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The Salvation of the Africana Child: Via the Role of the Black Woman in Educational Leadership

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THE SALVATION OF THE AFRICANA CHILD: VIA THE ROLE OF THE BLACK
WOMAN IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mama, Lula B. Smith whose love, support, and encouragement, throughout my life, has motivated me to reach this major milestone in my life. You have always been my biggest cheerleader and instilled in me the courage to be my own person. You were my first teacher…the reason I was able to teach my own kindergarten students at the age of five. You taught me to value education and how important it is to commit to being a student of life…for life. You also instilled morals and values in me that have led me to a life of service to the Lord and others. Thank you. You have always believed in me, and my successes are all a direct reflection of the things that I have learned from you. You are a brilliant mind. I love you and respect you for always sacrificing and putting our (my brothers and me) wellbeing first. It made us the people we are today. You are kind and compassionate. I pray someday I will be able to be as thoughtful and hospitable as you are – naturally. You are truly an inspiration, Mama. Thank you for teaching me how to first love the Lord, then myself, and then others. It's because of you that I have such a love and respect for family!

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ABSTRACT

Black Women principals have unique experiences that they have lived that influence the way they lead schools. Strong and committed leadership creates school environments where children can thrive.

This study illuminated the connectivity of race, class, and gender to the lived experiences of Black Women principals according to the Africana Womanism paradigm set forth by Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems (2020). The question my research sought to answer was: How do the lived experiences, as they relate to race, class, and gender, of Black Women principals impact the way they lead? The sub-question for the study was: How do the lived experiences of Black Women principals impact their styles of leading and the effect of those leadership styles on the culture and climate in their schools?

A phenomenological approach was selected to examine the lived experiences of six Black Women principals in a southeastern state. The findings revealed the lived experiences of Black Women principals have a tremendous influence on the way they lead in six ways. Their lived experiences have connected them with themselves and others, have caused them to lead with integrity, have caused them to be accountable to themselves and others, have caused them to be an inspiration to others, have caused them to be adaptable, and have caused them to be good listeners who truly care about others. These findings are firmly grounded in the eighteen characteristics of Africana Womanism.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

According to Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems, Africana Womanism, earlier known as Black Womanism from its inception in the mid-1980s, which is conceptually grounded in precepts dating back to African antiquity, has always been a strong authentic family centered paradigm. It is justifiable prioritization of race, class and gender is central to the overall nature and experiences of global Africana people, both females and males, which naturally puts forth activism as key in the Africana womanist persona (Hudson-Weems, 2020). Thus, making the paradigm a perfect conceptual framework for this study. By definition, Africana Womanism is intended as an ideology applicable to all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture and Afrocentrism and focuses on the experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women of the African diaspora (Hudson-Weems "personal communication" October 3, 2021). For almost two centuries, women have had to posture for an equitable place in society. As Sojourner Truth demonstrated in her legendary *Ain't I a Woman Speech* (US Department of Interior, 2017), Black women have long since faced more marginalization and oppression than their white counterparts (Konrad, 2009). This marginalization and unfair treatment in what is considered to be a civilized and progressive society, has led to much controversy and debate when dealing with the harsh realities of Black women from all aspects of life.

One aspect of life impacted by marginalization is occupation. Public school education is no exception. In public education, women constitute the bulk of the work

force while men were more likely to hold positions in school administration (Coleman, 2005; Harris, 2004). According to statistics, it was not until 2007 – 2008 when women in school leadership (50.3%) first surpassed men (49.3%) in the field (CES, 2019). According to the National Teacher and Principal Survey provided by the National Education Association, Center for Enterprise Strategy, in 2011, there were 1,189 school principals in South Carolina. Seventy-one percent were white, while twenty-seven percent were Black (NCES, 2019). In 2015 – 2016, women comprised 54% (n = 49,030) of principals in the United States. Of the 54% of women principals, only 13% were Black Women (3,240) (Lomotey, 2019). A slim majority of principals are now females; however, Black Women are still seriously underrepresented (NCES, 2019). Under-representation of people of color is a persistent problem in American public schools (NCES, 2019). According to the National Principal and Teacher Survey (NPTS), in 2015 – 2016, 22.2% of public-school principal positions were held by people of color, while 77.8% of principal positions were held by White, non-Hispanic people. Although the number of White principals has consistently decreased since 1993, most of the growth in principal diversity has been due to the increase in proportion of Hispanic/Latinix principals. The percent of Black principals has virtually remained flat since that time (NCES, 2019). In 2017 – 2018, Whites made up 78.2% of all principals, while 21.8% were Black (NCES, 2019). In 2021, using a database of thirty million profiles, it was estimated that there are more than 43,625 school principals currently employed in the United States. Fifty five percent of all of the principals are women. Sixty eight percent are White, while fourteen percent are Latino or Hispanic and eleven percent are Black (Zippia, 2021). The number of Blacks in leadership has steadily decreased since 2010

with currently only 10.7% of all administrators being Black (Zippia, 2021). Being a

woman in the workplace presents its own set of unique challenges; however, there is no

denying that being a Black woman in the workplace has even more significant

challenges. Black women are often subjected to both gender driven microaggressions as

well as being subjected to racial ones (Barratt, 2020). Since the death of George Floyd in

May 2020, the discussion of such inequalities has gained more national attention. The

discussion has highlighted that white women, despite belonging to a widely marginalized

group themselves, can often also be subjugators in their continual reticence and apathy

towards the fight for Black female equality (Barratt, 2020). Black females are more

likely to experience occupational segregation, as well as earn less than their white

counterparts.

According to Bianca Barratt (2020) on the average, women earn 19% less than

white men in the United States. Black women specifically earn 39% less than white men

(Barratt, 2020). These less than surprising statistics suggest Black female professionals

are facing discrimination for both their race and gender. With such a widespread

problem, women are often guilty of discriminatory practices against each other, as well.

These facts include Black Women in administrative roles, such as principals, in schools.

Although the number of Black female principals has increased over the past several

years, the number is still less than representative of the number of females who serve in

the role of teacher. In an article that appeared on UConn Today, an official news website

for the University of Connecticut, it was reported that beyond being underrepresented in

the role of school leader, Black female principals face additional challenges in these

positions in the form of microaggressions (Barrat, 2020). The underrepresentation of

Black Women in positions of leadership in schools is a consistent issue across the United States. There is not just an underrepresentation in administration, there is also an underrepresentation of Black Women in teaching positions, especially in South Carolina. For example, in South Carolina, there are a total of 53,689 teachers. There are 6,790 Black females and 33,828 White females in teaching positions (SCDE, 2021). The underrepresentation of Black Women in classrooms and in positions of leadership confirms the need for strong networks of support to be developed for these individuals who can use their experiences to support each other. Unfortunately, documented accounts of the lived experiences of Black Women are limited in scholarly literature (Clemmons, 2012). The importance of leadership in schools is substantiated and we know that effective leaders call upon certain practices to influence student achievement. What remains less clear is how the backgrounds of educators may influence the effective leader's practices (Dallas & Player, 2019). Therefore, the purpose of this study highlights the influence lived experiences have on Black Women principals. Lived experiences of all administrators can provide awareness for them as leaders, especially Black Women. There has been a legitimate concern of Black Women for many years feeling as though they are not heard (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). This concern has been the reality of many women in leadership positions because these women have often not been viewed as anything other than mothers, wives, caregivers, and the like (Jackson-Dunn, 2018). Although these are legitimate roles fulfilled by Black Women, an emphasis must be placed on how these roles (and the others they fulfill) should be recognized as a vital aspect of their lived experiences. These experiences can serve as a networking tool that can support the efforts of Black Women administrators to build strong relationships

in their schools, districts, and state. These efforts include providing opportunities to support each other as an already underrepresented population in schools (Eagly, 2007). Although insufficient research exists that examines how Black Women principal's lived experiences inform the way they lead, even less evidence exists that confirms how simply being Black Women impacts their lived experiences.

The interconnectivity of race, class, and gender can be referenced in Sojourner Truth's moving speech, wherein her speech demonstrates that "instead of establishing a feminist alignment, she was engaging in self-actualization, forcing White women in particular to recognize her and all Africana women as women, and as a definite and legitimate part of society in general" (Hudson-Weems, 2020, p. 23). Hudson-Weems pointed out Truth's position as "self-actualization" in her first Call for Africana Womanism in that 1989 seminal article, which was reprinted as Chapter 2 in all subsequent Africana Womanism books. The term Africana represents Africa and the African diaspora (which includes Afro-Latin, Afro-European, Afro-American countries and people, as well as their experiences and cultural ideologies with an Afrocentric perspective (Hudson-Weems, 2020). Truth's 1852 speech initially looks at race when she references the Negroes/Blacks of the South's debate with the women of the North (mainly white women) over who should have the right to vote. Then she looks at class, and finally at gender when she exclaims, "Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me the best place!" It is here that she adds her resounding question throughout the legendary speech, "And ain't I a woman?" She continues on that note, challenging a position of one of the men present: "Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman!

Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him." Truth's speech ended with a powerful statement on gender: "If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it. The men better let them" (US Department of Interior, 2017). Although slightly altered over time, the speech made by Sojourner Truth is a very strong indicator of the way race, gender, and class interconnect in the lives of Black Women. It's also a very poignant reminder of the prioritization Black women must make when faced with the marginalizations and microagressions they face.

Background of the Problem

There is a dearth in the literature regarding the experiences from Black Women principals, (BWPs), who make up less than 11% of educational leaders in the United States and must navigate both cultural and racial realities (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; National Education Association, 2019). The experiences of these Black Women based on their race, gender, and class can influence the way they choose to lead their schools. Two very important aspects of a school are the culture and climate. Some scholars may debate whether these two notions should be considered one and the same. Although the two are not the same, research supports culture and climate are interrelated phenomena having a reciprocal impact on each other; yet they are very different ideologies. As such, it can be said, culture and climate are two very different aspects of a school's persona. The Alliance for Education Solutions (2022) defines school culture as the way things are done in the school (the personality of a school), the underlying norms and values that shape

patterns of behavior, attitudes, and expectations between stakeholders in the school. Deal & Peterson (1998) suggest school culture includes norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals built up over time. Many educational organizations have produced detailed descriptions of positive school cultures, as well as strategies for improving them. On the other hand, school climate can be defined as the feel of the school (the school's attitude), the behaviors and points of view exhibited and experienced by students, teachers, and other stakeholders. School climate can be described as *the heart and soul of the school*, the feeling that either encourages teachers and students to engage, love the school, and want to be a part of it, or to reject the school and disengage from it. School climate is actually the outcome of the school's norms and values, the way in which the people at the school relate to and interact with one another, and the way systems and policies manifest themselves.

Research suggests schools with strong, positive cultures have service-oriented staff members, foster a collegial environment, participate in celebratory rituals, engage in supportive social and professional networks of development and readily espouse humor (Peterson & Deal, 2009). Although scholars debate whether schools actually have cultures (Barth, 2002), the research of Deal and Peterson suggests that positive culture is the key ingredient for influencing productivity and success in a school (Peterson & Deal, 2009). Other scholars support the idea of culture having an impact on every aspect of what happens in a school (Erickson, 1987). Peterson defines school culture as the set of norms, values, beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols, and stories that make up the "persona" of the school. These unwritten expectations build up over time as teachers, administrators, parents, and students work together, solve problems, deal with challenges

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and, at times, cope with failures (Peterson, 2002). It is imperatively crucial for principals to extend their roles beyond that of manager, nurturer, and chief instructional officer in their schools to one that includes a careful emphasis on leadership and school culture. Principals have to pay attention to the symbols and stories, rituals and routines, and values and beliefs that communicate the core values of the school, reinforce the mission, generates the energy for the development of a shared vision, and builds a sense of commitment and loyalty among stakeholders to ensure the development of a healthy school culture. This is one of the primary ways for leaders to distinguish their role in the creation, change, and management of their school's culture (Barth, 2002).

Lived experiences impact the way administrators establish those roles and how they respond to the cultural aspect of their schools. According to Edgar Schein (2004), it is the unique function of leaders to manage cultural evolution and change in such a way that the group can survive in a changing environment. Many times, the change that must be prepared for in a school environment includes that of maintaining a positive school culture amidst the ever-changing dynamics of the school. One such dynamic could be the turnover of school staff. Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) indicates there is an unspoken agreement among the staff members at a school that instills the "this is the way we do things and relate to each other around here" (p. 37). When the expectations are clear, and everyone in the school understands and is fully aware of his or her role in the organization, these traditions and routines will continue to be passed on even as veteran staff members leave or retire, and new employees are hired on. Barth (2002) reinforces this concept of school culture being an extremely important influence on student learning. Leaders must possess a cultural awareness to ensure they are cognizant at all times of

their school's culture. This cognizance of school leaders is imperative to them successfully fulfilling their roles as the head of their organizations. Being aware of who they are as individuals is equally as crucial in fulfilling their role as leader to the school.

In this current age of school improvement, school leaders have to be ever mindful of their role as the leader of the improvement process for the school. The culture of the school is a decisive factor in that improvement process (Nehez & Blossing, 2022). Therefore, principals should employ strong practices for creating a school environment that cultivates a healthy culture. Practices in school culture have an important impact on the outcome of school principals' improvement efforts (Deal & Peterson, 2016). Current research on school leadership documents the significance of principals building an organization which supports a professional and collaborative culture (Leithwood et al., 2019).

Although the role of the principal is constantly evolving with the increasing demands of the principalship and the demands of the modern-day schools (Daresh & Lynch, 2010), unexpected challenges make these demands more and more challenging. Larry Lashway (2003) contends principals are typically faced with frustration, stress, or even impairment as a result of the constant shift in their positions. This leaves very little time for them to truly reflect on their practices. Allowing principals' time to reflect on not just their practices, but also on who they are and their lived experiences is needed to produce more resilient and impactful school leaders.   Recent research confirms constraints on principals' time often limits their ability to engage with pertinent data (Hobbs, 2022). According to a new review of 20 years of research, the impact of effective principals is stronger and broader than was understood before (Hobbs, 2022).

Therefore, making it more important than ever for principals to understand their roles as school leaders. Current practicing principals have been forced to navigate a new normal during the coronavirus pandemic (Dare & Saleem, 2022). An increased need to ensure the well-being and safety of staff and students now rests upon the shoulders of school leaders in addition to the myriad other responsibilities they endure daily. Providing support to teachers who have been forced to teach in masks to students surrounded by plexiglass is imperative to ensuring the culture does not suffer as a result of teachers' fears, trepidations, and frustrations. In a similar manner, principals must be sensitive to the needs of students who have also been forced into a new sense of normalcy (Kniffin et. al, 2021). Students have fears and frustrations of their own that require the sensitivity and awareness of the school principal to avoid plummets in the school culture. In seeking to build and sustain positive and healthy school cultures, effective principals have to look beyond their schools to themselves and their positions within their communities to yield the greatest impact (Hobbs, 2022). Leading during a pandemic looks drastically different than leadership prior to the pandemic (Varela & Fedynich, 2020). The expectations and formulas for success are not the same. Pandemic leadership requires the same levels of commitment, expectation, and coaching. However, additional aspects of leadership are now required, as well. Those aspects include flexibility, grace, and patience. Diane Ravitch (2020) posits the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened students' emotions of exclusion as the role of the school principal continues to grow more untenable with the multitude of demands being placed upon them (Ravitch, 2020). As a pandemic principal, I can say these are always qualities that a leader must possess; however, the level to which these factors must be exercised has been tremendously influenced by the

pandemic. Sadly, school leaders were forced to handle all of the demands of the

principalship and the navigation of their leadership during a global pandemic with no

prior training or experience (Dare & Saleem, 2022). Now, more than ever, it is

imperative to provide opportunities for leaders to reflect and connect with themselves and

their communities to maintain a focus on what is truly important.

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the lived

experiences, as they relate to race, class, and gender, of Black Women principals.

Africana Womanism was used as a theoretical construct to examine the lived experiences

of Black Women principals to explore how the prioritization of race, class, and gender

impact the preferred leadership style of the participants. Africana Womanism was a

powerful tool that carefully examined the lived experiences of the six Black Women

principals participating in the study. Using this framework allowed me to explain how

the elements of Africana Womanism influences their leadership. The term Africana

represents Africa and the African diaspora which includes Afro-Latin, Afro-European,

Afro-American countries and people, as well as their experiences and cultural ideologies

with an Afrocentric perspective (Hudson-Weems, 2020). The characteristics of Africana

Womanism: Self-Namer, Self-Definer, Family Centered, Male-Compatible, Strong,

Whole and Authentic, Spiritual, Respectful of Elders, Adaptable, Ambitious, Mothering,

Nurturing, Family Centered, Genuine in Sisterhood, In Concert with Males in the

Liberation Struggle, Flexible Role Players, and Respected and Recognized, guided the

interview protocols. These characteristics were further examined to determine how they

ultimately impacted Black Women principals interactions and decision-making leading

them to resiliency and fortitude (Hudson-Weems, 2020). The eighteen characteristics of

Africana Womanism will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters. According to

Max van Manen, capturing the lived experiences of the participants would better help me

as the researcher to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning (significance) of

various aspects of the human experience, within the context of the whole human

experience (2016). Capturing the lived experiences of these Black Women principals

equipped me to understand and appreciate the deepest meanings and absolute values of

their respective experiences.

Leadership Styles

Over the past several centuries, the principal's role has shifted from that of a top-

down hierarchical manager who allowed teachers to just go into their classrooms and

teach what was expected (LeClear, 2005), to that of an instructional leader who was

expected to lead from an instructional perspective. As this shift occurred, Bernard Bass

(1985) developed a model that describes three types of leadership styles to which school

principals subscribe: transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire (1985). The

transactional leadership style is often referred to as a bartering system where services are

exchanged for rewards. Bass and Avolio (1993) posit transactional leaders share many of

the same characteristics of the school managers of old prior to the 1980s. In this top

down style of leading, the principal is still considered to be the dominant leader, and the

teachers are the subservient followers (Liontos, 1992). Transactional leadership consists

of three components: contingent reward, management-by-exception-active, and

management-by-exception-passive (Bass, 1990). These three components represent

relatively low forms of interactive leadership. Contrary to the belief of some scholars,

transformational leadership is not an alternative to transactional leadership, but rather an augmentation of it. Transformational leadership is necessary to motivate employers to higher levels of performance and increased effort (Lee, 2005).

As instructional leadership has continued to evolve, expectations for successful approaches to leadership have continued to evolve, as well. The role of the school principal changed in the 1990s to requiring a transformational approach to leadership (Johnson, 1996). Transformational leadership is the second type of leadership outlined in Bass' (1985) leadership model. Several researchers have found that transformational leaders are able to bring about both personal and organizational changes and help employees exceed beyond all expectations (Jung & Avolio, 2000). Researchers like Muhammad Khalifa have found that a part from embracing a positive attitude, a number of studies have realized that the leadership styles or approaches that school leaders adopt can tremendously contribute to the leaders' ability to create a culturally accommodating school atmosphere (Khalifa et al., 2016). In Bass' (1985) leadership model, the principal is not viewed as being the sole leader within the school; instead in this model, all employees were deemed as having leadership capabilities. These leadership abilities were expected to be groomed and cultivated by the principal (Johnson, 1996). Sergiovanni (1995) explains that transformational leadership motivates staff to have high levels of commitment to the success of the organization. The four components of transformational leadership are: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These components work together to produce high levels of commitment amongst staff and performance that exceeds

expectations (Hall et al., 2002). The third style of leading, which suggests the absence of leadership, is the laissez-faire style of leading.

Laissez-faire leadership is the final type of leadership explained in Bass' (1985) leadership model, which is referred to as a lack of leadership within the organization. Principals who subscribe to this model of leading evade making decisions and solving problems, are absent when needed, and fail to follow-up with requests for assistance. Of the three leadership styles described in Bass' model, laissez-faire leadership has been found to be the least effective (Bass & Avolio, 1996). However, Henry Levin (2001) reports that the leader of the school can be the determining factor when deciding the effectiveness of a school's success.

Shepherd-Jones and Salisbury-Glennon (2018) found teacher motivation and subsequently, the students' achievement was impacted by the teachers (and students) perceptions of the principal's competency (Shepherd-Jones & Salisbury-Glennon, 2018). There are distinct and different leadership styles adopted by school principals. These leadership styles are most often informed by personal preference more than any other factor (Corrigan & Merry, 2022). More current research has identified six leadership styles that are available to principals: Authoritarian Leadership Style, Democratic Leadership Style, Instructional Leadership Style, Integrated Leadership Style, Laissez-Faire Leadership Style, and Transformative Leadership Style (Corrigan & Merry, 2022). There are lots of different approaches available to leaders because principals exercise freedom to choose the most appropriate leadership style and what tactics they should employ (Corrigan & Merry, 2022). In Corrigan and Merry's (2022) research, transactional leadership, as put forth by Bass and Avioli (1993), can now be interchanged

with the autocratic (authoritarian) leadership style. In their research, Corrigan and Merry (2022), three additional leadership styles were lifted. These three leadership styles were the democratic leadership style, the instructional leadership style, and the integrated leadership style (Corrigan and Merry, 2022).

