testing, or evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge?

(Note some instructional development and service programs will include a "research" component that may fall within HHS' definition of human subjects research).

YES

NO

2. Does the project present physical, psychological, social or legal risks to the participants reasonably expected to exceed those risks normally experienced in daily life or in routine diagnostic physical or psychological examination or testing? You must consider the consequences if individual data inadvertently become public.

YES - Stop. This research cannot be exempted - submit regular application for IRB review.

NO-Continue to see if research can be exempted from IRB oversight

3. Are any of your participants incarcerated?

YES - Stop. This research cannot be exempted--submit regular application for IRB review.

NO-Continue to see if research can be exempted from IRB oversight.

4. Are you obtaining any health information from a health care provider that contains any of the identifiers listed below?

A. Names

B. Address: street address, city, county, precinct, ZIP code, and their equivalent geocodes. Exception for Zip codes: the initial three digits of the ZIP Code may be used, if according to current publicly available data from the Bureau of the Census: (1) The geographic unit formed by combining all ZIP codes with the same three initial digits contains more than 20,000 people; and (2) the initial three digits of a ZIP code for all such geographic units containing 20,000 or fewer people is changed to '000'. (Note: The 17 currently restricted 3-digit ZIP codes to be replaced with '000' include: 036, 059, 063, 102, 203, 556, 692, 790, 921, 830, 831, 878, 879, 884, 890, and 893.)

C. Dates related to individuals

i. Birth date

ii. Admission date

iii. Discharge date

iv. Date of death

v. And all ages over 89 and all elements of dates (including year) indicative of such age. Such ages and elements may be aggregated into a single category of age 90 or older.

D. Telephone numbers;

E. Fax numbers;

F. Electronic mail addresses;

G. Social security numbers;

H. Medical record numbers; (including prescription numbers and clinical trial numbers)

I. Health plan beneficiary numbers;

J. Account numbers;

K. Certificate/license numbers;

L. Vehicle identifiers and serial numbers including license plate numbers;

M. Device identifiers and serial numbers;

N. Web Universal Resource Locators (URLs);

O. Internet Protocol (IP) address numbers;

P. Biometric identifiers, including finger and voice prints;

Q. Full face photographic images and any comparable images; and

R. Any other unique identifying number, characteristic, or code; except a code used alone or in combination with other information to identify an individual who is the subject of the information.

YES - Stop. This research cannot be exempted--submit regular application for IRB review.

NO- Continue to see if research can be exempted from IRB oversight.

Continue on the next page

Part 2: Exemption Criteria For Research Projects

Please select any and all categories that relate to your research. Research is exemptible when all research methods are one or more of the following five categories. Check statements that apply to your study:

1. In education setting, research to evaluate normal educational practices.

-
2. For research not involving vulnerable people (prisoner, fetus, pregnancy, children, or mentally impaired): observe public behavior (including participatory observation), or do interviews or surveys or educational tests:

The research must also comply with one of the following:

- a) The participants cannot be identified, directly or statistically;
or that
 b) The responses/observations could not harm participants if made public;
or that
 c) Federal statute(s) completely protect all participants' confidentiality;

-
3. For research not involving vulnerable people (prisoner, fetus, pregnancy, children, or mentally impaired): observe public behavior (including participatory observation), or do interviews or surveys or educational tests:

- All respondents are elected, appointed, or candidates for public offices.

-
4. Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

The research must also comply with one of the following:

- a) Subjects cannot be identified in the research data directly or statistically, and no-one can trace back from research data to identify a participant;
or that
 b) The sources are publicly available

-
5. Research or demonstration service/care programs, e.g. health care delivery.

- a) It is directly conducted or approved by the head of a US Govt. department or agency.
and that
 b) It concerns only issues under usual administrative control (48 Fed Reg 9268-9).
e.g., regulations, eligibility, services, or delivery systems;
and that
 c) Its research/evaluation methods are also exempt from IRB review.

-
6. For research not involving vulnerable volunteers (see "2&3" above), do food research to evaluate quality, taste, or consumer acceptance.

The research must also comply with one of the following:

- a) The food has no additives;
or that
 b) The food is certified safe by the USDA, FDA, or EPA.