Autocratic leadership has been described as an extreme form of transactional leadership where the leader rather than staff bears the responsibility for the work of the school (Kars & Inandi, 2018). The democratic leadership style suggests that leadership can include others. This can be seen when members of the organization are not simply followers of the leader (Corrigan & Merry, 2022). This can be a sliding scale from consultation with members of the organization through actual power sharing and true distributed leadership (Woods, 2020). Instructional or expert leadership characterizes the principal as an important source of educational expertise within the organization. The principal is not the sole instructional leader but the leader of instructional leaders (Sebastian et al., 2017). A combined instructional and transformational leadership model actually replaces a traditional hierarchical and positional system with a model of shared instructional leadership (Corrigan & Merry, 2022).

Human Resources Development Quarterly Group (HDRQ) sponsors HDRQ-U a learning community for organizational trainers, facilitators, coaches and independent consultants, and more. The purpose of this learning community (which includes on demand on-line trainings) is to provide on-demand training topics from management to leadership, team building, and other trending topics in the workforce today (HDRQ-U, 2022). In addition to trainings and webinars, the Human Resources Development

Quarterly group (HDRQ) produces a regular blog covering a wide range of topics, as well.

In a 2019 Human Resources Development Quarterly (HRDQ-U) Ideas for Learning Five Transformational Leadership Characteristics and Qualities blog, five top characteristics of leadership were identified: good listener, adaptable, inspiring, accountable, and integrity (HRDQ, 2019). Visionary, transformational leadership is essential for effecting change and leading successfully (Principal Kafele, 2020). The characteristics of leadership that were identified are critically important aspects of the Black Woman principal's leadership.

Good Listener: Strong leaders always have a clear vision of what they want to accomplish; however, they are also humble enough to recognize they do not have all of the answers. Effective leaders understand listening to be foundational to humanize them and opens the door for genuine collaboration. Good leaders listen actively to demonstrate attentiveness and a genuine concern for others. Intentional listening allows a leader to make strategic decisions regarding the needs of their schools or organizations. Active listening also helps a leader to lead with empathy and compassion (HRDQ-U, 2019).

Adaptable: In our fast-moving society, good leaders must be agile enough to recognize changing dynamics and to make rapid adjustments in response to identified needs. Excellent leaders possess the situational awareness needed to understand when shifts need to occur or when a leader needs to pivot. The ability to be flexible and respond to changes by prioritizing makes a good leader more adaptable. Being adaptable also helps a leader to encourage collaboration and collegiality among their staff members.

Adaptability within an organization also helps to solidify the credibility of the leader (HRDQ-U, 2019).

Inspiring: Transformational leaders find ways to inspire. Creating a sense of enthusiasm and passion amongst the staff causes staff members to aspire to be better and put forth their best efforts at all times. An inspirational leader creates a sense of purpose for their organizations. Possessing the ability to inspire others makes a strong leader vital to the organization's success.   A leader who inspires others can often motivate others to become sources of inspiration, as well (HRDQ-U).

Accountable: A good leader is unafraid and unapologetically accountable to herself and everyone in her organization. An effective leader recognizes she is ultimately responsible for all outcomes whether good or bad. An accountable leader will follow through to ensure all systems, structures, and protocols are communicated and a priority for the organization. Accountable leaders generate trust, camaraderie and support. A good leader sets a standard of excellence in her organization, and at its apex is accountability of all.

Integrity: When leaders struggle to build trust, loyalty, and support; they will find it almost impossible to be successful. As such, effective leaders demonstrate honesty, high ethics, and trustworthiness. These leaders keep promises and honor commitments. They earn the credibility of those with whom they work because they are known for their truthfulness and honesty. A leader with strong integrity believes in leading by example and model honestly and strong moral principles (HRDQ-U, 2019).

Leaders who lead with integrity, are adaptable, are good listeners, and are accountable to themselves and others are a true source of inspiration to those around

them. They inspire them to stay motivated and remain committed to the mission, vision, and values of their organization. The leadership characteristics identified by Human Resources Development Quarterly Group (HRDQ) will be discussed in future chapters. The characteristics (I will use to categorize the themes) will be aligned to the themes that resulted from participant interviews. The characteristics of Africana Womanism will also be applied to the categories to determine their alignment to the themes that emerged from the data.

Many local districts and states do not require data collection or monitoring specifically around issues of school climate and discipline. Therefore, in this emerging field of educational leadership studies, the hope is that school principals will learn how to be culturally responsive, and that this will ultimately help all children reach their fullest potential (Khalifa et al., 2016). As such, it is crucial for principals to be keenly aware of the influence they possess to influence, impact, and shape school culture. They should also be aware of their influence on the achievement of their students (Peterson, 2002).

One area of a school that is both directly and indirectly impacted by the leadership styles of the principal is the area of school culture and climate. Every decision a leader makes has some bearing on how the culture and climate of the school is cultivated or ignored. For more than two decades, school climate has been a hot topic. Throughout this time, there has been no consistent agreement amongst scholars regarding a common definition (Coral et al., 2004). Some researchers have defined school climate as being either "open" or "closed" (Halpin & Croft, 1963); engaged or disengaged (Hoy et al., 1996); "feelings students and staff have about the school environment over a period of time" (Peterson & Skiba, 2001, p. 155); or "the internal characteristics that distinguish

one school from another and influence the behavior of each school's members (Hoy & Miskel, 2005, p. 185). These definitions provided food for thought for me as a researcher; however, the definition is still largely debated. According to Gruenert and Whitaker (2015), climate and culture are both constructs we use to describe how we interact with our environment (p. 22). These gentlemen also describe climate as being one of the building blocks of a school's culture (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Addressing school climate can be a good strategy for assessing and leveraging cultural change. Unfortunately, the voice of the Black Woman has been largely omitted from these important conversations.

Not only are Black Women's voices left out of these conversations, often their voices are stifled because of the stereotypes associated with being a black woman in a position of authority and power. Lais (2021) says that it is not the responsibility of black women to tailor who they are and how they express themselves because of our white and male-dominated society (Lais, 2021). However, that has been the reality for many Black Women principals for a long time. Black women are often labeled as "pushy", "aggressive", "angry", "hostile", and "unreasonable" (Lais, 2021). A minority leader in education in London can be quoted as saying,

> I think that minority women's experiences as leaders' challenges them
> physically and emotionally. They experience stereotypical perceptions
> which is an emotional challenge. I believe there is another point, which is
> that people feel threatened if you appear too intelligent or you know, they
> feel threatened especially if for whatever reasons they haven't got the
> same qualifications. (Showunmi, 2021, p. 6)

Racism is complex, endemic in society, and shielded by White privilege; therefore, ethnic minority leaders often suffer in silence (Franklin et al., 2006). Although there is a growing body of evidence examining diversity and leadership, from scholars like Alice Eagly, Jean Lau Chin, Baruti Kafele, and Josep Trimble, there is still very little on how race, class, and gender impact racism (Lumby & Coleman, 2007) as it relates to lived experiences of Black Women. Unfortunately, leadership theory has traditionally suppressed and neutralized 'difference', including the racial/ethnic dimensions and gender in discussions of developing strong leaders (Parker & Reynaga-Abiko, 2005). Much of the data collected on early leadership research was gathered in business, the military, and government settings, from White, Anglo-Saxon men in leadership positions with little or no emphasis given to differences or the importance of equity and the empowerment of Black Women. Leadership is immersed with studies drawing upon constructs developed in Western contexts (Middlehurst, 2008). Osler (2006) explains that textbooks aimed at aspiring school leaders published in the 1980s and 1990s in Britain rarely referred to equality, although by that time, minority and ethnic communities were well established in that country. Consequently, he claims, this was mirrored in academic journals and educational management courses, where race equality was rarely a topic of interest even when it had been confirmed that ethnicity was known to be a factor in student attainment. In professions around the world, organizations are characterized by inequalities, such as loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations (Acker, 2006). Organizations are microcosms of the societies within which they are embedded, and "work cannot be understood outside the context of

the socio-cultural arena in which it is enacted" (Dombeck et al., 2003, p. 352). As a result, racial and gender discrimination in school leadership is widely known to exist and can have lasting impacts on the future of our schools (Peters, 2010; Muñoz et al., 2014; Jean-Marie et al., 2016). Often in education settings, the discussion of racial and gender specific issues are considered taboo, as they elicit feelings of guilt, shame, and inadequacy. Thus, making such conversations difficult, if not impossible, to engage in. However, addressing negative discourses around race and gender are imperative for future generations of Black Women in school leadership to be able to survive and thrive (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008).

> Within feminism, to the extent that race is addressed at all, it is usually
>
> seen as an additional burden, one that simply adds to gender oppression –
>
> rather than being a part of it. Yet race cannot be separated from gender in
>
> Black women's lives. Race in many ways both shapes the kinds of gender
>
> subordination Black women experience and limits the opportunities to
>
> successfully challenge it (Crenshaw, 1992, p.1468)

Today, according to Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems (2020), the current emphasis on the relativity of feminist activity, called "intersectionality," which was introduced by race theorist Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, has enhanced the dominance of the Eurocentric tool of analysis for Black life. Dr. Hudson-Weems makes it very clear that this is not necessary, as an Afrocentric tool of analysis for Black life, particularly relative to Black women and their families, as such a tool was already in place with the earlier advent of Africana Womanism. Intersectionality is a concept often used in critical theories to describe the ways in which oppressive institutions (racism, sexism, homophobia,

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transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, etc.) are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another (Hudson-Weems, 2020). Although intersectionality is a sort of expansion of an existing established practice of inclusivity, Africana Womanism, Hudson-Weems calls for a clearer positioning of the Black woman, indicating a more inclusive agenda than found in traditional mainstream feminism. In fact, from its inception in the mid-1980s, Africana Womanism has focused on a prioritization that has not existed heretofore in other schools of thought. One of the top theorists in her field, Hudson-Weems, has focused the Africana Womanism paradigm on prioritizing race, class, and gender (Hudson-Weems, 2020). In 1989, Crenshaw used the cocoon of Africana Womanism to introduce intersectionality as an attempt at shifting from gender exclusivity to the interconnected ideal of inclusivity (Hudson-Weems, 2020).

When thinking about the oppression experienced by Black women, race must always be prioritized as what must be dealt with first. When examining the Africana culture, this is why women and men are able to remain in concert with one another in their liberation struggles. The majority of Black Men do not possess the political, social, or economic power needed to be considered an oppressor of Black Women. Therefore, the two (Black Men and Black Women) are two parts of a three-part legacy in the Africana community –men, women, and children in it together.

Race, class, gender, and other identity markers and their relationships with educational access and achievement are the "elephant in the room" topics in many U.S. schools especially in what is deemed to be a post-racial America (Jean-Marie et al., 2008; Mansfield, 2011). It's critically imperative that we move beyond allowing that proverbial

elephant in the room to silence the voices of Black Women to being able to engage in critical discourse that moves us forward towards a liberated system of opportunities for all and true social justice (Hudson-Weems "personal communication, October 18, 2021). Although more Black Women are becoming school leaders, there remains a dearth of research that demonstrates how Black Women's race, gender and class impact the way they choose to lead their schools. Black Women experience many burdens of gendered racism in their roles as school leaders, yet little is known about how these leaders cope with those experiences (Burton et al., 2020). It's also undetermined how such coping could impact their ability or desire to persist and thrive in positions of leadership. Therefore, there is a genuine need to amplify the voices of Black Women to be heard throughout all aspects of education. Black Women principals need to have an opportunity to reflect on their lived experiences and how those experiences impact who they are as individuals, as well as who they are as leaders. Capturing those lived experiences of participants in this study can begin to help fill in the existing gaps, especially since school leadership has historically been defined as the domain of men in general, and White men in particular (Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2006). There is no doubt, the voices of Black Women principals need to be heard.

Statement of the Problem

The accountability systems from state to state have been driven by the federal government's repurposing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The reauthorizations that have taken place over time have served as the catalyst for increasingly unreasonable accountability measures to be sanctioned on schools throughout every region of the United States. With these mandates, educational leaders

are being held accountable for the success or failure of the students in their charge on standardized assessment measures. Although legislators view these sanctions as means to creating more effective schools and improving the achievement of students, and thus generating effective outcomes for students and teachers, the undue pressure and demands the mandates placed on principals causes frustration and burnout at high levels (Wise, 2015).

An added pressure for administrators is ensuring they are able to find new ways of increasing students' motivation and achievement, all the while carefully examining their leadership practices, styles of leading, and their schools' cultures. As a result, the demands on school leaders continue to increase. Therefore, principals are often stressed and frustrated with the daily challenges associated with efficiently and effectively operating a school. Many principals struggle to maintain or ever create positive school cultures at their schools (Beaudoin & Taylor, 2004). Building and maintaining a positive school culture can be an uphill battle for many principals (Modan, 2019). Research indicates that principals are the essential element in shaping and sustaining a positive school culture. This research suggests the struggle to maintain a positive school culture is directly tied to school principals' leadership characteristics or styles (Peterson, 2002). Leadership owns every aspect of climate and culture, and they influence every aspect of the school every day (Modan, 2019).

In Dr. Anthony Raymer's doctoral dissertation, he noted that as the principal enters the situation, the effective leader assesses the situation for the positive and negative qualities of the setting and goes about making changes based on his or her leadership approach and interactions (2006). It can be assumed that ineffective leaders

enter the situation and overlook the area of culture as they go about the business of their schools. This may be because some leaders do not recognize the impact the culture has on the teaching and learning process. Other leaders may be challenged by time constraints, budget limitations, and other school level dilemmas that distract them from a focus on embracing school culture to help them to get the desired outcomes they want for their schools. Sometimes this occurs as a result of instituted changes; however, some administrators are unwilling to waste resources on changes that are not proven and have not been tested. The goal of every principal should be to lead a successful school; therefore, it is imperative administrators are able to recognize the level of influence they have in shaping the culture of their schools. Allowing principals' time to reflect is an important aspect of helping them to recognize and embrace their influence on their students and their schools.

According to Linda Darling-Hammond, leadership matters. She claims the effective leadership provided by a school principal comes second only to the guidance of an effective classroom teacher when looking at student achievement. In her work on the principalship, Darling-Hammond (2005) notes, "School leadership strongly affects student learning. Principals are central to the task of building schools that promote powerful teaching and learning for all students" (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p. 3). Waters and Cameron (2007) indicates the role of the principal in a school is crucial. They say, "No longer is there a question about the effect of leadership on student achievement. Clearly, leadership makes a difference." (Waters & Cameron, 2007, p. 3).

While it may appear to be evident school leaders play a major role in creating and cultivating a positive school culture, little is known about how the leadership style of the

principal correlates to school culture. According to Melesse (2018), the improvement and enhancement of students' academic achievement was the result of three factors: school culture, teachers' commitment, and students' motivation. Additionally, Hoy and Miskel (1987) posit school culture has a great influence on students' academic achievement. It has been determined, toxic school cultural practices are obstacles for every attempt to improve students' academic achievements (Anthony, 2004). Since research has shown school culture is a contributor to the success of the school, it is important to understand how the behaviors of the principal relate to creating and maintaining a positive school culture. There is also little known about how Black Women principals' leadership styles impact student achievement and school culture at the schools they lead. Additionally, insufficient research exists that examines how Black Women principals' lived experiences inform their styles of leading. There is even less evidence that confirms how the lived experiences of Black Women principals are impacted and influenced by simply being African Americans. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of Black Women principals and how those experiences impact them as leaders (including their styles of leading and the way they view themselves as leaders).

Research Questions

Through my research, I addressed the following overarching research question: How do lived experiences, as they relate to race, class, and gender of Black Women principals, impact the way they lead? The following sub-question guided my study:

1. How do the lived experiences of Black Women principals impact their styles of leading and the effect of those leadership styles on the culture and climate in their schools?

Significance of the Study

Voices of Black Women for centuries have been stifled, silenced or often ignored. In 2008, as a Black Woman, an eternal hope was reignited within many Black Women, as America watched Michelle Obama become the first Black First Lady in our country's history. The nation excitedly watched as she prepared for her family's entry in January 2009 to the White House. From First Lady Michelle's media coverage as she and her husband, soon to be, President, Barack Obama headed to the polls to vote on November 4, 2008 to the non-stop coverage of the non-traditional inaugural walk to their new home, visibility was never an area of concern for the strong, Black Woman Michelle Obama proved herself to be. Women and men throughout the world recognized the First Lady's position as President Obama's wife, confidante, advisor and partner in life and all things (Adichie et al., 2016). Perhaps her supporting role made her appear to be non-threatening.

Two terms later, America seemed to be moving in a positive direction as the nation elected its first Woman Vice President. History was made when a woman of color was sworn into the second highest position in the nation. Hope sprung eternal in many hearts; however, for some that eternal hope has been greatly diminished by the blatant invisibleness of Vice President Kamala Harris. Many critics of Harris are lauding her as the most ignored, invisible, and non-productive Vice President in recent history (Tobin, 2021). Her insignificance when contrasted with Michelle Obama's significance creates a

juxtaposition that Black Women's stories need to be told and their voices deserve to be heard. According to Vice President Harris in an article in the New York Post, all her problems can be summed up in two words: race and gender. She says the only reason for the widespread perception that she has gone from a historic role model to a much-ridiculed failure in less than a year is that she is the only vice president who has not been a white male (Tobin, 2021). Just like Michelle Obama, there are many Black Women principals who appear to have flawless leadership. On the other hand, it is my opinion, there are far too many Black Women principals who feel invisible and without a voice. Some black and other minority ethnic groups of women are 'theoretically erased' and appear to be virtually unseen (Crenshaw, 1989). This holds true in the principalship, also. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, just ten percent of principals are Black and eighty percent of teachers are White. The demographics highlight the isolation Black Women principals often experience, as well as the structural nature of their exclusion and virtual invisibility (Aldrich, 2018). She claims that previous research on Black Women and other minoritized groups suggests this environment could be a likely locus for microaggressions. Yet, information about how Black Women experience the role of school principal has not been studied specifically (Aldrich, 2018). Aldrich (2018) also posits research indicates Black Women often have fewer opportunities to join professional networks and access the resources that are actually available to them.

The principalship is a very demanding office. The increasing demands being imposed upon school leaders often cause frustration, exhaustion, and unnecessary amounts of stress. These and many other factors cause some administrators to exit the

profession to obtain some semblance of peace and an attempt at a normal life (Wise, 2015). This study can be used to help superintendents to understand the need for principal mentorship and principal collaboration programs that provide a layer of support to principals who feel overwhelmed by the demands of their position and are frustrated with having to go at it all alone. The collaboration and culture frameworks can be used to assist them with having relevant content for their principal and/or aspiring principals' mentoring programs.

In addition to being appropriate for mentoring programs for administrators, this study can help principals who are interested in improving the cultures at their schools to understand the importance and significance of doing so, as school culture/climate is a part of the evaluation process for all school leaders in many states, like South Carolina. Each of the competencies on the Program for Assisting, Developing and Evaluating Principal Performance (PADEPP) instrument has a cultural component to it (Spearman, 2015).   It could encourage and motivate them to analyze their own leadership styles in an effort to determine whether or not their style matches the current needs of their schools. Further, this study can be useful to higher education institutions for their principal preparation programs as well as system-level professional development departments that have leadership programs designed to prepare administrators for principalship positions. It can provide them with materials that can be used in their programs to help prepare principals for understanding and preparing for the task of creating a healthy and positive culture in their schools. The study revealed a number of other ways in which the findings can be used as a means for understanding how important our lived experiences are in helping us to develop as human beings and as leaders. More details will be provided in chapter five

on how the study can be extended and future recommendations. Finally, the study provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on their lived experiences and obtain information regarding their leadership behaviors.

For a voice that is often stifled, Black Women principals had an opportunity to gain perspective on how the experiences they have had throughout their lives impact their behaviors as leaders. This study provided an opportunity for several aspects of leadership to be carefully examined through the lens of the Africana Womanism theoretical framework for future studies on Black Women leaders. Additionally, the culminating aspect of this study was to provide an emphasis on the strengthening of Africana communities world-wide as the interconnectivity and family-centrality of Africana Womanism was carefully examined and applied to the experiences of the participants through the eighteen Africana Womanism characteristics. As previously mentioned, the term Africana represents Africa and the African diaspora (which includes Afro-Latin, Afro-European, Afro-American countries and people, as well as their experiences and cultural ideologies with an Afrocentric perspective (Hudson-Weems, 2020). Just as the Civil Rights Movement can distinctly identify Martin Luther King, Jr. as the father of the Civil Rights Movement, Rosa Parks as the mother of the Civil Rights Movement, and Emmet Till as the child of the Civil Rights Movement, this study demonstrates the interconnectedness and collectivity of men, women and children in the Africana culture. Studying Black Women principals allowed for a close examination of their lived experiences and the way they ultimately influence the lives of those they serve, in particular, their children. Findings can be very helpful for determining how lived experiences can be used to not just strengthen their respective schools, but also used as a

means of strengthening their resolve to effect change for the entire Africana community. Africana Womanism as a paradigm and the eighteen characteristics that define the construct were used to examine the lived experiences of all participants revealed during interviews. A matrix was used to correlate the characteristics of Africana Womanism to the interview questions that captured the lived experiences of participants.

This study also contributed to the ongoing research that examines the relationship between the leadership of Black Women principals and the characteristics of Africana Womanism as a theoretical construct. Another layer added to research in this study is the lifting of the voices of Black Women principals and the validation of their varying lived experiences. Finally, an additional contribution to existing research comes in the way participants self-identified their leadership characteristics. This study has aligned those characteristics to the eighteen Africana Womanism characteristics and the five leadership categories identified by the Human Resources Development Quarterly Group (HRDQ-U).   In my research study, the leadership of Black Women principals has revealed a detour from the current leadership styles identified and widely accepted in research that have largely been created by and for White men (Bass & Avioli, 1993 and Corrigan & Merry, 2022). As a result of the findings from this study, the need for further research has evolved, especially from researchers who may have an interest in conducting similar studies in other countries, states, or regions. Future research can be done surrounding the following:

1.   How do the characteristics of Africana Womanism relate to Black Women principals' preferred styles of leading?

2.   What is the relationship between Black Women principals with a transactional leadership style, on school culture and student achievement?

3.   What is the relationship between Black Women principals with a transformational leadership style, on school culture and student achievement?

4.   What is the relationship between Black Women principals with a laissez-faire leadership style, on school culture and student achievement?

Definition of Terms

Africana – a term that represents Africa and the African diaspora (which includes Afro-Latin, Afro-European, Afro-American countries and people, as well as their experiences and cultural ideologies with an Afrocentric perspective (Hudson-Weems, 2020).

Africana Womanism — a term coined by Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems in the late 1980s, intended as an ideology applicable to all women of African descent. An inclusive theoretical framework (Hudson-Weems, 2021).

Africanans – A term created by Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems to refer to people of the African diaspora. The term refers to the people and their context, not the discipline. People of the African diaspora includes: African Americans, African Caribbeans, African Canadians, African Europeans, African Cubans, African Brazilians; really Africana people wherever they are (Hudson-Weems, 2021).

Active-management-by-exception occurs when leaders constantly monitor their workers' performance and keep track of their mistakes (Bass & Avolio, 2000).

Class (social) is a division of a society based on social and economic status (Oxford University Press, n.d.).

Collaborative leadership is the degree to which school leaders maintain relationships with the staff members of the school (Gruenert, 1998).

Collegial support is the degree to which teachers work together effectively (Gruenert, 1998).

Contingent reward provides others with rewards in exchange for their efforts (Bass & Avolio, 2000).

Culture is a normal and natural part of human interaction where people come together based on shared history, beliefs, identities, and values (Akua, "personal communication" October 13, 2022).

Ethnicities is broadly defined as "large groups of people classed accordingly to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background (Oxford University Press, n.d.).

Gender is either of the two sexes (female or male), especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones. The term is also used more broadly to denote a range of identities that do not correspond to established ideas of male and female (Oxford University Press, n.d.).

Idealized attributes explain the degree that leaders are able to instill pride in his or her followers for being associated with the group (Bass & Avolio, 2000).

Idealized behaviors explain the degree that leaders are able to instill pride in his or her followers (Bass & Avolio, 2000).

Individualized consideration is the degree to which leaders provide support, encouragement, and developmental experiences to followers (Bass & Avolio, 2000).

Inspirational motivation indicates the extent that the leader is able to communicate a shared vision and establish a commitment from his or her followers in achieving the goals set forth by the organization (Bass & Avolio, 2000).

Intellectual stimulation is a process where leaders increase follower awareness of problems and influence them to view problems from a new perspective (Bass & Avolio, 2000).

Laissez-faire leadership refers to a lack of leadership (Bass & Avolio, 2000).

Leadership style is described as a relatively consistent pattern of a leader's behaviors (Barbuto, 2005).

Learning partnership is the degree to which teachers, parents, and students work together for the common good of the student (Gruenert, 1998).

Passive-management-by-exception occurs when leaders fail to monitor their workers' performance and do not interfere until the problem becomes serious (Bass & Avolio, 2000).

Professional development is the degree to which teachers seek continuous personal development and value school-wide improvement (Gruenert, 1998).

Race a category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits. Race is not to be confused with the term ethnicities (Oxford University Press, n.d.).

School culture is the set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies, and symbols and stories that make up the persona of the school (Peterson, 2002).

Teacher collaboration is the degree to which teachers engage in constructive dialogue that furthers the educational vision of the school (Gruenert, 1998).

Transactional leadership relies primarily on an exchange of services and rewards between leaders and subordinates (Bass & Avolio, 2000).

Transformational leadership occurs when leaders raise the awareness levels of their subordinates and inspire them to commit to a shared vision (Bass & Avolio, 2000).

Unity of purpose is the degree to which teachers work toward a common mission for the school (Gruenert, 1998).

Summary

Research confirms school leaders play a key role in creating and cultivating a positive school culture (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). However, more research is needed that indicates how the leadership style of the principal correlates to the school culture and students' achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2005). Lived experiences influence the decisions school leaders make on a daily basis. More research is needed, relative to how Black Women principals' leadership styles impact their school's culture and students' achievement.

The Human Resources Development Quarterly Group (HRDQ) identified five top leadership characteristics that aligned to the themes revealed when analyzing the interview data of the Black Women principals who participated in the study. I have added insight to the body of existing literature on how the lived experiences of Black Women principals influences them as school leaders by aligning their leadership to HRDQ's leadership characteristics and the eighteen characteristics of Africana Womanism.

Existing literature will be discussed in chapter two. Chapter three will provide the details of my research design for this hermeneutic phenomenological study, as well as the

methodologies and outline for the execution of the study. In chapter four, I will discuss

the findings of the study as they relate to the participants and the general context of the

study. Finally, in chapter five I will discuss implications and recommendations before

providing a conclusion and reflections.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

School Reform in the United States

William E. Webster suggests, since the comprehensive reform efforts of the 1990s, an increasing emphasis has been placed on school culture and the principalship (Webster, 1994). The efforts of school leaders are among the most powerful direct sources or influences on the goings on of the school and both directly and indirectly impact teachers (Leithwood & Beaty, 2008). Leithwood & Beaty (2008) further explained that teachers' perceptions of leadership determine their levels of commitment. Therefore, school and classroom practices improve and, ultimately, so does student achievement when principals are perceived in a positive way. As such, principals must include five main actions as a part of their leadership practices: provide the school community with a vision of academic success for students, create a climate that is safe, welcoming, and cooperative, and that places the success of students as a top priority, develop the staff around them by distributing leadership and thus generating buy-in from them; provide instructional leadership in the form of coaching (ultimately leading to improved instructional practice); and establish systems and processes to collect and analyze data in order to be the driving force of school improvement (Mendels, 2012). When a principal is actively involved in the school and behaves in a manner that conveys

a message that demonstrates her commitment and passion to students and staff, poorly performing individuals can improve and achieve at greater levels (Sahin, 2011).

School reform has significantly evolved over the past fifty-five years. Attempts at improving America's schools can be traced back to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965. President Johnson's attempt at declaring a war on poverty represented a new commitment to "quality and equality" by the federal government in educating the country's youth (US Department of Education). Over the decades that have followed, the original ESEA legislation has undergone many significant revisions. In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* was published. The report linked the decline in American competitiveness for students exiting high school to a perceived lack of rigor in public schools and resulted in the adoption of learning standards in all fifty states. Linn (2000) posits, standards-based education reform was a challenge to previous practices in the field of education that differentiated and focused on instruction based upon the perceptions of teachers and the ability levels of students. By changing the emphasis on instructional practices and offering rigorous content to all students, student achievement was anticipated to rise. This focus on school improvement would eventually lead to increased accountability measures and changes in instructional practices and strategies that were expected to work for all children.

In 2001, President George W. Bush, with strong bipartisan support, reauthorized ESEA as the No Child Left Behind Act, (NCLB) which was signed into law in January of

2002. NCLB put in place important new measures to expose achievement gaps and started the dialogue on how to close them (US Department of Education, 2001). Although the law focused on promoting accountability for the achievement of all students and protecting the civil rights of at-risk students, it had significant flaws. It created incentives for states to lower their standards, emphasized punishing failure over rewarding success, focused on absolute scores instead of recognizing growth and progress, and prescribed a pass-fail, one-size-fits-all series of interventions for schools that did not achieve their state's established goals (US Department of Education, 2014).

Since 2012, it seems legislators have been searching for the perfect reauthorization that allows for flexibility with states while maintaining an expectation for there to be college and career-ready standards and assessments in place. A recently added expectation is that of ensuring accountability systems are in place that focus on the lowest-performing schools and schools with the largest achievement gaps. The added expectation of requiring districts and schools to implement teacher and principal evaluation and support systems is also in place (US Department of Education, 2020). School reform is such an important aspect of the conversation when discussing school principals because the uncertainty of the sanctions that result from school reforms and reauthorizations contribute to the stress levels and frustrations of practicing principals (Dare & Saleem, 2022).

The discussion of school reform and accountability may feel a bit out of place in a research study about the lived experiences of Black Women principals. However, it is an appropriate and necessary component of the research because in our current reality, school reform and accountability measures are a major portion of the pressures and

stresses Black Women and all other principals are experiencing. Additionally, the discussion of school reform and accountability is significant for Black Women principals because many times Black Women are assigned to underperforming schools that come with the demands and stigmas of state sanctioned school improvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2014)

Although it might appear in our current society, there is no space for leaders to place an emphasis on an aspect of school that goes largely unaddressed, school culture. When ignored, this very significant component of a school's persona can lead to detrimental results (Daresh & Lynch, 2010). In some schools, leaders feel the need to focus more on the seemingly more important aspects of their schools like curriculum, assessment, and accountability because these issues normally result in some type of grade for the school and, consequently the leaders themselves (Hobbs, 2022). The role of the principal is increasingly becoming more demanding. Prior to the global pandemic the position of principal had begun to be viewed as essential to the success of the school (Varela & Fedynich, 2020). With such a challenging and essential role, the position has become more and more difficult to navigate. For example, in addition to all of the day to day tasks required to manage a school, principals are also expected to be instructional experts to provide appropriate leadership and guidance to their teachers. Additionally, with the coronavirus pandemic came the need to make decisions that provided schedule and class changes, staff assignments, and student placements based on the need to provide a safe environment for all. The added pressure of keeping staff and students healthy added another layer of responsibility to some already overwhelmed administrators. Since there is no prescription for successfully navigating the office, many

principals across the country struggle to find a proper balance. The Mid-Atlantic

Regional Education Laboratory Program (REL) (2019) believes school leaders matter a

lot based on the fact that research confirms leaders as a key lever in improving education.

According the program, leadership only comes second to teaching as an influence on

student success. The REL program provides evidence of the changing landscape of

school leadership (REL, 2019). Their research has identified three key challenges that

current and prospective principals face:

>1. Increased job complexity. Principals' roles encompass an array of
>administrative and instructional demands. They are expected not only to
>run their buildings but also to serve as experts who observe, coach, and
>develop staff to become better teachers.
>2. Sufficient supply of candidates. Districts, especially higher needs ones,
>have difficulties attracting and retaining enough highly qualified leaders.
>3. Adequate preparation. Research supported by the Wallace Foundation
>found that principals are dissatisfied with the quality of their preparation.
>Many preparation programs, according to a report from RAND, fail to
>provide opportunities to gain leadership experience and ready principals
>for the realities of their jobs (REL, 2019).

With these changing roles of principals, in some places the distractions to investing in

more effective school management are beginning to be delegated elsewhere, allowing

principals to build a vision and school culture that support effective instruction and

student success (REL, 2019).

Research looking at Black Women's leadership orientations and ways of engaging as principals provides insight into their approach and efficacy (Weiner et al., 2022). During 2020, the twin pandemics, both disproportionately impacted BIPOC (e.g. Black, Indigenous, and/or people of color) communities. The first, COVID-19, was rampant in communities of color (Weiner & Burton, 2022). CDC data showed Black people dying from COVID-19 at almost three times the rate of Whites (CDC, 2020). The second, related, and continuing pandemic was that of White supremacy and anti-Black racism in all aspects of contemporary society, including US schools and school systems (Watson, 2020b). As natural nurturers, it might be assumed that Black Women principals would able to put staff and students' minds at ease and make decisions that created an environment that was non-chaotic and limited levels of stress. Such incredible leadership of Black Women during this time would not be uncommon. School principals, in their role as leaders, are expected to improve the quality of education for all. Principals are expected to be motivators for staff and students, to demonstrate care and concern for all, and to make provisions for an enviable learning environment (Dare & Saleem, 2022). These expectations were not extinguished during the pandemic. Peters (2012) speaks to the "philosophy of caring for students" (p. 24) as a characteristic of Black Women principals. Bass (2012) found care as the primary driver of Black Women principals' work and decision-making. This type care is understood to be grounded in concepts of mothering (Collins, 2000) in which leading schools and educating Black children more broadly are situated in "deliberate acts of love, nurturance, guidance and community rebuilding" (Loder, 2005, p. 308). As part of this orientation to care and to mother, Black Women also show a commitment to changing systems of oppression and racial inequity

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to facilitate greater access, opportunity, and outcomes for minoritized children (Lomotey, 2019) that will ultimately lead to achieving true social justice for all. This is especially important for Africana communities. The term Africana represents Africa and the African diaspora (which includes Afro-Latin, Afro-European, Afro-American countries and people, as well as their experiences and cultural ideologies with an Afrocentric perspective (Hudson-Weems, 2020).

History of Black Women

From slavery to Jim Crow, through the Civil Rights Movement to the present, a quest for freedom and true liberation has been the reality of Africana people. Unfortunately, the struggle continues and has continued since antiquity. This struggle is especially true for Black Women. Black Women in Antiquity provides a dramatic account of the role of black women in history. The matriarchy, probably one of the oldest forms of social organization, appears to have originated first in Africa (Sertima, 2007). The concept of men and women being in concert together in their liberation struggle is not a new one. In ancient Kemet (Egypt) there was equality between men and women. Ancient Egyptian women had political power as well as a general voice in the running of the country, as did their sisters in other parts of Africa. They also had the opportunity to hold high offices and were often very wealthy and prosperous. This was in contrast to the situation of their counterparts, women in the Near East and Asia (Sertima, 2007).

Even in ancient times, the strength of women can be seen in their ability to lead with dignity, grace, and wisdom. Several women of ancient Kemet ruled their nation from time to time. Kemet is by far the best documented of the ancient African nations

and its female citizens probably had more freedoms than any other females in the ancient world (Sertima, 2007). Although the rulership of Kemet (Egypt) was entrusted exclusively to the male, there are a number of accounts where strong African women served as leader and ruler of Kemet. Women were a vital part of the ancient society, and just like in Africana Womanism, these ancient mothers were well respected and recognized. The Palermo Stone lists the names of the mothers of the kings of that dynasty. This is very important since it was through these mothers that the ancient dynasties originated (Sertima, 2007). This is likely a strong indication of the truly matriarchal nature of Kemetic rulership and culture. In these ancient systems, it is evident that women must have wielded a great deal of power, had a definite voice in government and a direct influence on the rulership of the reigning kings (Sertima, 2007). In an Eighteenth Dynasty inscription appeared the following:

> The king's wife, the noble lady, who knew everything Assembled Kemet.
> She looked after what her Sovereign had established. She guarded it. She
> assembled her fugitives. She brought together her deserters. She pacified
> her Upper Egyptians. She subdued her rebels, The king's wife Ahotep
> given life (Sertima, 2007).

It appears very obvious that Ahotep was highly regarded as a fierce leader of Kemet.

Another very powerful ancient female leader was Hatshepsut who served as a queen and regent. Hatshepsut's father, King Thutmose I, extended the borders of his territory into parts of Asia. He was succeeded by his son Thutmose II, who had as his queen his half-sister Hatshepsut. Thutmose II's son, who was still a young child when his father died, was declared heir to the throne; however, his aunt Hatshepsut was

appointed regent for him.   She was a strong and successful ruler representing the strength

and power of the Africana woman. Hatshepsut once wrote, "My command stands firm

like mountains, and the sun's disk shines and spreads rays over the titular of my august

person, and my falcons rise high above the kindly banners to all eternity." (Sertima,

2007)

Hatshepsut was an absolute ruler whose character developed from familial roles

dating back five generations before her birth. Like the current Africana Womanist,

family is of the utmost important in Kemetic communities – ancient, past, and present.

Like many Africana Womanist today, Hatshepsut is remembered as being brave,

beautiful, and ingenious (Sertima, 2007).

The history and rich legacy of the Black Woman begins in antiquity in the ancient

civilization of Kemet and others confirming that Black Women have not developed

strength as a result of the struggles they have undergone over the past century or two, but

Black Women have been strong warriors, queens, and regents beginning in the earliest

dynasties. Such facts are important to note, as the strength and fortitude of the Black

Woman predates slavery, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement, Women's Liberation,

Black Lives Matter, and all of the other more recent movements that tend to suggest a

new ideal and concept of women possessing the strength needed to serve as strong

leaders because these brave and noble matriarchs have possessed the strength needed to

lead boldly since the beginnings of time. Black women in antiquity, certainly a thought

worth thinking.

For decades, Black Women have struggled to earn an appropriate recognition as

the incredible leaders they are. From the antebellum south through Jim Crow and on

throughout the Civil Rights Movement to the challenging and perplexing present filled

with social and political unrest, Black Women have demonstrated their intelligence,

fortitude, and superior leadership skills in sundry ways. For example, The National

Council of Negro Women was led by Dorothy Height, who also served as the president of

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority (Bell, 2020). Another strong example of Black Women in

leadership is Margaret Wilson, the first woman to lead the National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.). Black Women have boldly fought to free

our country from the vestiges of slavery and Jim Crow. They were active in the Civil

Rights Movement in an effort to make life better for their communities. Black women

continue to be an active part of the movement to achieve social justice in Africana

communities. Black women had significant roles in this fight but were too often invisible.

These women, who served as agents of societal change, have paved the way for Black

Women in education, politics, and other careers to blaze new trails.

      Many of these important women's names have not been recorded in history,

while versions of others' stories have been allowed to be told to document an account of

history that has been accepted as truth by many. However, some of those women's

stories have often been modified and adjusted to create a textbook version of some very

dark and demoralizing times in U.S. history. Some very important women in the history

of Blacks in America have been deliberately written out of history because they

challenged white counterparts and what were considered to be the societal norms of the

time (Lopate, 2012). One such example can be noted in the life of Frances Ellen Watkins

Harper. During an interview with Leonard Lopate, historian, Nell Painter describes Mrs.

Harper, as a free born Black. Quite an anomaly of the time, Mrs. Harper was also an

educated black person who held Underground Railroad Conductor, Harriet Tubman in very high esteem. As an abolitionist, suffragist, poet, and author Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was bold and unafraid to challenge the norms of the time. During this interview, it was shared that Mrs. Harper also connected with other abolitionists of her day whether free born or enslaved.

At one point in history (1865 — 1867), there was a mixed group, including both black and white women, of abolitionist who were working for reform as a unified group. When Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony became vocal about their opinions of black men gaining the right to vote, that movement soon began to fall apart. Stanton and Anthony, although strong feminist, were willing to work with their white male counterparts to keep Black men from receiving the right to vote. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper challenged their belief that racism and classism had no place in the movement during an 1866 convention. She made a speech, similar to the one Sojourner Truth is famous for, that is nearly inaccessible in historical records today. Her bold challenge created a rift between her and the white women suffragists because Anthony and Stanton refused to understand that for Black Women, women's rights could not be separated from issues of race (Lopate, 2012).