PART 3: Consent Forms

* The consent form must be written in non-technical language which can be understood by the subjects. It should be free of any exculpatory language through which the participant is made to waive, or appears to be made to waive any legal rights, including any release of the investigator, sponsor, institution or its agents from liability for negligence. (Note: the consent form is not a contract.)

* For example consent forms, please refer to our website, www.lsu.edu/irb

* The IRB prefers using signed informed consent; However, if that is impractical, an application to waive signed consent can be requested below. However, even if this waiver is requested, the **IRB must be provided with the consent script** that will present the information to human subjects regarding the study/research. All consent forms or scripts must include a statement that the study was approved or exempted by the IRB and provide IRB contact information to participants.

I am requesting waiver of signed Informed Consent because:

- (a) Having a participant sign the consent form would create the **principal risk** of participating in the study.

or that

- (b) The research presents **no more than minimal risk** of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which having signed consent is normally required.

Now that your application is complete, please send it to the IRB office by e-mail (irb@lsu.edu) for review. If you would like to have your application reviewed by a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee before submitting it to the IRB office, you can find the list of committee members at <http://sites01.lsu.edu/wp/ored/human-subjects-screening-committee-members/>.

Institutional Review Board
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair
130 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.5983
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

****Please sign and submit this document with your IRB application****

Security of Data

Number: PS06.20

SECURITY OF DATA

PURPOSE

I certify that I have read and will follow LSU's policy on security of data - [PS06.20 \(http://itsweb.lsu.edu/ITS_Security/IT_Policies/LSU/item614.html\)](http://itsweb.lsu.edu/ITS_Security/IT_Policies/LSU/item614.html) and will follow best practices for security of confidential data

(http://itsweb.lsu.edu/ITS_Security/Best_Practices/Sensitive_Data/item862.html)

This Policy Statement outlines the responsibilities of all *users* in supporting and upholding the security of *data* at Louisiana State University regardless of *user's* affiliation or relation with the University, and irrespective of where the *data* is located, utilized, or accessed. All members of the University community have a responsibility to protect the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of *data* from unauthorized generation, access, modification, disclosure, transmission, or destruction. Specifically, this Policy Statement establishes important guidelines and restrictions regarding any and all use of *data* at, for, or through Louisiana State University. This policy is not exhaustive of all *user* responsibilities, but is intended to outline certain specific responsibilities that each *user* acknowledges, accepts, and agrees to follow when using *data* provided at, for, by and/or through the University. Violations of this policy may lead to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal, expulsion, and/or legal action. It is recommended that all personnel on your project be familiar with these policies and requirements for security of your data.

In addition it is recommended that PIs review any grant, non-disclosure/confidentiality agreement, or restricted data agreements before publishing articles using the data.

I certify that I have read and understand these policies

Name: Alicia D. Nance

Date: 02 / 13 / 2015

Appendix G: IRB Approval Letter



ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Alicia Nance
Education

FROM: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: February 20, 2015

RE: IRB# E9204

TITLE: Glass Ceilings & Bottomless Floors: Black Women's Experiences in Education Reform Leadership

Institutional Review Board
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair
130 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.5983
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: New Protocol

Review Date: 2/19/2015

Approved **Disapproved**

Approval Date: 2/19/2015 **Approval Expiration Date:** 2/18/2018

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 1, 2b

Signed Consent Waived?: No

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable): _____

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable) _____

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman 

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –

Continuing approval is **CONDITIONAL** on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.

8. **SPECIAL NOTE:**

**All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>*

Appendix H: NIH Protecting Human Research Participants Certificate



VITA

Alicia Danielle Nance received her bachelor's degree at The University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia in 2007 while teaching K-12 Special Education in Northern Virginia and the District of Columbia. As her desire to better support students of color through culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy grew, she gained a master's degree from George Washington University in the District of Columbia in 2008. Soon after, she relocated to Louisiana to pursue her doctorate in Curriculum Theory. While studying at Louisiana State University, she acquired a master's degree in English in 2012 and will graduate with her doctorate in December 2016. She is currently a Deeper Learning Equity Fellow with Big Picture Learning and the Internationals Network for Public Schools. Through this opportunity she is working to leverage her privilege and co-create a community freedom school that will provide the space for the type of work that educators, students, and communities like those in this study need to experience education as the practice of freedom.