Francis Ellen Watkins Harper was quoted in the abolitionist newspapers (Primary Source) where many other suffragists were introduced. Unlike Sojourner Truth, Mrs. Harper was not included in the women's history that came from those newspapers and made it to modern accounts of Women's History. Portions of Mrs. Harper's speech challenged the entire suffrage movement and created, no doubt, a level of discomfort for white suffragists. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper boldly declared,

I do not believe that giving the woman the ballot is immediately going to

cure all the ills of life. I do not believe that white women are dew-drops just

exhaled from the skies. I think that like men they may be divided into three

classes, the good, the bad, and the indifferent. The good would vote

according to their convictions and principles; the bad, as dictated by

prejudice or malice; and the indifferent will vote on the strongest side of the

question, with the winning party.

You white women speak here of rights. I speak of wrongs. I, as a colored

woman, have had in this country an education which has made me feel as if

I were in the situation of Ishmael, my hand against every man, and every

man's hand against me. Let me go tomorrow morning and take my seat in

one of your street cars — I do not know that they will do it in New York,

but they will in Philadelphia — and the conductor will put up his hand and

stop the car rather than let me ride (Lopate, 2012).

Harper concluded this powerful declaration with a tribute to Arimenta Harriet Ross (known

to most as Harriet Tubman), also known as Minty to her family and friends. She said

concerning Ross,

We have a woman in our country who has received the name of "Moses"

not by lying about it, but by acting out — a woman who has gone down into

the Egypt of slavery and brought out hundreds of our people into liberty.

The last time I saw that woman, her hands were swollen. That woman who

had led one of Montgomery's most successful expeditions, who was brave

enough and secretive enough to act as a scout for the American army, had

her hands all swollen from a conflict with a brutal conductor, who undertook

to eject her from her place. That woman, whose courage and bravery won a

recognition from our army and from every black man in the land, is

excluded from every thoroughfare of travel. Talk of giving women the

ballot-box? Go on. It is a normal school, and the white women of this

country need it. While there exists this brutal element in society which

tramples upon the feeble and treads down the weak, I tell you that if there

is any class of people who need to be lifted out of their airy nothings and

selfishness, it is the white women of America." (Proceedings of the

Eleventh National Woman's Rights Convention).

Such a controversial speech delivered to an entire convention of women left Mrs. Harper

on the outside of the suffrage movement, but not on the outside of working for the rights

of Blacks. She was co-founder of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs.

While Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's story has largely been omitted from the

widely accepted accounts of history, stories of other significant Black Women have been

altered or adjusted to reflect an acceptable version or account for our history books.

Harriet Tubman, who was held in high esteem by fellow abolitionists like Frances Ellen

Watkins Harper, represents one of those females. In a documentary of Harriet Tubman's

life, it can be seen that although Harriet has been hailed as Moses, a heroine by many for

her commitment to bringing southern slaves to the North to freedom by way of the

Underground Railroad, the story of her heroism has been reduced to freeing over three

hundred slaves. During the 19 documented trips back to the southern states to free

slaves, Harriet encountered numerous challenges and unexpected detours that required

quick thinking and courage. A very hefty reward had been placed on Harriet's life. The reward described Harriet as an illiterate woman with a scar; therefore, many of her trips were made as a man with a book. When Harriet Tubman died, she was buried with Military Honors in Fort Hill Cemetery in New York; however, she lived her last days in abject poverty because her efforts went largely unnoticed and unappreciated because of her identity as a woman. Contrariwise, many of her fellow male abolitionists regarded her highly and recognized her courage and fortitude. Fellow abolitionist, John Brown called her "General Tubman" and regarded her as one of the best and bravest people on this continent.

Frederick Douglas, a Black Male who is regarded for his radical ways and courage said this to Harriet Tubman:

> Most of that I have done and suffered in the service of our cause has been
>
> in public. I have had the applause of the crowd and the satisfaction that
>
> comes with being approved by the multitude. While the most you have
>
> done has been witnessed by the few trembling, scared, and foot-sore
>
> bondsmen and women whom you have led out of the house of bondage
>
> and whose heartfelt God Bless You has been your only reward!

Frederick Douglas' words indicate his awareness that although Harriet Tubman was a noble and brave woman who fought the fight of freedom for southern Black slaves, she was basically invisible to the cause because she was a woman, a Black Woman (Fernandez, 2018).

Black Women as Leaders: Types and Styles

Women in leadership is not a new phenomenon, although Black Women have been faced with the woes of the interconnectedness of their race, gender, and in many instances, their class for centuries, presented in Sojourner Truth's oration, "And Ain't I A Woman", in the text below:

Well children, where there is so much racket, there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the Negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about?

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man – when I could get it – and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or Negroes' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full?

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much

rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ

come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman!

Man had nothing to do with Him.

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world

upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it

back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it. The

men better let them.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing

more to say. (US Department of Interior, 2017, p. 1)

Despite all, Black women have strong leadership skills and have demonstrated

them for centuries, which has been shown in all aspects of Black History and Black

culture. As is still the reality today, many of these heroines are without a prominent place

in history because of their commitment to their cause more than their commitment to

exalt themselves (Bell, 2020). Black Women have long since had a triple consciousness

that includes race, class, and gender (Welang, 2018). Many of these visionary

pragmatists faced their fears by demonstrating remarkable courage in accepting the

uncertain and sometimes dangerous consequences of their leadership. These Black

Women generally embodied three modes of leadership: transformational leadership,

servant leadership, and adaptive leadership. Transformative leadership is creative and

adapts non-traditional approaches to lead in their particular contexts. These

transformative women eschewed top-down leadership and encouraged others to develop

their own approaches to leadership and then supported them to achieve their goals.

Transformative leadership develops an atmosphere of trust, which is a major component of transformative leadership (Bell, 2020). Some of the main characteristics that develop an atmosphere of trust are: commitment, consistency, reliability, and diligence. Another very important aspect of transformational leadership is respect. Respect manifests itself in reliability, transparency (disclosing intentions and actions), and inclusiveness (Bell, 2020). Transformational leadership among these women, just like in women today, encouraged maximum participation and the taking on of leadership roles to effect positive change. This type leadership is motivational and inspirational to others (Bell, 2020). The Africana paradigm is one of inclusivity and transparency in this continued fight for social justice. Black women and their unwavering commitment to building their communities is an example of servant leadership type of leadership.

Servant leadership defined leaders who are rooted in their desire to first serve their communities and others, as opposed to gaining power or fame for themselves. Black women have embraced work without recognition for centuries. Although they did not seek recognition, they realized strategic recognition would help further their work (Bell, 2020). It's important to note, servant does not mean servile. In Christian religions the ultimate servant leader is often considered to be Jesus Christ. Harriet Tubman is also a powerful example of servant leadership. She led hundreds of slaves to freedom while never seeking notoriety for herself or personal gain. She continued to sacrifice to help others throughout the remainder of her life. She served as both a Union Army scout and spy. After the Civil War, she established a home for the aged in New York (Fernandez, 2020). Servant leaders are gentle, humble, and generous. Those characteristics are also true of Social Justice Leaders today (Bell, 2020).

Adaptive leadership ensures that leaders thrive in challenging environments and receive the support and sustenance necessary to continue their work over a lifetime. Black Women Leaders developed a sense of confidence and self-worth through the Civil Rights movement and the contributions they made. This allowed them to have life-long development in their personal and professional lives. Having a firm grasp on Black culture and recognition of their cultural heritage helped them to develop effective coping mechanisms allowing them to lead without being paralyzed by fear of the unknown (Bell, 2020). Their individual growth and dedication to improving the lots of Black people were natural consequences of their personal circumstances and philosophies. This type of leadership forced Black women to be courageous in the face of fear. Myrlie Evers, a strong Civil Rights activist and widow of Medgar Evers, lived with the fear of their home being bombed and the threat of assignation looming over them at all times (Bell, 2020). However, she continued to work alongside her husband for the betterment of Blacks in America. Black women's leadership is compassionate and loving focusing on the values of redemption, forgiveness, and peace. Black Women understood being forgiving was not an act of weakness, but one of assertiveness and power. Being able to forgive allowed women to exhibit a moral authority and grace. Examples of this powerful phenomenon are Mamie Till Bradley, the mother of the murdered Chicago teen, Emmett Till and Coretta Scott King (Bell, 2020). Mamie Till Bradley sent her only son to Mississippi for a two-week trip to visit with family. Unfortunately, the young man was cruelly murdered because of the color of his skin. Even through such a tragic loss, Mamie was able to forgive as she grieved the loss of her only child. The world mourned with Coretta Scott King when her husband, Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated for

his leadership of the modern Civil Rights Movement (Bell, 2020). Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems closed an interview for her soon to be released biography with these words, "If God can forgive you, then so can I." This powerful quote provides a perfect example of the essence of Black Women.   Just as Black Women faced challenges and trials in leadership over time, Black women leaders today face similar woes and obstacles in all aspects and arenas of leadership, especially education. Black women leaders are tasked with improving schools, creating successful schools, and moving the academic needle, all while creating a strong, positive school culture and climate that can be sustained through all situations that may arise. Additionally, Black Women principals are often forced to find the style of leading that supports their philosophies of education while allowing them to be true to their beliefs and convictions about students and learning.

Often times, Black Women principals are not supported in their efforts to improve their schools because their styles of leading are non-conventional and do not align with what is traditionally or widely accepted in the field of education today (Grogan, 2010). This can create a real disconnect and present principals with unnecessary struggles (Wallace, 2015). Black Women principals must also learn to adapt to the situations facing them in their respective schools and apply the leadership necessary to navigate their trials. One important aspect of being an effective and impactful leader is understanding and knowing exactly what your style of leading is.

Black Women Principals

Fanny Jackson Coppin was born on January 8, 1837 as a slave. When she was twelve years old, her aunt purchased her freedom. She worked as a servant for George Henry Calvert and studied whenever she could. Ms. Coppin attended Oberlin College –

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the first school to accept Black and Female students. In 1865, she accepted a position at the Institute for Colored Youth (now Cheney University) where she taught Greek, Latin, and Mathematics. In 1869 Ms. Coppin became the first Black Woman principal (Perkins, 1982). African American girls and women have persisted since the days of slavery in the United States to become the exceptionally accomplished scholars they are. They have done so despite the many obstacles that they've been threatened by, over the course of hundreds of years to curtail their achievements (Arao, 2016).

According to Thomas and Jackson (2007), the educational advancements of African American women have afforded them opportunities to play a crucial role in the empowerment of African American communities and to uplift the African American race (Thomas & Jackson, 2007). Their research illustrates the veracity of the belief shared by enslaved Africans in the United States that education would be the key to true, lasting, and enduring freedom (Arao, 2016). Scholars like Thomas and Jackson (2007) agree that it cannot be presumed that the struggle for equity for African American girls and women is over (Thomas and Jackson, 2007). Therefore, we must continue to lift the stories of Black Women to serve as motivation and support to other women on their leadership journey. Freedom, after all is a process – not an endpoint. This process is a part of the journey of Africana Women (Arao, 2016).

Black women and educators have played and continue to play a pivotal role in overcoming inequities that are far too common in the educational system in America (Pringle & Bradley, 2021). Black Women principals invest both their time and money into their students and their communities. They (Black Women principals) are able to remain resilient in the face of unsurmountable obstacles (Pringle & Bradley, 2021).

While all educational leaders face challenges in achieving success, African American Women principals face a unique set of challenges associated with the complexity of their gender, race, and age (Msila, 2022). Black Women leaders encounter patriarchal domination every day – forcing them to always be mindful of the role of race, gender, and class on their leadership (Msila, 2022). Many feminists believe the primary struggles for Black Women are a result of their gender. Feminists like bell hooks (1995) believe that the woman's struggles in society should be against all perceived sources of domination. Hooks proports the need to view things through a feministic lens (1995). However, Africana Womanists like Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems, counters the argument of the Feminists with an interrogation of who actually possesses the social and political power to truly be an oppressor (Hudson-Weems, 2020). As such, in the Africana Womanism paradigm, Black Women are not in a liberation struggle against Black Men, but rather with them, (Hudson-Weems, 2020).

Black Women principals commitment to students and educating them deserves acknowledgment. Black Women principals should be honored and celebrated for their "stick-to-it-ness" that helps them to make important things happen in their schools (Pringle & Bradley, 2021). The ability to persevere is an important attribute of a leader. The "stick-to-it-ness" referenced by Pringle and Bradley (2021) is akin to the concept of a leader being able to persevere in the face of obstacles and difficulties. That type of resiliency can help leaders to navigate through those experiences that may appear insurmountable. In many instances, Black Women leaders must make meaning of their leadership as they tread along. This can possibly be credited with a level of resilience in these Black Women principals, in response to the adverse and tumultuous circumstances

they are exposed to (Rosette & Livingston, 2012). Foster (2021) states that Black Women leaders are more likely to be able to utilize coping strategies to shield themselves from obstacles like humiliation, marginalization, and frustration (Foster, 2021).

In their YouTube video, The Importance of Black Women in Education/Thank You Black Women, Becky Pringle and Bernita Bradley recognize, celebrate, and honor Black Women by saying thank you. They hail these Black Women principals as everyday heroes who deserve to be recognized for all of the sacrifices of time and talent they make to education each and every day. They also explain that Black Women need strong support systems to be effective in their leadership (Pringle & Bradley, 2021). These support systems can show up in sundry ways. One way could potentially be through strong mentoring programs for Black Women leading schools. Although such programs may not be popular at this time, the need for that level of support is the reality for many school leaders. According to Rosette and Livingston (2012) as a result of numerous obstacles, some Black Women leaders may not be successful as leaders, and as they flounder, they fail alone because there are few or no people to lean on for advice and mentoring (Rosette & Livingston, 2012).

Existing knowledge about educational supports calls for more information to be available regarding racialized educational experiences and practices (Maylor et al., 2021). The leadership of a Black Woman principal can be affected by the type of school she is assigned to lead. Her professional (and personal) experiences which causes her to reflect on what it means to be a leader often guides her practice (Maylor et al., 2021). Research by Rosette and Livingston (2012), confirmed that Black Women leaders suffer from double jeopardy, and were evaluated more negatively than Black Men and White

Women, but only under conditions of organizational failure (Rosette & Livingston, 2012). Leader typicality, the extent to which individuals possess characteristics usually associated with a leader role, mediated the indirect effect of leader race, leader gender, and organizational performance, on leadership effectiveness. The researchers suggest that Black Women leaders may carry a burden of being disproportionately sanctioned for making mistakes on the job (Rosette & Livingston, 2012). Berry and Cook (2019) contend that 'telling stories of one's experiences can provide important lessons for the future' (Bell & Cook, 2019, p. 86). Therefore, researching the lived experiences of Black Women principals can have lasting implications for other Black Women principals in the future.

In his hermeneutic phenomenological study, Dr. Derek Brauer revealed three emergent themes that helped him explain how school administrators made meaning and gained understanding of their lived experiences (Brauer, 2014). The principals were expected to understand how to regulate boundaries and maintain privacy as they utilized social networking tools to participate in an online personal learning network (PLN) (Brauer, 2014). The themes revealed that explained school administrators' understanding were: must share and exchange resources to help each other grow, personal and professional benefits were powered by their participation in the PLN, and privacy should not be a priority (Brauer, 2014). Dr. Brauer's use of hermeneutic phenomenology allowed him to study how the participants experiences, traditions, and culture shaped their ordinary, everyday practices and their participation in the PLN (Laverty, 2003).

Researching the lived experiences of Black Women can provide valuable information to those individuals interested in discovering how those experiences impact

that (Black Women) demographic group as well as others. In her doctoral dissertation,

Dr. Adrienne Aldaco's research focused on capturing the experiences of Black Women

principals. Her study researched the experiences and perspectives of African American

Women principals in School Improvement Grant (SIG) Turnaround Model Schools.

Through their stories, the principals explained their roles, responsibilities, and actions as

leaders of chronically low performing schools (Aldaco, 2016). Dr. Aldaco found that

through implementing sustainable systems and processes, having and encouraging growth

mindsets, and building relationships, each woman worked to increase student

achievement and to create a culture of continuous improvement (Aldaco, 2016). She

believes her study to have uplifted the standpoint of Black Women despite the challenges

and barriers faced as leaders and Black Women (Aldaco, 2016). One of the most

important things Dr. Aldaco learned from her participants is that there is power in having

a moral purpose and dedication to children and school communities (Aldaco, 2016). Her

research paved the way for future researchers to further investigate the lived experiences

of Black Women in contexts other than in School Improvement Grant d(SIG) Turnaround

Model Schools.

In 2018, Dr. Jennifer Jackson-Dunn published a research study conducted with

eleven African American Women leaders. Her research revealed five themes that were

presented and discussed as they were perceived by the eleven principals. The themes

were perceived barriers of work-life balance and faculty push back, racism and sexism

which included the feeling of being silenced, which was experienced by most of the

participants in their principalship, the need for mentorship, the strengths of African

American leaders which were considered to be imperative in being able to deal with the

experiences of racism and sexism as well as use them to overcome possible obstacles as barriers to their success in leadership, use the Four Dimensions of Principal Leadership (Jackson-Dunn, 2018). For Dr. Jackson-Dunn, this was an unanticipated theme. Her research sought to identify barriers to the position of school principal or assistant principal as African American Women leaders. Therefore, she was certain to include any of the perceived barriers. Racism and sexism were identified as prevalent barriers for African American females in maintaining leadership positions. All of Dr. Jackson-Dunn's participants felt their experiences in K-12 education had an impact on their leadership as well as their life experiences. The study also identified the need for more mentorship programs prior to the principal position (Jackson-Dunn, 2018).

Phakeng (2015) discusses how Africana Women are often viewed as virtually invisible because of the dominance of patriarchal values, he shares that the chances of Black Women assuming leadership positions are almost nil, and their invisibility is very pronounced (Phakeng, 2015). According to Pringle and Bradley (2021), we can no longer sit idly by and fail to recognize the significance and value of the contributions of Black Women. We have to begin to "see" them for who they truly are, powerful and impactful leaders (Pringle & Bradley, 2021).

My study adds the voice of the Black Woman to the leadership conversation. My study picks up to add to the existing literature where current literature leaves off. Black Women have an opportunity to be heard as their stories are told from their perspectives through their lived experiences. This research study introduces a new lens on the Black Woman's leadership characteristics based on the experiences that they have lived. The characteristics identified by participants have been aligned to the characteristics of

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Africana Womanism and categorized by the top five leadership characteristics identified by the Human Resources Development Quarterly group (HDRQ-U, 2019).

Africana Womanism: A Defined Paradigm for Lived Experiences

During a conversation with Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems, she spoke very candidly when asked why she saw the need for a paradigm such as Africana Womanism. She shared,

I highlight key issues relative to our ideal existence as Africana people, who must become free from all forms of racial domination. This offers a brief exercise for ensuring that one leaves such a conversation (or any of my books) with a clearer understanding of the dynamics of Africana/Africana-Melanated Womanism. In realizing this, we will then fully understand why the authentic paradigm is the perfect one for all people of African descent. Further, in explicating how it differs from other female-based constructs, it is my sincere hope that we come to the conclusion that we do not have time to spend on unfulfilling exercises, like competing, with each other for whatever reasons. We have got to be bigger than that. Instead, we should be putting our energy in coming together, with the consensus that collectivity can ultimately bring us true victory, not just the success of a minute percentage of the overall human population. And should that be, after all, our real goal, our empowering legacy to be handed down to our future generations. To be sure, in knowing the specific agenda of African Womanism, via grasping the power of its 18 characteristics, our mission, requiring the creation and

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facilitation of strategies for bringing to full fruition true social justice for

us, will then be more expeditiously realized. Our time is now! We must

collectively aid in making possible the ultimate survival of the entire

Africana family – men, women and children, collectively. In it together!

(Hudson-Weems, "personal communication", October 9, 2022)

Therefore, by definition, Africana Womanism, earlier called Black Womanism

from its inception in the mid-1980s, is conceptually grounded in precepts dating back to

African antiquity. Africana Womanism is an authentic family-centered paradigm.

Central to the overall nature and experiences of global Africana women in particular the

justifiable prioritization of race, class, and gender, which naturally puts forth activism as

key in the African Womanist persona. This is a powerful quality observed by the editors

of *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary*

Tradition (1997):

An Africana woman…is a black woman activist who is family-centered rather

than female centered and who focuses on race and class empowerment before gender

empowerment. Of all the theoretical models, Hudson-Weems' best describes the racially

based perspectives of many black women's rights advocates beginning with Maria W.

Stewart and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper in the early nineteenth century (Hill, 1979).

Hudson-Weems argues that Africana Womanism is in no way an addendum to feminism,

Black feminism, African feminism, or Alice Walker's womanism. In Hudson-Weems

school of thought, feminism and gender issues are separate areas of concern and do not

rely upon each other. As such, Africana women are able to address gender issues when

they arise without partaking in any way in feminist activities (Hudson-Weems, 2020).

Hudson-Weems (1998) explains how she came to coin the term Africana Womanism. She says,

Africana Womanism is a term I coined and defined in 1987 after nearly two years of publicly debating the importance of self-naming for Africana women. Why the term 'Africana Womanism'? Upon concluding the term 'Black Womanism' was not quite the terminology to include the total meaning desired for this concept. I decided that 'Africana Womanism,' a natural evolution in naming, was the ideal terminology for two reasons. The first part of the coinage, Africana, identifies the ethnicity of the woman being considered, and this reference to her ethnicity, establishing her cultural identity, relates directly to her ancestry and land base – Africa. The second part of the term 'womanism', recalls Sojourner Truth's powerful impromptu speech 'Ain't I a Woman?', one in which she battles with the dominant alienating forces in her life as a struggling Africana woman, questioning the accepted idea of womanhood. Without question, she is the flip side of the coin, the co-partner in the struggle for her people, one who, unlike the white woman, has received no special privileges in American society (Hudson-Weems, 2020).

The term Africana represents Africa and the African diaspora (which includes Afro-Latin, Afro-European, Afro-American countries and people, as well as their experiences and cultural ideologies with an Afrocentric perspective (Hudson-Weems, 2020). Since antiquity, Black Women have always been strong, resilient, tenacious, courageous, and determined. The list of qualities that define them and their lived

experiences is vast. The innumerable lived experiences of Africana women have helped to cultivate their identity, and to provide a space to have true and genuine relationships with others. Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems, progenitor of the concept of Africana Womanism, identified the elevation and empowerment of the Africana race and community as the center of consciousness for Black Women. She postulates that Africana men, women, and children share a unique connection, allowing the triumvirate to garner strength from one another, realizing that they are far better together than they could ever be apart from one another. As such, the experiences of these women define who they are and how they lead, both in life and in their respective schools, as they face the challenges that arise in their lives as Black Women.

In her theory, Africana Womanism, Dr. Hudson-Weems does not minimize the subjugation of the Africana woman, for she contends that the Africana woman has, in fact, been marginalized on three dimensions: race, class, and gender. However, she is very clear, on her position, which is that marginalization for the Africana woman has occurred in that very order – race, class, and gender. To be sure, Africana Womanism does not focus on gender empowerment to the exclusion of all else. To define the theory of Africana Womanism, it is important to first understand what Africana Womanism is not. Africana Womanism is not the black version of feminism, as some have purported. Why not? Hudson-Weems explains, "To begin with, the true history of feminism, its origins and its participants, reveals its blatant racist background, thereby establishing its incompatibility with African women" (Hudson-Weems, 2020, p. 12). During the Women's Suffrage Movement, it became very clear that the agenda of the White women leading that cause did not include their black counterparts. Although the original

message of the Movement was said to have been the abolition of slavery and equal rights for all people, the white women in the Movement were very clear and vocal about their disappointment when the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States that ratified the voting rights of Africana men, leaving women, particularly White women's rights, unaddressed (Lopate, 2012).

Africana Womanism is different from other female-based concepts. There are myriad concepts that can be compared; however, since this study is not designed to be an interrogation of feminism, I will paint with a broad brush in an attempt to present the four waves of feminism, as none of the ideologies were the proper fit for this study.

Beginning with the term Feminism, which we will refer to as the first wave, is a female-centered ideology dating back to its beginning with the Women's Suffrage Movement of the nineteenth century, led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony (Lopate, 2012). Since the mid-19th century, organized feminist movements in the United States have called for greater political, economic, and cultural freedom and equality for women. Yet not all of the movements shared the same goals (that are usually very specific), taken the same approaches, including their calls for action (activism) or included the same groups of women in the rallying cries that are sent out (Pruitt, 2022). Generational differences make it easy (and common) to hear feminism divided into four distinct waves, each roughly corresponding to a different time period. This concept of the "waves of feminism" first surfaced in the late 1960s as a way of differentiating the emerging women's movement at the time from the earlier movement for women's rights that originated in 1848 with the Seneca Falls Convention (Pruitt, 2022). Critics of the "wave" concept argue that the idea is an oversimplification of a very complex history to

suggest that only one distinct type of feminism exists at any one time in history (Pruitt, 2022). Pruitt (2022) acknowledges the imperfection of the wave concept. However, she posits that it remains a helpful tool to use when outlining and understanding the tumultuous history of feminism in the United States.

The First Wave is associated with the time period 1848 – 1920. The first organized movement aimed at gaining rights for American women effectively began in July 1848, with the Seneca Falls convention in New York. Women were demanding equality with men and called for women's right to vote. The women's rights leaders resented Black Men being granted suffrage (15th Amendment) before White Women (19th Amendment) Pruitt, 2022). Black Women had no real place in this movement as their equality did not mean the same thing as the White Woman's equality then or now (Hudson-Weems, 2020).

The Second Wave is associated with the time period 1963 – 1980s. The National Organization for Women (NOW) at its second annual National Conference in 1968, elected Betty Friedan as president (Pruitt, 2022). During the sixties, a heavy emphasis was being placed on changing the trajectory of Blacks via eradicating racism, proponents of feminism continued to support female centrality (versus the fight for family-centrality or equal rights for all people). Author, Betty Friedan, in *The Feminine Mystique, said,*

> The feminists were pioneering on the front edge of woman's evolution.
> They had to prove that women were humans. They had to shatter,
> violently, if necessary, the decorative Dresden figurine that presented the
> ideal woman of the last century. (Hudson-Weems, 2020).

Ms. Friedan argued that women were chafing against the confines of their roles as wives and mothers (Pruitt, 2022). This second wave of feminists called for a reevaluation of traditional gender roles in society and an end to sexist discrimination (Pruitt, 2022). Feminism, or as it was referred to at that time, "women's liberation" gained strength as a movement and a political force in the 1970s when the National Women's Political Caucus was established in 1971 (Pruitt, 2022).

Like the suffrage movement, second-wave feminism drew criticism for centering privileged white women, and some Black women formed their own feminist organizations, including the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) (Pruitt, 2022). During this same time frame, Dr. Hudson-Weems was in search of a paradigm that would allow her to make a stronger connection to herself that represented who she was and all of who her people were. She was also uninterested in being associated with a concept that would force her to take a name that was not her own. The term feminism is an assigned term that did not match her philosophy of how to make life better for Africana people. As such, she put forth her own framework that was not gender-exclusive, but one that centered the entire family (Hudson-Weems, 2020).

The Third Wave was associated with the time period of the 1990s. Although the advances of second-wave feminism had more equality and rights for women, the movement that emerged in the 1990s focused on tackling problems that still existed, including sexual harassment in the workplace. Third wave of feminism also sought to be more inclusive when it came to race and gender. The work of Kimberle Crenshaw on the concept of "intersectionality," or how types of oppression (based on race, class, gender, etc.) can overlap, was particularly influential in this area (Pruitt, 2022). During a formal

discussion with Dr. Hudson-Weems, she explained that there has always been the need to prioritize these three ideals (race, class, and gender). She actually put forth the interconnectedness of the concepts in the early 1980s. She said, "I have called those ideals interconnected because they are. They come together, they always do. Yes, they must be prioritized with race being the thing that will be noticed first no matter what." She has done an amazing analysis of these three plights in the Tripartite Plight of Africana Womanism. (Hudson-Weems, "personal communication", 2022, October 9)

The Fourth Wave is a present-day reality. According to Sarah Pruitt this wave is quite possibly the most difficult to define. Some people argue it is simply a continuation of the third wave. However, the emergence of the Internet has created a very different brand of social media-fueled activism. In 2007, Tarana Burke launched the #MeToo movement (Pruitt, 2022). Since 2017, this movement has gained momentum and aims to hold anyone guilty of sexual misconduct responsible no matter how famous they may be.

Africana Womanism is intended to unite the Africana community. The characteristics of this framework are solidly the characteristics found in Black women since antiquity. Those characteristics are Self-Namer, Self-Definer, Genuine in Sisterhood, Strong, In Concert with Males in Struggle, Authentic, Whole, Flexible Role Player, Respected, Male Compatible, Respectful of Elders, Ambitious, Adaptable, Mothering, Spiritual, Family Centered, and Nurturing (Hudson-Weems, 2020). These characteristics are demonstrated in all facets of life, including the experiences of women, especially Black Women. The Africana Womanism paradigm affords the opportunity to view the challenges Black Women face through a scope of interconnectedness, allowing

her to hyper-focus on the family and community, including schools where they may be assigned as leaders.

In her book, *Africana Womanist Literary Theory* (2004), Dr. Hudson-Weems outlines a list of 15 Positive/Negative Elements of relationships among Africanans. These elements are essential in solidifying the message that Africana Women are not in their liberation struggle alone. These characteristics are as follows: love/contempt, friendship/rivalry, trust/distrust, fidelity/infidelity, truth/deceit, mutual respect/disrespect, support/neglect, humility/arrogance, enjoyable/mean-spirited, compassionate/callous, sharing/caring/selfish/egocentric, complimentary/critical, secure/insecure, interdependence/dependence, and spiritual/non-spiritual. Attention to these elements can provide Black Women with a foundation to begin to examine their lived experiences, heal and move forward towards that struggle for liberation that has always been a part of the Africana reality which guides all of their actions, interactions, and experiences in life and leadership.

Africana Womanism, an inclusive paradigm, demanding inclusivity in the community to unite men, women, and children in the struggles they face, has far reaching implications for the future of the Africana community. The focus on the interconnectivity and unification of members of the community promotes togetherness and propriety for all. An outlook that allows men, women, and children to operate within their respective roles enables them to realize the reciprocal nature of giving and receiving support from each other. A recent study from Georgetown Law confirms that Black girls feel the sting of adultification bias creating a rare form of discrimination that only Black girls are feeling. The new report, "Listening to Black Women and Girls: Lived

Experiences of Adultification Bias," reveals findings from groups that assessed whether the original study aligns with the real lives of black girls and women, as well as what should be done to address adultification bias (Georgetown School of Law, 2019). Such experiences as young Black girls impact the lives of Black Women. The use of a theoretical construct like Africana Womanism can give Black Women a platform to use their voices to actively engage and promote discourse surrounding race, class, gender, cultural awareness, and other important topics, especially in schools. Khalifa et al. (2013) posits race, ethnicity, and color, which are important to every leader's context.

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences, as they relate to race, class, and gender, of Black Women principals. Africana Womanism was used as a theoretical construct to examine the lived experiences of Black Women principals to explore how the prioritization of race, class, and gender influence the preferred leadership style of the participants. Africana Womanism is a powerful tool that examined the lived experiences of the participants who are all women of African descent. Using this framework explained how the elements of Africana Womanism influences their leadership.

The term Africana represents Africa and the African diaspora which includes Afro-Latin, Afro-European, Afro-American countries and people, as well as their experiences and cultural ideologies with an Afrocentric perspective (Hudson-Weems, 2020). The principles of Africana Womanism: Self-Namer, Self-Definer, Family Centered, Male-Compatible, Strong, Whole and Authentic, Spiritual, Respectful of Elders, Adaptable, Ambitious, Mothering, Nurturing, Family Centered, Genuine in

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Sisterhood, In Concert with Males in the Liberation Struggle, Flexible Role Players, and Respected and Recognized, guided the interview protocols. These principles were carefully examined to determine their ultimate influence on Black Women principals interactions and decision-making as leaders, leading them to resiliency and fortitude (Hudson-Weems, 2020). According to Max van Manen, capturing the lived experiences of the participants would better help me come to an understanding of the deeper meaning and significance of all of their human experiences, in the context of the whole of human experience (2016). Capturing the lived experiences of these Black Women principals equipped me to understand and appreciate the deep meanings of their respective experiences.

Africana Womanism lists the 18 characteristics. Each of the characteristics listed above have specific meanings that collectively serves as the basis of Africana Womanism. Self-naming and self-defining are two closely related characteristics of Africana Womanism. The term "nommo" is given to the idea of self-naming. This is important to ensuring we only answer to the names we choose to be called. This helps to establish self-identity for Black people through their own point of view of their world that goes against that of the dominant culture. The word "nommo", which is an African terminology, meaning the proper naming of a thing that brings it into existence. A third of the Africana Womanism characteristics is family-centered. The principle of family-centrality places an emphasis on the entire black family unit. The success of the Black community as a whole, leads to the fourth characteristic, wholeness. This references the Africana community provides a sense of wholeness so that the entire community may survive as a whole. The whole of the community is not overshadowed by vying for

individual accolades or accomplishments. Wholeness also represents the Africana

Womanist's ability to be okay with herself, realizing that she is complete and needs

validation from no one (Hudson-Weems, 2020). Characteristic five is spiritual. Spiritual

is not to suggest that Africana Womanists are all going to have the same faith base.

Instead, it refers to our belief that a Supreme Being exists. It also validates our existence

in a natural world, while recognizing and respecting that a spiritual world co-exists.

Spirituality also stresses the importance of the reverence for traditional African spiritual

systems. The spiritual systems call for a collection of principles including ancestral

reverence, oneness with self, and an appreciation of nature (Hudson-Weems, 2020). The

sixth characteristic is respectful of elders. This is common throughout Africana

communities, there is a true respect for the elders and the wisdom they possess. Having a

high level of regard and respect for those who are older allows for cross-generational

relationships that provide strength to the community. Adaptable is the seventh Africana

Womanism characteristic. Being adaptable for the Africana Woman transcends most

boundaries of having to be adaptable and possessing the ability to monitor and adjust.

Such adaptability allows for the Africana Womanist to take a licking and keep on ticking

(Hudson-Weems, 2020). Characteristics eight and nine are usually referenced together,

as mothering and nurturing. The Africana Womanist is a nurturer by nature. She's

committed to the art of mothering and nurturing, her own children in particular, but

humankind in general. This mothering and nurturing includes the genuine care given to

children and their families (Hudson-Weems). One does not have to be a biological

mother to strongly possess the characteristics of nurturing and mothering. Characteristic

ten is strong. Strong is not to be misunderstood with the myth of the "Strong Black

Woman" because the characteristic is so much bigger than that. It's not meant to support the myth that Black Women are so strong, they cannot feel pain either. This strength is the strength that is crucial for the survival of a people. Strong also means brave and having the courage to lead in the midst of calamity (Hudson-Weems, 2020). Characteristic eleven is male compatibility. The Africana Womanist desires to have positive male and female companionship. Hudson-Weems says that it is the beautiful bond between Black Men and Black Women that helps to maintain the race (Hudson-Weems, 2020). The quest for positive relationships is a top priority for both the Africana man and woman. Hudson-Weems has identified fifteen positive-negative tenants of male-female relationships as can be seen below:

1. Love/Contempt

2. Friendship/Rivalry

3. Trust/Distrust

4. Fidelity/Infidelity

5. Truth/Deception

6. Mutual Respect/Disrespect

7. Support/Neglect

8. Humility/Arrogance

9. Enjoyment/Mean-Spiritedness

10. Compassion/Callousness

11. Sharing/Caring/Selfish/Egotism

12. Complimentary/Negative Criticism

13. Security/Insecurity

14. Interdependence/Dependence

15. Spirituality/Non-Spirituality

According to Hudson-Weems, the way to achieve strong healthy male-female relationships is to begin with the list (Hudson-Weems, 2020). In Concert with Males in the Liberation Struggle is characteristic twelve. Africana Womanist are not fighting against Africana men. They do not view Black Men as their enemies. Instead Black Women are fighting alongside Black Men against oppression. Unlike feminist who view males as their primary enemies, Africana Women see themselves as fighting on the same team as Black Men. Being in concert with men is the Africana woman's attempt at developing strong relationships with like minded men in the struggle for liberation for all Africana people (Hudson-Weems, 2020). Characteristic thirteen is ambitious. Ambition and responsibility are highly important in the life of the Africana Womanist. These are also qualities that her family depends upon her for, too. Africana families see their mothers, sisters, aunts, and grandmothers as being self-reliant and resourceful at all times. They see the Africana Woman making a way out of no way. With determination and drive, the Africana Woman will refuse to throw in the towel (Hudson-Weems, 2020). Characteristic fourteen is flexible role player. In the Africana home, the roles are often blended. The Africana Woman, unlike White Women has not had the privilege of being homemakers exclusively. Therefore, at times the roles of individuals in the Africana home may look undistinguishable. The Africana man may prepare dinner for his working wife before she gets home if he gets home early. The Africana child may start the laundry before parents arrive home from work on a given day. These roles resort back to whatever it takes – when making things work at home (Hudson-Weems, 2020).

Respected and recognized are characteristics fifteen and sixteen. Hudson-Weems (2020) claims that before we can expect love and respect from others, we must first recognize the need to care for and respect ourselves. The Africana Womanist demands respect for and recognition of herself in order to acquire true self-esteem and self-worth, which in turn enables her to have complete and positive relationships with others (Hudson-Weems, 2020). Having a strong sense of self and respecting one's self cultivates in the Africana Woman an ability and desire to reciprocate that respect and recognition to others. Genuine Sisterhood is characteristic seventeen. This genuine sisterhood is a reciprocal sisterly bond that is not easily broken. The Africana Woman enjoys supporting her "sisters" and belief that having these sisterly (friendships) relationships are truly invaluable. This bond allows for Africana Women to look out for and support one another, regardless of the need. This sisterly bond includes the ability to tell each other the truth, no matter how drastic (Hudson-Weems, 2020). Finally, characteristic eighteen is authenticity. The Africana Woman does not need permission to be herself. She is free to show up as who she is every day, leaving it up to those around her to embrace this authenticity or shy away from it. As an authentic being, her standards, her acts, and her ideals reflect those dictated to her by her own culture. As such, her essence complements her culture and there is never the need for her to be anything other than her (Hudson-Weems, 2020).

These eighteen characteristics of Africana Womanism have been theorized by Hudson-Weems to all be in the possession of the Africana Woman to a varying degree. The characteristics will be used to guide interview protocols, as well as to frame the analysis of the data as codes and themes are emerging. Each of the characteristics will be

considered and analyzed for impact when data are being reviewed. As themes are developed, the eighteen Africana Womanism characteristics will be applied to the themes to validate the use of the paradigm in the study if applicable.

Leadership Styles

Multifactor leadership theory is one of the most researched theories in the social sciences field because it focuses on leadership and organizational effectiveness. There are different forms of this approach in the literature, and it is considered in three dimensions: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles (Hoy & Miskel, 2010). Transformational leadership places transformation, development, and human values at the forefront (Bass & Avolio, 1993) and is formed with idealized effects to inspire motivation, intellectual stimulation, and personal importance dimensions. Transformist leaders think, examine, and take risks for realizing tasks in the organization, in addition to imbuing certain notions and visions for organizational purposes in the employees of these organizations (Torres, 2019). Transactional leadership is defined as a leadership style that prioritizes the organizational achievements that are focused on the organization. The sub-dimensions of transactional leadership are conditional award, management with expectancy, and management with passive expectancy. Transactional leaders manifest a leadership style that focuses on the continuous accumulation of the productivity of employees over the organization's history and they overlap with creativity and transformation. Laissez-faire leadership emerged in opposition to transformational and transactional leadership and refers to a managerial approach based on the absence of a leader in an organization and/or the indifference of the leader to the organization and its employees (Rowold & Schlotz, 2009).

Connecting with a style of leading, as a principal is essential to the success of her school as there is so much to be done. Everything that happens in a school reflects upon the principal. Therefore, principals must be well equipped to manage the many roles of the principalship in an expert manner. Although culture plays a part in a school's successes and failures, it takes a school leader to transform that culture into one that is strong and supportive of student achievement (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). In their book, *School Culture Recharged: Strategies to Energize Your Staff and Culture*, Gruenert & Whitaker (2017) conclude that the relationship between people and culture is incredibly complex and inarguably important. Which one (people or culture) is the cause of changes and which one (people or culture) is affected varies from situation to situation. However, there is no disputing that each child has a direct and indirect connection with both the people and the culture in their schools. School leaders must be attuned and sensitive to this dynamic. We must always remember that leaders can pull each other up in a positive direction or push each other down ultimately harming our schools and our students. By working together, we can support one another. By working in absentia of others, we are unable to provide the interconnectedness necessary to strengthen our communities and each other. Being intentional in what we do will make a tremendous difference in our people and our schools. It is critical that we take on the challenge. It is one worthy of our best effort. Culture always wins, and when a positive culture wins, so do our students (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017).   The principal is essentially responsible for shaping school cultures (Snowden & Gorten, 1998). Therefore, one purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between Black women principals' lived

experiences and how those experiences influence their leadership styles and school

culture and climate as revealed through data examined from their interviews.

School Culture and Climate

Leadership has an impact on every aspect of a school from environment to

academics. If Black Women principals are not supported in efforts to become effective

leaders, they often struggle with making decisions that can move their schools forward.

A lack of mentorship and established systems of support for new principals may force

principals to have to choose where their concentration must go. Often the principal's

chair feels like the loneliest place in the world. Principals struggle with prioritizing and

creating a sustainable plan for themselves and their schools. Some principals go about

their daily routines in a frenzied manner trying to ensure all the work is done, and all

boxes have been checked. However, they have no idea why they lean towards certain

ideologies more than others or why particular aspects of the job seem more easily

conquered than others. This could be the result of having not connected with or

identified their preferred style of leading. This could also be a result of not understanding

the need to understand their schools' culture. In a professional learning community,

connecting with your why is imperative (Principal Kafele, 2020). A leader is responsible

for creating an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. This can only

happen when the leader understands who he/she is as a person and as a leader including

being at the helm of the school improvement process in his/her building. In their seminal

book, *Time for Change,* Anthony Muhammad and Luis Cruz (2019), they claim:

> The most vital assets in any organization are the human resources, and the
>
> leader is responsible for managing these resources. The task of

cultivating, organizing, and motivating people to improve an

organization's productivity holds much importance, especially for school

leaders, who seek improvement to ensure that students grow, develop, and

reach their maximum potential, the key to a community's prosperity.

Leading school improvement is serious business, indeed! (p. 1)

Without exception, every school has a culture that can be identified and defined.

Gruenert &Whitaker (2015) discuss six culture types originally identified by Fullan and

Hargreaves (1996) and Deal and Kennedy (1999). The culture types are: Collaborative,

Comfortable-Collaborative, Contrived-Collegial, Balkanized, Fragmented, and Toxic.

These culture types can help explain why the feeling of schools differ from campus to

campus. Every school has a culture and a general tone that meets a visitor at the door.

Some schools are welcoming and enjoyable to visit, while other schools are sterile and

uninviting. Some schools subscribe to the mantra, students should be seen and not heard,

while other schools encourage students' engagement and discourse and purposeful chatter

can be heard throughout the building. Some schools have a steady stream of students in

route to the principal's office, while in other schools, teachers can be found in private

discipline conferences with students about classroom and school-wide expectations.

If the purpose of schooling across America is the same, why would there be such

drastic variations in the way schools operate? The practices, protocols, structures,

processes, procedures, routines, rituals, and values define the school's culture. The daily

practices are categorically different. A school's culture will distinguish it from another

school with an identical set of demographics and location (rural, urban, suburban,

physical distance apart and so forth). Gruenert and Whitaker suggests these differences

create cultural distances (Gruenert &Whitaker, 2017). These aforementioned categorical differences are what defines the school's culture. For instance, all schools have a set of guidelines and protocols that outline the school's communication plan. In some schools, this process is very formal, outlined and detailed in a section of the school's handbook or procedural policy guide. In other schools, this process may be less formalized and the communication plan might simply be a weekly email to the staff about the events of the upcoming week. Therefore, it can be assumed, the differences observed in school cultures impact the business of school for all stakeholders. According to Roland S. Barth, one of the most important and probably the most difficult responsibilities of an instructional leader is to change the prevailing culture of the school. He says changing a toxic culture into a healthy school culture that inspires lifelong learning among students and adults is the greatest challenge of instructional leadership (Barth, 2002).

Kent Peterson posits that schools need clear structures and strong, professional cultures to foster teacher learning, describing school culture, positive versus toxic cultures, and staff development. He suggests the culture of a school influences the way people think, feel, and act (Peterson, 2002). Although culture has a tremendous effect on leadership, in the end, leadership makes all the difference (Gruenert and Whitaker, 2015). *The Shaping School Culture Fieldbook* by Kent Peterson and Terrence Deal explains, for the past several decades, nationwide efforts have focused on school reform. Many school principals have a lot on their minds and even more on their plates. Each day is full of situations that require immediate attention and landmines that could potentially explode at any time and without warning. In a single day, a principal may have to serve as referee to quarreling students, a counselor to a distraught teacher, a motivator to a discouraged

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staff member, and a meteorologist watching the weather patterns of an impending storm. It could be deduced that when the school principal is not having to deal with these daily crises, their primary focus should be on instruction (Lashway, 2003). Although instruction should always be a top priority in a school, the *Shaping School Culture Fieldbook* suggests a different top priority. These authors propose, culture is what really matters and is where principals need to devote much of their time, attention, and energy. Without a well-focused and cohesive set of cultural norms and values, a school will be adrift (Deal & Peterson, 2002). Here are a few that can be beneficial: 1. Read the cultural signs and clues; 2. Assess what is working and what is not; and 3. Where needed, change things for the better. Black women principals, like all principals, are expected to create a culture and climate within a school that allows for a focused and cohesive set of cultural norms and values to guide their practices (Deal & Peterson, 2002). These practices are always going to be guided by the lived experiences of these Black women.

Summary

Africana Womanism is significantly different from all other female-based theories with its prioritization of race, class, and gender. Hudson-Weems (1993) has confirmed the need for Blacks to create our own concept, tailoring it to meet the needs of all Africanans. Africana Womanism meets the unique needs and demands of our communities as Africana people in a way that no other theory has before. When practiced, the eighteen characteristics can meaningfully improve our communities. As a family-centered paradigm, Africana Womanism differs from other female-based theories that are female-centered. Although Africana Womanism is an appropriate ideology for all Africana people, the appropriateness is very specific to the needs, dynamics, and

ideologies of each respective Africana community. Africana people are not to be minimized, generalized or stereotyped as each community is uniquely different, yet exactly the same with a desire to create a lasting legacy for their children.

It was in 1932 that Carter G. Woodson, the father of Black historiography who is responsible for our Black history month celebration, maintained that the continued debasement and degradation of Black women will not cease until all Africana men and people stop providing ammunition to the enemy to maltreat and abuse the Black woman (Hudson-Weems, 1993). Africana Womanism is a family-centered theory that focuses on men and women working together for social justice as they face the oppressions plaguing Africana people together. As previously mentioned, the term Africana represents Africa and the African diaspora which includes Afro-Latin, Afro-European, Afro-American countries and people, as well as their experiences and cultural ideologies with an Afrocentric perspective (Hudson-Weems, 2020).

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences, as they relate to race, class, and gender, of Black Women principals. Africana Womanism was used as a theoretical construct to examine the lived experiences of Black Women principals to explore how the prioritization of race, class, and gender influences their leadership. Africana Womanism was the tool used to examined the lived experiences of the participants who were all women of African descent. Using the Africana Womanism framework explained how the elements of Africana Womanism influences their leadership.

The term Africana represents Africa and the African diaspora which includes Afro-Latin, Afro-European, Afro-American countries and people, as well as their experiences and cultural ideologies with an Afrocentric perspective (Hudson-Weems, 2020). The characteristics of Africana Womanism: Self-Namer, Self-Definer, Family Centered, Male-Compatible, Strong, Whole and Authentic, Spiritual, Respectful of Elders, Adaptable, Ambitious, Mothering, Nurturing, Family Centered, Genuine in Sisterhood, In Concert with Males in the Liberation Struggle, Flexible Role Players, and Respected and Recognized, guided the interview protocols. The eighteen characteristics

of Africana Womanism were examined to determine how they impact Black Women principals interactions and decision-making leading them to resiliency and fortitude (Hudson-Weems, 2020). According to Max van Manen (2016), capturing the lived experiences of the participants would better help me as the researcher to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning and/or significance of all aspects of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience. Capturing the lived experiences of these Black Women principals equipped me to understand and appreciate the deep meanings of their respective experiences. According to van Manen (2016), "The data of human science research are human experiences" (p. 63). These human experiences are the foundation for understanding the deep meanings and interpretations that were the result of the interviews with participants.

In hermeneutic phenomenological human science, the interview serves very specific purposes: (1) it may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon, and (2) the interview may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience (van Manen, 2016). The question guiding my research was, How do lived experiences, as they relate to race, class, and gender of Black Women principals, impact the way they lead? The following sub-question guided my study: "How do the lived experiences of Black Women principals influence their styles of leading and the effect of those leadership styles on the culture and climate in their schools?" These questions were used as the structured framework that guided both interviews. Van Manen posits in both uses of a conversational interview that it is important to realize that the interview process

must be disciplined by the fundamental questions that prompted the need for the interview to begin with (2016). He also claims the insight into the essence or the nature of a phenomenon involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience. He says that ultimately the project of phenomenological reflection and explication is to affect a more direct contact with the experience as lived (van Manen, 2016).

According to Marshall and Rossman (2014), qualitative research allows individuals to reflect on their experiences, illuminate their narratives, and understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address problems or issues. For this study, I used phenomenological methodology (through a phenomenological qualitative research design) because it allowed me to illuminate rich descriptions and personal meanings of lived experiences related to Black Women principals. While the method of ethnography is used to identify shared patterns of a cultural group, I chose to use hermeneutic phenomenology for my study. My research centered on the lived experiences of participants. Although, a case study approach, would have allowed for the development of detailed portrayal and case analysis of a single case or numerous cases, I chose rather to use hermeneutic phenomenology to focus on the experiences of the participants in my study (Peoples, 2021). Guided by the research traditions of hermeneutic phenomenology, I constructed meaning from the lived experiences of the participants in the study.

Africana Womanism, an inclusive paradigm, demanding inclusivity in the community to unite men, women, and children in the struggles for liberation, allowed me to investigate the lived experiences of participants and how those experiences impact

them as school leaders.   I used the tenet of hermeneutics: past and present horizons to examine the lived experiences of Black Women principals and the theoretical concept of Africana Womanism (Bhattacharya, 2017).

I reviewed several hermeneutic studies during my research to garner an understanding of the hermeneutic methodology process to assist me with the methodology of my research. In her hermeneutic phenomenological study, *Fiery Passion and Relentless Commitment: The Lived Experiences of African American Women Principals*, Dr. Adrienne Aldaco examined how Black Women principals determine their identities, function as leaders, and overcome obstacles to be inspirational and successful school leaders of turn around model schools (Aldaco, 2016). Dr. Jennifer Jackson-Dunn's dissertation, *African American Women Principal's Perceptions of Challenges Faced in Obtaining and Maintaining Principal Leadership*, illuminated the intersectionality of race and gender as defined by Crenshaw. Although our philosophies differ, and my work focuses on interconnectedness as opposed to intersectionality, the study was helpful in centering my participants' lived experiences. As an extension of feminism with a focus on gender exclusivity, intersectionality was not the theoretical construct that best matched the needs of my study. As the original concept of the interconnectedness of race, class and gender, Africana Womanism's focus on interconnectivity was a better fit, allowing me to examine data collected from participants in a way that would allow themes to naturally (and authentically) emerge from the data. Dr. Jackson-Dunn's study pointed out how the African American female principals identify, understand, conceptualize, interpret, and overcome obstacles in leadership (Jackson-Dunn, 2018). A third study was also used during my research, *A Hermeneutic*

Phenomenological Study of School Administrators' Participation in Personal Learning Networks and Privacy Issues, conducted by Dr. Derek Brauer. This hermeneutic phenomenological study was designed to understand how school administrators made sense of their experiences utilizing social networking tools to participate in personal learning networks (PLN) while managing privacy (Brauer, 2014). I used these studies to help me to construct meaning from the lived experiences of the participants in my study by studying their methodology and gaining a clearer understanding of how the circular nature of hermeneutic phenomenology actually works when applying it to data sets.

Research Design

In order to explore Black Women principal's experiences, this study used a hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative design to examine how these experiences impacted the leadership of each of the participants. Concerns that relate to the method of qualitative research inquiry included potential challenges like the role of the researcher, purposeful sampling, data collection, data analysis, limited interpretation, and the fine line that exists between transcendental and hermeneutic methodologies (Bhattacharys, 2017). I researched currently practicing Black Women principals from three regions of a south eastern state: the upstate, the midlands, and the piedmont regions. This qualitative study drew from phenomenologically informed principles which are well suited for a study utilizing Africana Womanism as an analytic lens. In particular, I used hermeneutic phenomenology (in a phenomenological qualitative research design) which is concerned with conveying the human experience as it is lived (Laverty, 2003). Capturing the lived experiences of each of these Black Women principals allowed me to give voice to the experiences and circumstances of life that have helped to develop them as the leaders and

people they are. This was very useful from an Africana Womanism perspective because as a researcher, I am able to explicate the past and present experiences of the participants to adequately explain their influence on their preferred leadership styles. Hermeneutic phenomenology provided a means for overcoming the "objectivity" of dominant assumptions (Laverty, 2003). Having six Black Women principals as participants in my study, it could easily have been assumed that data sets would look very similar to each other. However, when each participants data was analyzed and reviewed, it became very obvious that each of the women had her own unique and varying set of experiences, no matter how similar experiences may have been. Moustakas (1994) explains phenomenology as seeking meanings from appearances and arriving at essences through intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experience, leading to ideas, concepts, judgments, and understandings. He also says, "Phenomenology is committed to description of experiences, not explanations or analyses" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 58).

Qualitative research is most appropriate when little is known about an issue, phenomenon, or population (Mills & Gay, 2016). The purpose of this study was to achieve a greater understanding of the experiences and to augment the voices of Black Women principals. I found this approach to be an appropriate design given the (1) exploratory nature of this study, and (2) need to capture a rich and detailed understanding of lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This type of research design focused on the perspectives of the participants (Aagaard, 2017). It also provided them with opportunities to articulate their thoughts and be reflective of the varying experiences they have lived to gain an understanding and acquire new knowledge (Glaser, 2002). Appropriate questions had to be asked to be able to accurately describe participants'

experiences. Therefore, this allowed the concrete and detailed descriptions from Black Women principals' perspectives to be derived, which has added to the body of research highlighting the lived experiences of Black Women principals (Phillips-Pula et al., 2011).

The research design of this study while examining lived experiences of Black Women principals was a phenomenological qualitative research design. One purpose of phenomenological research is to generate the lifeworld experiences of a certain population (Peoples, 2021). The research design of this study while examining lived experiences of Black Women principals was hermeneutic phenomenology. Relevant aspects of a phenomenological qualitative research design were examined as a part of the framework I used to inquire about the experiences of the participants. Participants were Black Women principals from public schools in a southeastern state. As a Black Woman principal serving in a public school in a southeastern state, my research can serve as a catalyst for establishing Africana Womanism as an appropriate paradigm for authenticating the lived experiences of Black Women and how those experiences can be influential on their leadership. A qualitative study drawn on phenomenologically informed principles which were well suited for a study that utilizes Africana Womanism as its analytic lens was appropriate. More specifically, hermeneutic phenomenology which is concerned with the conveying of human experience as it is lived (Laverty, 2003). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) posit that, "narrative inquiry is an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experiences as a source of important knowledge and understanding" (p. 17). Although narrative inquiry could have been extremely significant when using a theory like Africana Womanism because it would have allowed me, as the researcher, to analyze beyond dominant assumptions, I

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chose hermeneutics and was still able to organize, review and analyze data (beyond dominant assumptions) using hermeneutic phenomenology. Polkinghorne (1989) describes phenomenology as a tool to explore the structures of consciousness in human experiences. Van Maanen (1988) attempts to explain phenomenology in this way:

> From a phenomenological point of view, we are less interested in the
>
> factual status of particular instances: whether something happened, how
>
> often it tends to happen, or how the occurrence of an experience is related
>
> to the prevalence of other conditions and events. For example,
>
> phenomenology does not ask, "How do these children learn this particular
>
> material?" but it asks, "What is the nature or essence of the experience of
>
> learning (so that I can now better understand what this learning experience
>
> is like for these children)?" (p. 10)

Bhattacharya suggests what van Maanen is really teaching is that the researcher is not interested in directly exploring the experiences of a particular phenomenon per say but rather the essence of that experience, what lies in the core of the experience, the invariant pattern (Bhattacharya, 2017). I was able to use hermeneutic phenomenology as an excellent method for discovering the richness and depth of the lived experiences of participants.

The purpose of survey research is to generalize from a sample of participants to a population so that inferences can be made about the perceptions, attitudes, or behaviors of the population (Strahan et al., 2003).   As such, surveys were not essential to collecting data in this particular type of research. Since the study was designed to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of the Black Women participants as it was important for

me to capture a rich and detailed understanding of the lived experiences of these

participants (Moustakas, 1994). I was able to capture these experiences through

interviews with the participants.

Participant Selection

The phenomenological tradition calls for the selection of research participants

based on their experience within the phenomenon being researched and participants who

are willing to speak openly about those experiences and to be recorded during interviews

(Eddles-Hirsch, 2013).

I used purposeful random sampling to select Black Women principals in public

schools in three geographic regions of the south eastern state selected. The state selected

is divided into four regions: Upstate, Midlands, Pee Dee, and Low Country. The regions

each have their own unique geography and culture. Administrators were selected from

three of the four regions to participate in the research study. The Low Country was not

included in the selection of principal participants for two reasons. One, the region is a

great distance from the researcher, and since participants are given the opportunity to

select either digital or in-person interviews, there could be potential travel constraints.

Two, many of the low country districts are located along the I-95 corridor. These

districts often do not welcome researchers after the *Corridor of Shame* video released in

May, 2005. The video presented a deficit view of those districts. As such, those districts

may still be leery and skeptical of being participants in research studies. I wanted to have

at least seven Black Women principals to commit to participating as this is an appropriate

sample size for the nature of my study as Boyd (2001) regards two to ten participants or

research subjects as being sufficient to reach saturation. Six of the Black Women

principals invited committed to being a part of the research. The invitation to participants

is included in Appendix A. In a study such as mine, quantity versus quality can be a

debatable topic. On one hand, to reach saturation, having enough participants to provide

sufficient data is imperative to validate data; however, on the other hand, in a study

where large volumes of data are being collected like mine, saturation was not necessary

to have validity of the data. It is important to note that in a study like mine, saturation is

not necessary as each interview with participants will add to the existing data.

Additionally, the contributions of participants in their respective interviews cannot be

compared. Each interview reveals the personal experiences of the participants.

Therefore, all experiences are unique to the respective participants regardless of how

similar experiences may be. Finally, when coding data, there will be no point when the

interviews with participants will not have an impact on the coding process Marshall &

Rossman, 2014).   The names of Black Women principals from the three selected areas

were placed in a randomizer in EXCEL to select the participants who would be invited to

participate in the study. Prior to placing participant names into the randomizer, I

obtained a list of all of the principals in the selected state. I removed all males from the

list. The state-generated list had principals listed as Mr., Ms., or Mrs. Although names

are listed as Mr., Ms., or Mrs., there were several errors on the list, including my own

name that was preceded by Mr. As such, I initially went through the list with special

attention given to all of the names including the prefixes, removing all "Mr.s", unless I

knew the assignment was an error or the name appeared to be a female name. If there

was a question, an asterisk was placed by those names to include in the list of names to

call and confirm as female. All remaining names were verified as being Black Women

with a telephone call to the respective schools.

After a final list was generated, all names were typed into an EXCEL spreadsheet.

Using the RAND function, the names were ordered (randomly). The first ten names on

the new randomized list in EXCEL were contacted and invited to be participants in the

study. This method allowed me to continue to move forward on the list when potential

participants declined the invitation to participate. This method also allowed me to

advance to the next person on the list when friends or relatives' names were populated in

the top ten list. This happened on five different occasions.

Additionally, stratified purposeful sampling had been planned to be used.

"Stratified samples are samples within samples" where each stratum is almost

homogeneous (Patton, 2002). The purpose of stratified purposeful sampling is "to

capture major variations' even though 'a common core…may also emerge in the

analysis" (Patton, 2002, p. 240). Stratified purposeful sampling is used for examining the

variations in the manifestation of a phenomenon as any key factor associated with the

phenomenon varies (Harsh, 2011). According to Harsh (2011), in a research synthesis,

this factor may be contextual, methodological, or conceptual. However, such sampling is

no longer necessary for the scope of this research study but will be employed during

future studies by the researcher that are an extension of this one.

Instrumentation

Interviews were conducted with all of the participants to determine how their

lived experiences influence their styles of leading. Interviews were structured with

formal interview questions (Appendix B). Each interview was scheduled to last for 45 to

60 minutes. Generally speaking, qualitative interviews are conversations between the interviewer and the interviewee. Data sources can be tangible sources of information that can be collected through active measures, such as interviews or observations, or through gathering relevant documents and archived materials (Battacharya, 2017).

In-depth open-ended interviews usually focus on digging deep into a person's experiences with a few key questions that have been prepared in advance (Bhattacharya, 2017). Participants were asked questions regarding their lived experiences based on the eighteen characteristics of Africana Womanism. I prepared a Question Matrix from the characteristics of Africana Womanism (Appendix C).   The following characteristics were intricately examined during interviews:

1. Self-Naming/Self-Defining

2. Family Centered

3. Male Compatible

4. Strong

5. Whole

6. Authentic

7. Spiritual

8. Respectful of Elders

9. Adaptable

10. Ambitious

11. Family-centered

12. Genuine in Sisterhood

13. In Concert with Males in the Struggle

14. Flexible Role Players

15. Respected

16. Recognized

17. Nurturing

18. Mothering

   The interview protocol instrument was designed to be conducted in two parts. The first part of the interview was centered on the participants identity and allow the interviewer to get to know the participants as Black Women principals (Appendix D). The second interview took a deep dive into the elements of Africana Womanism and how they related to the lived experiences of the participants. The choice of data collection and the method of data collection should always be informed by the research purpose, questions, and theoretical perspective(s) (Bhattacharya, 2017). The tenets of Africana Womanism were reflected in my interview protocol in a way that is meaningful and relevant to my study (Bhattacharya, 2017) and allowed me to collect volumes of rich, meaningful data.

   Additionally, I kept a journal that I used to record my thoughts, reflections, opinions and notes. Using the journal was an excellent tool to help me to avoid any subjectivity being applied during the analysis of my data.   Researchers have found that keeping a journal, diary or log can be very helpful for keeping a record of insights gained, for discerning patterns of the work in progress, for reflecting on previous reflections, for making the activities of research themselves topic for study, and so forth (van Manen, 2016). For any of the above-mentioned purposes of journal, diary or log writing, it is likely that such sources may contain reflective accounts of human experiences that are of

phenomenological value (van Manen, 2016). This was true in my study, as well. As a researcher, I also analyzed the data through the use of analytic memoing where I was able to use the memoing process to capture my thoughts and flesh out concepts, ideas, and varying contexts that emerged in my data. I also used memoing to keep a summary of the patterns found in my data.

Data Collection

The data collection protocol was followed for collecting phenomenological data. Participants were contacted both by email and telephone to be invited to participate in the research study. The data protocol for collecting phenomenological data was followed. When participants from the randomized EXCEL list were determined, I contacted each participant to extend an invitation to participate in the study. Telephone calls were followed up with formal emails. Although I wanted to get a commitment from at least seven participants, the study was actually completed using six participants. In order to protect the participants' privacy and identity, pseudonyms were assigned. I assigned the pseudonyms both for transcribing and discussing interviews when writing. I chose to use pseudonyms that reflected the names of Women from the Bible as a way of honoring the tradition of the Black church through this study. In hindsight, it would have been appropriate to allow participants to select their own pseudonyms. When participants were contacted, they were asked if recorded Zoom interviews would be acceptable for them or if they preferred face to face meetings. All participants selected to meet via the virtual Zoom platform. Participants were initially going to receive an Informed Consent Form (Appendix E) to complete prior to beginning data collection. However, the plan was changed during the IRB approval process. Participants were

asked to select three times that they would be available for their initial interviews. I had

planned to provide all participants with a research agreement to sign before we began

data collection; however, the plan for doing this also changed during the IRB approval

process. Each participant was informed that she had the option of withdrawing from the

research study at any time. I recorded individual interviews and had them transcribed

with REV transcription software to protect internal validity. This was important because

of the volume of interview data that needed to be transcribed. Originally, the plan was to

use NVIVO as the transcription software to transcribe interview data. However, there

was a downloading issue. Although I spoke with a number of software engineers in the

company, the issue was never resolved. The REV transcription software was used to

assist me with the volume of interviews that needed to be transcribed. This was very

beneficial to the study, as the interviews were very in depth and were the source of a

tremendous amount of information. Therefore, it was extremely helpful to have

transcriptions that allowed me to revisit interviews multiple times as themes were

developed and patterns unfolded. After interviews were transcribed, I coded them using

a ground-up inductive approach to coding where my codes were developed after

transcribing and reading the interviews (Saldana, 2009). The process of coding

qualitative data varies widely depending upon the objective of the research. In general, it

involves a process of reading through data, applying codes to excerpts, conducting

various rounds of coding, grouping codes according to themes, and then making

interpretations that lead to research findings (Saldana, 2009). As such, I had to conduct

multiple rounds of coding before I was able to apply my interpretations. First, I used

inductive coding and identified codes from the data. Next, I determined what stood out

from the identified codes. Afterwards, I identified anything related to being Black. Then, I identified anything related to being a Woman. Finally, I looked for anything that related to the social class the participants identified with growing up (I even looked for references to their current social classes to ensure no relevant data was overlooked). It became clear during the coding process that all of the plans I initially made for coding had to be recalibrated because of the rich and voluminous data collected. Since second, follow up interviews were conducted, I realized I had to alternate between using inductive and deductive coding. By applying an effective coding system to my data, I increased validity, decreased bias, accurately represented all of my participants, and ensured transparency in my study (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Follow up interviews were conducted with participants to clarify ideas, discuss various aspects of the initial interviews, and to allow participants the opportunity to share anything they wanted to share that was omitted from the initial interviews. This allowed me to hyper focus on how something experienced informs the lived aspects of human phenomenon. Descriptions of lived experiences are essential in order to avoid methods of investigation that are indirect (Giorgi, 1985). Prior to conducting interviews with participants, I conducted a pilot interview and follow up interview with a non-participant. These interviews helped me to determine how the timing for actual interviews would run. I was able to adjust the timing to respect the commitments of participants. The pilot interviews also allowed me to adjust the questions. During this time, I had to reduce the number of questions, combine questions to address multiple characteristics, and eliminate questions that were no longer needed. I coded interview transcripts that were transcribed using REV software. At that time, I was able to identify themes to ensure I had adequately

prepared for the coding process with data collected from participants. I used the Africana

Womanism as an a priori coding scheme by creating a question matrix based on the

eighteen characteristics of Africana Womanism. The question matrix can be found in

Appendix C. I kept all of my field notes in my journal.

During the actual interviews, the coding process was extremely tedious, due to the

massive volume of data that resulted from asking open-ended interview questions.

Responses to the open-ended interview questions gave me more actionable insights into

the lived experiences of the participants. During this coding process, I was able to

organize and label my data into different themes to discover the relationships that existed

between them. While coding, I was able to assign labels to words (phrases) that

represented important and recurring themes from each of the participants. This aspect of

my coding was devoted to thematic analysis, allowing me to search across each of the

participants' data sets to identify, analyze, and label the repeated patterns that were being

revealed (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I used multiple types of qualitative data analysis to process through the data. I

used narrative analysis to identify the stories that became very obvious while coding.

These stories were exhilarating and often required me to have longer than usual quotes to

reveal the stories of the participants when writing. I also used discourse analysis because

I had to be very careful when selecting from what participants had to say, especially those

responses that took on a social or cultural context. Although I thought I would have to

use deductive coding because of the specificity of the eighteen Africana Womanism

characteristics that guided the context of my research, after reviewing transcripts and

sorting through the themes being revealed, I realized inductive coding, or open coding,

would be best, as I could start from scratch and create codes that were based solely on the data that had been collected. Then, I was able to take the eighteen Africana Womanism characteristics and reciprocally apply them either as stand-alone codes or to connect them to codes that had been revealed.

I also had to use framework analysis. I had to create a code frame to help me to process through all of the data. My inexperience with code frames created a slight dilemma for me when creating the first frame, which was a flat coding frame. Initially, I assumed each of the eighteen characteristics should be assigned the same level of specificity and importance to each of the codes. This proved to be much more complicated than I expected, as there were clearly characteristics that were more important in the data sets. When attempting to create codes for analysis using the flat coding frame, I realized it was extremely difficult to organize my thoughts and to navigate the themes and concepts because I seemed to have been creating more and more codes. It also became a bit overwhelming, trying to determine which themes were most important since there were so many main themes being revealed. Therefore, I had to go back to the frame and create a hierarchical coding frame to handle the volume of data in a more organized manner. It also allowed for different levels of granularity in my coding without having too few or too many codes (Schreier, 2012). Flexibility when using the coding frames allowed me to clearly see when data could be applied to multiple contexts, sometimes receiving different codes.

One of the most important revelations from my coding was revealed when I discovered that assigning codes to data is a meticulous process. An important realization was when I noticed I was assigning different codes to the same "ideas". Instead, I needed

only to note terms with similar connotations up front, thereby placing all under the code

of collegiality: "Family-Oriented, Supportive, Caring, Look out for one another, etc."

Data Analysis

I used a combined phenomenological methodology. I supplemented Amadeo

Giorgi's existential-phenomenological method with elements from Max van Manen's

lived experience human science inquiry (four reflections) to create a new

phenomenological method currently unnamed (Peoples, 2021). Giorgi's Five Basic Steps

are: 1) Collection of verbal data, 2) Reading of the data, 3) Breaking of the data into

some kind of parts, 4) Organization and expression of the data from a disciplinary

perspective, and 5) Synthesis or summary of the data for purposes of communication to

the scholarly community (Peoples, 2021).

Van Manen's Four Reflections are: 1) Corporeal Reflection, 2) Spatial Reflection,

3) Temporal Reflection, and 4) Relational Reflection (Peoples, 2021). In these very

difficult and divided times, a study providing the basis for uniting Africana people and

communities around the world can become a global phenomenon. Studying the

leadership of Black Women from an inclusive rather than exclusive perspective can serve

as a catalyst to begin some needed healing in Africana communities throughout the

United States and the world, as Black Women embrace the fact that men and children are

an integral part of their liberation struggle. The strong leadership of Black Women

principals can begin to close the opportunity and attitude gaps that exist in today's

schools, especially with Africana students. Therefore, this study can lead to lasting

changes in the education system as we currently know it. Principal Baruti Kafele (2021)

explains, "Any and all aspects of social and racial justice have historical implications" (p.

135). He says that in order for us to understand contemporary social and racial justice issues, we have to understand what got us to the point where we are right now (Kafele, 2021). As such, we must be willing to research the Black experiences and our Black existence for the past four centuries. Using Africana Womanism as a theoretical construct allowed me to be able to dig deeply into the experiences of Black Women school leaders, as the legacy of Black womanhood goes back to our African ancestry. As previously mentioned, the term Africana represents Africa and the African diaspora (which includes Afro-Latin, Afro-European, Afro-American countries and people, as well as their experiences and cultural ideologies with an Afrocentric perspective (Hudson-Weems, 2020).

The study employed qualitative methods that examined the lived experiences of Black Women principals. I recorded individual interviews and had them transcribed to protect internal validity using a transcription software to assist me with the volume of data that needed to be transcribed. This was very beneficial to the study, as the interviews were very in depth and were the source of a tremendous amount of information. Therefore, it was extremely beneficial to be able to have transcriptions that allowed me to revisit them multiple times as themes developed and patterns unfolded.

Originally, my plan was to transcribe interviews using the NVIVO transcription software. However, there was a downloading issue. I spoke with a number of individuals within the company who attempted to help resolve issues; however, this was unsuccessful. I believe this was beneficial to the study, as the interviews were very in depth and the source of a tremendous amount of information. The transcriptions allowed me to revisit interviews multiple times as themes developed and patterns unfolded. After

interviews were transcribed, I had planned to code them using a ground-up inductive

approach to coding where my codes would be developed after transcribing and reading

the interviews (Saldana, 2009). The process of coding qualitative data varies widely

depending upon the objective of the research. In general, it involves a process of reading

through data, applying codes to excerpts, conducting various rounds of coding, grouping

codes according to themes, and then making interpretations that lead to research findings

(Saldana, 2009). As such, I had to conduct multiple rounds of coding before applying my

interpretations. First, I actually used inductive coding and identifying codes from the

data. Next, I had to determine what stood out from the identified codes. Afterwards, I

had planned to identify anything related to being Black. Then, I would identify anything

related to being a Woman. Finally, I was going to look for anything that related to the

social class the participants identified with growing up. However, the coding process

turned out to be not so cut and try, and as such, many codes (and consequently) themes

emerged from the data. Since I was going to be conducting second interviews, I realized

I would possibly be required to alternate between using inductive and deductive coding.

By applying an effective coding system to my data, I knew that I would increase validity,

decrease bias, accurately represent all of my participants, and ensure transparency in my

study (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Second interviews were conducted with participants to

clarify ideas, discuss various aspects of the initial interviews, and allow participants the

opportunity to share anything they would like to share that was omitted during the initial

interviews. However, specific interview questions would also be used during interview

two, as well. The questions in the second interview focused on the characteristics of

Africana Womanism. The Africana Womanism question matrix was created to align the

characteristics to the interview questions. This allowed me to have a focus on how something that is experienced informs the lived aspects of human phenomenon. Descriptions of lived experiences are essential in order to avoid methods of investigation that are indirect (Giorgi, 1985). Prior to conducting interviews with participants, I conducted a pilot interview and follow up interview with a none participant. These interviews helped me to determine how the timing for actual interviews would run. As a result, I was able to adjust the timing out of respect for participants time. The pilot interviews also allowed me to adjust the questions and reduce the number of questions to be asked. I also coded the mock interviews and identified themes to help me to be adequately prepared for the coding process with data collected from participants. I kept all of my field notes in my journal.

During the actual interviews, the coding process was extremely tedious, due to the massive volume of data that resulted from asking open-ended interview questions. Responses to the open-ended interview questions gave me more actionable insights into the lived experiences of the participants. During this coding process, I was able to organize and label my data into different themes to discover the relationships that existed between them. While coding, I was able to assign labels to words (phrases) that represented important and recurring themes from each of the participants. This aspect of my coding was devoted to thematic analysis, allowing me to search across each of the participants' data sets to identify, analyze, and label the repeated patterns that were being revealed (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I used multiple types of qualitative data analysis to process through the data. I used narrative analysis to identify the stories that became very obvious while coding.

These stories were exhilarating and often required me to have longer than usual quotes to reveal the stories of the participants when writing. I also used discourse analysis because I had to be very careful when selecting from what participants had to say, especially those responses that took on a social or cultural context. Although I thought I would have to use deductive coding because of the specificity of the eighteen Africana Womanism characteristics that guided the context of my research, after reviewing transcripts and sorting through the themes being revealed, I realized inductive coding, or open coding, would be best, as I could start from scratch and create codes that were based solely on the data that had been collected. Then, I was able to take the eighteen Africana Womanism characteristics and reciprocally apply them either as stand-alone codes or to connect them to codes that had been revealed.

I also had to use framework analysis. I had to create a code frame to help me to process through all of the data. My inexperience with code frames created a slight dilemma for me when creating the first frame, which was a flat coding frame. Initially, I assumed each of the eighteen characteristics should be assigned the same level of specificity and importance to each of the codes. This proved to be much more complicated than I expected, as there were clearly characteristics that were more important in the data sets. When attempting to create codes for analysis using the flat coding frame, I realized it was extremely difficult to organize my thoughts and to navigate the themes and concepts because I seemed to have been creating more and more codes. It also became a bit overwhelming, trying to determine which themes were most important since there were so many main themes being revealed. Although the six main themes will be reported in chapter four, there were a number of themes that were unable

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to be explored fully. Therefore, several were collapsed to be apart of the six main themes. For example, a major theme from the data was a focus on family. The focus on family fit well into the overall theme of connectivity. Also, focus on family was thoroughly represented during the introduction of each of the participants. Another theme across themes. Another example of a major theme that could be synced with one of the six major findings was dependability. The ability to depend on a leader who cares and wants their stakeholders to truly feel how deeply they care can come as a result of having good listening and communication skills. Other themes that were revealed in the data and help to undergird the study are: creative genius, having a pivot posture, predictable, having the flaw of perfectionism, drive (ambition), and the fear of failure. These themes were not ignored from the data or in my writing. The themes were woven into the findings and through the documented dialogue of participants.   Therefore, I had to go back to the frame and create a hierarchical coding frame to handle the volume of data in a more organized manner. It also allowed for different levels of granularity in my coding without having too few or too many codes (Schreier, 2012). Flexibility when using the coding frames allowed me to clearly see when data could be applied to multiple contexts, sometimes receiving different codes.

One of the most important revelations from my coding was revealed when I discovered that assigning codes to data is a meticulous process. An important realization was when I noticed I was assigning different codes to the same "ideas". Instead, I needed only to note terms with similar connotations up front, thereby placing all under the code of collegiality: "Family-Oriented, Supportive, Caring, Look out for one another, etc."

Interviews

Initial interviews were semi-structured to permit the essential methodical

spontaneity of phenomenological research (Giorgi, 1985). I used individual follow-up

interviews to fill any gaps that existed in the data collected as well as to ask deeper, more

probing questions. Gaps can consist of either excluded data or areas that are implicit or

deficient in any way (perhaps the participant did not quite complete a narrative for some

reason) (Giorgi, 1985). I conducted a sample interview prior to engaging in actual

interviews with participants to adequately prepare for the interview process. The first

interview was going to be twenty probing questions (Appendix B). The second interview

was scheduled to be designed after the initial interviews have been transcribed, studied,

and coded in order to generate questions that allowed gaps to be filled or to probe further

into identified themes from my initial interviews. However, I discovered twenty

questions to be too many, and there would need to be a more reasonable plan for

collecting second interview data, as scheduling was not always easy. On a number of

occasions, second interviews were scheduled and conducted before initial interviews

were transcribed.

An emphasis on interconnectedness and inclusivity is paramount for this research

study. As the researcher, I had anticipated that many of the descriptions provided in

initial interviews would need further explanation. As such, I had planned for multiple

interviews because I realized that forgetfulness, sundry vocabularies (both superior and

inferior), and other limitations in participants fully expressing themselves can all

contribute to deficient explanations by participants (Kruger, 1988, p. 152). Follow-up

individual interviews allowed me to clarify the preliminary information gathered and to

collect additional data that sometimes was not expressed in initial interviews, as the

second interview was designed to collect other pertinent data to address the number of themes being revealed when closely inspecting the eighteen characteristics of Africana Womanism. The data was further analyzed until the meaning became completely clear during the follow up interviews (Giorgi, 1985).

Journals

As I conducted my research, I kept a journal that allowed me to reflect and keep notes in addition to the information shared by participants during interviews. I believe in the power of togetherness and inclusivity in Africana communities. As such, I was able to use my journal to capture the important aspects of the Africana culture I observed and learned about during my research.

Throughout the data collection, I used my journal to capture my thoughts. I also used the journal throughout the process to reflect on my research study, as well as on my organization and time management. Journaling allowed me to reflect on any issues that came up, especially during data collection. Reflexivity emphasizes an awareness of the researcher's own presence in the research process, with the aim of improving the quality of the research (Annink, 2016). Over the past few years, a researcher's positionality, one's identity, conceptions, origin, and gender have been considered factors likely to influence the choice of research, topic, field work, data analysis, and presentation (Weiner-Levy & Popper-Given, 2013). As an individual researcher, it was appropriate for me to use a journal or diary to record (Boutilier & Mason, 2012). Besides improving the quality of data collection, maintaining a research journal provided me the opportunity to record my emotional highs and lows during this data gathering process (Engin, 2011). The use of my journal also allowed me to remain objective and confront any biases that

tried to present themselves during my data collection and analysis. The journal also was a great tool for capturing my opinions – that were not relevant to the work, during my interviews and data analysis. All of my field notes were also kept in the journal. Field notes were different than reflections, as they allowed me to express my thoughts, work through questions, and address any biases that tried to invade my thoughts and perceptions. My field notes included things I needed to remember from my interactions with participants. Although I recorded the interviews via Zoom, I still recorded the behaviors and reactions of participants, as well as information regarding important details from the setting in my journal. I made notes of changes in body language, voice inflections, and hesitancies in responding to questions. Additionally, my field notes included my reactions and my personal reflections that were evoked by the participants' responses and feelings.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are two of the most important aspects of any research study. In qualitative research there is a focus on the trustworthiness of data which consists of the following components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) recommend the use of various methods of triangulation for addressing the question of credibility and dependability with research design. Triangulation is a foremost consideration in qualitative research. It is an attempt to gain more than one perspective on what is being investigated. In order to triangulate the data collected, during participant interviews for the purpose of research credibility, I applied each participants' responses to the eighteen characteristics of Africana Womanism to determine their influence or effect on the

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participants' leadership. I used rich, thick description (Creswell, 2007) to discuss

findings and ensure dependability in my study. I also used purposeful random sampling,

which requires specific criteria of participants that allowed me to collect the information

from each participant to address transferability in the study (Shenton, 2004). I have

reported my methodologies in an honest and transparent manner to provide

confirmability of the data that was collected, analyzed, and constructed in my research.

Verification

I used peer debriefing and member checking as methods to verify the quality

of my study (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking was used throughout my analysis of

the data to ensure that I adequately and accurately interpreted the data collected during

interviews. This helped me to ensure that each participant's lived experiences when

examined through the lens of Africana Womanism had been captured with precision, but

more importantly as a means of member checking. I had planned to get transcriptions of

interviews and my analysis of the interviews to interviewees within forty-eight hours;

however, the research process proved to me this was not a possibility. Participants were

allowed to make corrections, provide clarifications and additions through this process for

obtaining feedback. I encouraged the participants to clarify, add to, enhance, or retract

their original responses during this time to ensure their lived experiences were accurately

conveyed from their perspectives. I shared the participants analyzed responses in

context, also.

A trusted colleague who is a Black Woman principal participated in mock

interview sessions with me, as well as reviewed my journaling, at various points

throughout the study, to eliminate any chances of subjectivity through the data collection and analysis processes.

About the Researcher

A researcher's positionality does not exist independently of the research or the research process nor does it completely determine the latter. Instead, this must be seen as a dialogue – challenging perspectives and assumptions both about the social world and of the researcher herself. This enriches the research process and its outcomes (Palaganas et al., 2017). My research (the entire process) and all of the outcomes that resulted were critical components in exploring and understanding my subjectivity and identity as a researcher. Although I am a Black Woman, it cannot be assumed that the data revealed in my study will match my personal experiences. As fieldwork is intensely personal and my positionality (i.e., position based on class, sex, ethnicity, race, etc.) and who I am as a person (shaped by the socio-economic and political environment) play a fundamental role in the research process, in the field as well as in the final text (Palaganas et al., 2017). This is why it is imperative that as a researcher, I understand my positionality and subjectivity in relation to what I am studying.

The term positionality both describes an individual's world view and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context (Foote & Bartell, 2011 and Rowe, 2014). These are colored by an individual's values and beliefs that are shaped by their political allegiance, religious faith, gender, sexuality, historical and geographical location, ethnicity, race, social class, and status (dis) abilities, and more (Sikes, 2004, Wellington et al., 2005 and Marsh & Furlong, 2018). I bring to the research

a wealth of experiences as a Black Woman who is also a devout Christian with a belief system that is built upon my faith in Jesus Christ as my Savior. I bring the experiences I have had as a Black Woman principal. I am a Black Woman from a very small, rural family community. Growing up in a home where education is valued and personal best is expected, I assumed everyone shared those same expectations. I learned a very hard lesson in first grade when I was assigned the leading role in a school play with students who were in grades as high as grade six. When my school librarian (a Black Woman) was questioned about why she had given the leading role to a first grader, I remember her saying, "She is the only one who can handle remembering all of the lines." I heard Mrs. Sumter (my librarian) tell my mother later over the telephone to make sure I knew my lines backwards and forwards because everyone was expecting me to fail as a little black girl who should not be the lead in a school play; therefore, I had to show them that I was better than everyone else. It was instilled in me that day that I had to be better. I carried the awareness of my race requiring me to be better throughout my academic journey. After high school, I was slated to attend Temple University in Philadelphia. Instead, I got married at eighteen and attended Winthrop University instead. As an accounting major, I was able to begin my professional career in corporate banking. Therefore, I bring to my study a background with sundry experiences that have shaped who I am and how I enter a research experience.

Positionality "reflects" the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013 p. 71). It is essential for new researchers to acknowledge that their positionality is unique to them and that it can impact all aspects and stages of the research process (Holmes, 2020). As such,

positionality is guaranteed to affect the totality of the research process (Holmes, 2020).

Voices of Black Women for centuries have been stifled, ignored, and forced into acceptance of mainstream positions of thought (Bell, 2020). My belief that these voices deserve to be heard and my commitment to changing this narrative, propels me to lift the voices of the Black Women participating in my study. My goal of lifting the voices of these Black Women extends to lifting the voices of Black Women everywhere.

Conducting qualitative research changes a researcher in many ways (Palaganas et al., 2017). Through reflexivity researchers acknowledge the changes brought in themselves as a result of the research process and how these changes have affected the research process (Palaganas et al., 2017).

Reflexivity pertains to the self-awareness of the researcher (Lambert, et al., 2010). It is about the recognition that as researchers, we are a major part of the social world that we study (Ackerly & True, 2010). Our worlds include our personal worlds, also. One major aspect of my personal world is that of my family. The Africana Womanism Theoretical construct is a family-centered paradigm, centering around the family and the strong relationships that exist between African men, women, and children (Hudson-Weems, 2020). I grew up in a single parent home with a mother who worked hard to provide for my three brothers and me. My mom was (is) an inspiration in my life. She instilled in me morality and the value of hard work and commitment. I was fortunate to marry into a family with similar philosophies on how to treat others and working hard to accomplish goals. My family have helped me with understanding exactly how to define myself and the roles I play within our family unit. I am a pastor's wife, a role that yields other non-familial roles like confidante, counselor, and friend. I am a daughter, daughter-

in-law, sister, sister-in-law, aunt, niece, cousin, and granddaughter. All of these family roles (and church roles) are a major part of what I bring to my research.

Reflexivity is a process of introspection on the role of subjectivity in the research process (Palaganas et al., 2017).   Researching the lived experiences of the Black Women participants in this study has changed me as a researcher. In future studies, I will not work so hard to separate myself from who I am as a Black Woman. In an effort to remain unbiased while remaining true to representing the true identities of participants.

It is a continuous process of reflection by researchers on their values (Parahoo, 2006). My research has also changed me as a person. Conducting research that investigated the lived experiences of Black Women principals provided me an opportunity to collect, analyze, and study data that provided an opportunity to determine how the lived experiences of the participants impacted them as leaders. As a practicing Black Woman principal, this study has made me more aware of the need to lead authentically and embrace my lived experiences. The study has also emboldened me to never underestimate, minimize, or downplay the experiences that I have had throughout my career that have shaped and molded me to be the person that I am, the professional that I am, and the principal that I am.

Limitations

At the onset of this study, I had designed a research proposal that was too large to be completed in a single study. As such, my proposal was revised to determine how the lived experiences of Black Women principals' influence their leadership.

I recognized before beginning any of the research that all studies have limitations. I also recognized that many of the limitations would unfold as I moved deeper into my

research. I was able to honestly assess any problems with methods, validity, sample size, access, or cultural biases that entered into my research. For example, I found that different questions were needed. I also found that fewer questions were needed for me to truly respect the participants time. I realized that what was important was that I am honest, self-critical, and self-reflective about my research without being apologetic or defensive (Peoples, 2021).

I realized that bias can be shaped by a researcher's knowledge of prior theory, gender, and paradigmatic assumptions, which can all impede on the researcher's ability to hear and listen to the perspective of the participants (Klenke, 2015). As such, I understand researcher bias could not be completely omitted from the qualitative research process. In my study, I used reflective journaling, member checking, the thick descriptions that are required for narrative research, and memoing (Creswell, 2007; Bold, 2011) as tools to control my biases.

Additional limitations are relevant to the study. Several were identified as the study unfolded, one limitation that had a tremendous impact on the general nature of my study was the coronavirus pandemic. As a researcher during the pandemic, there are a number of influences that impacted my study. At the onset of my dissertation journey, my plan was to have face to face interviews with participants and possibly have the interviews at their respective schools. The pandemic prevented that from being the way the interviews took place. Some school districts have restricted visitors in schools to essential personnel, while some districts still do not feel comfortable having in person meetings for sundry reasons. As a result, all of my interviews were conducted virtually.

As a pandemic researcher, I realized interviews via an electronic meeting platform worked well.

As a Black Woman principal, I had to be very careful to not allow subjectivity to creep into analysis or data collection based on assumptions (or my personal experiences). As a Black Woman of African descent and an elementary school principal, I have had many experiences that could have caused me to allow my opinions or biases to creep into my data collection and/or analysis. As an African American (Black) woman, I am constantly reflecting upon those experiences that have helped to define me as a woman, as well as a Black person living in the rural south. As a school principal, I know that my leadership has been tremendously impacted by the experiences I have lived throughout my life. As such, I was very interested in discovering how the lived experiences of other Black Women principals have impacted their leadership styles.

As a student of the very family-centered paradigm, Africana Womanism, I know there is a need to strengthen the Black Community and place an uncompromising emphasis on the development of Black children, while ensuring collectivity prevails and that men, women, and children are working together to combat the struggles they still face as a community today.

The leaders in the study are transformational in their approach to leading their schools; however, the study did not result in traditional leadership styles being identified. In retrospect, I could have framed my leadership question around the established styles of leading (transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, etc.) to have the participants to select from. This is also true regarding culture and climate as not one of the interviews went into any depth regarding the culture and climate of the schools. Those

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conversations were woven into discussions of how the leaders described specific activities and experiences from their schools.

The number of participants in the study was a limitation, as well. Although the number of participants is appropriate to reach saturation, it became obvious during data analysis that more responses could have provided more variation in the responses, which could potentially have yielded different findings.

Finally, in hindsight, focus groups could possibly have been beneficial when I only used structured interviews. I think a group discussion on Africana Womanism and its characteristics would possibly have been valuable. The individual interviews were very informative; however, in a group forum the discussions could have possibly been even more impactful.

Delimitations

1. The study looked at only three aspects of demographics – race, class, and gender. Years of experience, not age, were not considered during data analysis.

2. The study was confined to schools in a southeastern state.

3. Class was based on the social class the participant grew up in for the most part and not the class they currently associate themselves with, as it appears all participants have similar associations as professional women.

Study Implications

This dissertation study focused on the lived experiences of Black Women principals providing an opportunity for the voices of these Black Women to be heard. Hearing of these lived experiences and how they impact the leadership of these Black Women can be beneficial in helping other Black Women find their voices. The study can

also serve as evidence to superintendents and others that Black Women are a community that needs to be supported and their leadership cultivated in order to positively impact student achievement in schools. Finally, this study can serve as a springboard for others to begin to recognize the strength of the Africana community in the struggle for true social justice and bringing men, women, and children together to improve the quality of life for all.

Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure that proper respect for human subjects is exercised, I applied to the Institutional Review Board for approval to conduct my research and was approved prior to beginning to collect any data (Glesne, 2011).

I called potential participants to determine their eligibility to participate in the study. Afterwards, I sent an electronic invitation for participants to join the study. During my telephone conversations with the participants, I explained the details of participation in the study. Potential participants (at that time) were able to decline by indicating they wished not to participate. Each consenting participant was assigned a pseudonym used to identify them during the study. Participants' data has remained confidential using only the provided pseudonym as an identifier. Pseudonyms were used for district, county, and school names, as well. Once all the interviews were completed, all recordings were stored electronically on a secure drive and sent to a transcription software company to be transcribed. In addition, I logged off of my computer and all corresponding sites when I was not using the data to avoid potential confidentiality breaches. The data is stored and will be maintained for three years after which time it will be permanently deleted.

The letter of invitation served to remind recipients that participation in the study was completely voluntary. Participants were informed of the minimal risks involved in their participation in the study, and their ability to withdraw from the study at any time.

There were no direct risks to participating in the study. However, during the interview, participants often did recall uncomfortable or distressing situations from their past. Sometimes this may have caused an emotional reaction; however, all participants were able to get through both interviews successfully. Participants had the right to postpose or terminate their participation at any time they felt the need to do so. I also offered breaks during the interviews if participants appeared to need a moment to gather their composure.

There were no direct benefits to the participants. The data gleaned from the study can benefit educational leadership programs and other administrators. Furthermore, the information will be used to help expand the knowledge of the significance of embracing the lived experiences of leaders as it could potentially impact the performance of students in their schools.

I used full disclosure and transparency throughout my data collection and analysis process to ensure I was respectful of all participants' rights to privacy, as well as their human rights.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences, as they relate to race, class, and gender, of Black Women principals. Qualitative data was collected through two interviews with participants. I kept a journal

for field notes and reflections throughout the research process. I have provided an explanation of my selection process for participants, my data collection and analysis processes, and how I ensured the study was conducted in an ethical manner. Additionally, I have provided details on my positionality, verification process, and the implications and limitations of my study.

My study has both cultural significance and relevance, especially during these difficult and divided times in which we are currently existing. My study has the potential for uniting Africana people and communities around the world. The experiences from community to community will look differently as all Africana communities are unique and have their own individual needs and dynamics. According to participants, studying the leadership of Black Women from an inclusive rather than exclusive perspective truly served as a reflection tool for them during the study. During an interview with Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems, she suggested the findings are a catalyst for some needed healing in Africana communities throughout the United States and around the world, as Black Women embrace the fact that men and children are also an integral part of their liberation struggle, for their lived experiences are valuable and hence, deserve to be heard. The strong leadership of Black Women principals can potentially close both the opportunity and attitude gaps that exist in today's schools, especially with Africana students when the proper conditions are put forth to honor their experiences as a means to strengthen their leadership. Therefore, this study can lead to lasting changes in the education system as we currently know it. In *The Equity and Social Justice Education 50*, Principal Baruti Kafele (2021) explains, "Any and all aspects of social and racial justice have historical implications" (p. 135). He continues by emphasizing that in order

for us to understand contemporary social and racial justice issues, we have to understand what got us to the point where we are right now (Kafele, 2021). As a researcher, I was able to research the Black experiences of six Black Women principals. Using Africana Womanism as a theoretical construct, I was able to dig deeply into the experiences of these Black Women leaders. I am certain that our work together has provided them with knowledge of the legacy of Black womanhood and how that legacy goes back deeply into our African ancestry. These Black Women now possess the knowledge of exactly what "Africana" represents. It is clear to them, that Africana represents not only Africa, but the African diaspora, as well, including those of African- Latin, African-European, African-American, etc. descent, their experiences and cultural ideologies with an African-centered/Afrocentric perspective (Hudson-Weems, 2020).

The study employed qualitative methods that examined the lived experiences of the six Black Women principals. Data was collected during two interviews, which were transcribed and read through thoroughly. I organized the data into themes and aligned those themes to the eighteen characteristics of Africana Womanism, to be discussed further in detail.

Latrese Younger is a trend-setting instructional leader in Virginia. She is the founder of the Black Women Education Leaders podcast and devotes endless hours to the study of Black Women in leadership. Latrese is also a Black Woman (assistant) principal who served unknowingly as an inspiration for me to study the lived experiences of Black Women principals and commit to such a pivotal research experience. She once shared a Shirley Chisholm quote with me that emboldened my resolve to be willing to address problems, inequities, and injustices rather than just complain about them, "You don't

make progress by standing on the sidelines, whimpering and complaining. You make progress by implementing ideas." These powerful words motivated me to design a research study that would have a great and lasting impact on me and others, while empowering us to be the next generation of Africana Womanist who are committed to saving our Africana children in particular, who are in dire need of leaders who really care about their well-being. As such, I was inspired to remain steadfast to my convictions and commitments of strengthening the Africana family and our communities by designing and executing a research study that can be referenced and actively utilized for years to come.

Semi-structured interviews were used to allow for spontaneity of my phenomenological research (Giorgi, 1985). Interviews were divided into two, forty-five to sixty-minute sessions. The second interview was used to collect additional data, mainly focusing on the selected characteristics of Africana Womanism, as well as to fill gaps created during the first interviews with participants. Having gotten to know the participants better through our first interviews, I was able to ask deeper, more probing questions during our second interview. Those questions specifically addressed the eighteen characteristics of Africana Womanism. After initial interviews, gaps were identified by the need for clarifications, as well as from incomplete thoughts that at times, required me to ask clarifying questions of several of the participants. I conducted a sample interview prior to engaging in interviews with participants to adequately prepare, especially for the coding process. During the sample interview, I discovered that the compilation of the interview questions required some shifting, hence, reducing the number of questions chosen for the first interview. The depth and breadth of the

questions caused the interview to take much longer than anticipated. As a researcher, I am aware of the need to be respectful of the time spent with the participants and therefore, adjustments were made to the interview question lists even though longer interviews would have provided an even greater volume of data. Interviews were reduced to an appropriate amount of time so that participants did not mind volunteering. The principal participating in the sample interview made suggestions for the actual interview process. One suggestion made was to adjust the PowerPoint created by removing all of the background slides and theoretical information, since it took up valuable time. Another suggestion was to combine some of the characteristics from Africana Womanism to avoid an overload of questions during the second interview, which could make the participants feel rushed and overwhelmed.

All interviews were completed, using video conferencing via Zoom at the request of each participant. The participants were thankful for the Zoom opportunity, as such an opportunity allowed them to literally carve out an hour of time that wouldn't interfere with their entire day. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed, using the REV transcription software. After transcriptions were received each interview was coded. During coding, I was able to outline the profiles of each participant and note commonalities and themes found among their experiences from their perspectives as Black Women principals.

The coding process was extremely tedious, due to the massive volume of data that resulted from asking open-ended interview questions. Responses to the open-ended interview questions gave me more actionable insights into the lived experiences of the participants. During this coding process, I was able to organize and label my data into

different themes to discover the relationships that existed between them. While coding, I was able to assign labels to words (phrases) that represented important and recurring themes from each of the participants. This aspect of my coding was devoted to thematic analysis, allowing me to search across each of the participants' data sets to identify, analyze, and label the repeated patterns that were being revealed (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I used multiple types of qualitative data analysis to process through the data. I was able to identify stories that became very obvious while coding. These stories were exhilarating and often required me to have longer than usual quotes to reveal the stories of the participants when writing. I had to be very careful when selecting from what participants had to say, especially those responses that took on a social or cultural context. Although I thought I would have to use deductive coding because of the specificity of the eighteen Africana Womanism characteristics that guided the context of my research, after reviewing transcripts and sorting through the themes being revealed, I realized inductive coding, or open coding, would be best, as I could start from scratch and create codes that were based solely on the data that had been collected. Then, I was able to take the eighteen Africana Womanism characteristics and reciprocally apply them either as stand-alone codes or to connect them to codes that had been revealed.

I also had to use framework analysis. I had to create a code frame to help me to process through all of the data. My inexperience with code frames created a slight dilemma for me when creating the first frame, which was a flat coding frame. Initially, I assumed each of the eighteen characteristics should be assigned the same level of specificity and importance to each of the codes. This proved to be much more complicated than I expected, as there were clearly characteristics that were more

important in the data sets. When attempting to create codes for analysis using the flat coding frame, I realized it was extremely difficult to organize my thoughts and to navigate the themes and concepts because I seemed to have been creating more and more codes. It also became a bit overwhelming, trying to determine which themes were most important since there were so many main themes being revealed. Therefore, I had to go back to the frame and create a hierarchical coding frame to handle the volume of data in a more organized manner. It also allowed for different levels of granularity in my coding without having too few or too many codes (Schreier, 2012). Flexibility when using the coding frames allowed me to clearly see when data could be applied to multiple contexts, sometimes receiving different codes.

One of the most important revelations from my coding was revealed when I discovered that assigning codes to data is a meticulous process. An important realization was when I noticed I was assigning different codes to the same "ideas". Instead, I needed only to note terms with similar connotations up front, thereby placing all under the code of collegiality: "Family-Oriented, Supportive, Caring, Look out for one another, etc."

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS

School leaders play a key role in creating and cultivating a healthy and thriving school environment where students are able to learn and grow. My research was formulated to determine how the lived experiences of Black Women principals impact the way they lead. More research is needed, relative to how Black Women principals' leadership styles impact students' achievement.

The following profiles include brief background information on the study participants' educational experiences. The categories included in the Participant Profile Table 4.1 include: participants' names, years of experience, teaching experience, curriculum experiences, and an "other" category that includes administrative assistant and principal intern positions. The "administration experience" category include both assistant principal and principal experiences. These six women identified their styles of leading and shared how their lived experiences have influenced their leadership and the culture and climate of their schools during interviews where they also shared their sundry background experiences. The profile table also captures each of the participants' number of years in education. The combined number of years of experience of the six participants in the study totaled 144. It is important to note, only one of the six participants had less than twenty years of experience. Each of the participants had at least five years of teaching experiences in a regular classroom. Two of the six participants had experience in the role of curriculum support. Two participants had other

experiences, as well. Those experiences could include Administrative Intern or Assistant

Principal of Instruction. Ruth was the only participant who had a value across the table

in each of the cells, as all of the experiences listed applied to her context.

Each participant has been assigned a pseudonym for anonymity in the study. The

names in the table and the names throughout the research study are all pseudonyms. Any

references to the names of schools, districts, or counties were also changed to ensure

anonymity in the study.

Table 4.1 Participant Profiles

Name	Years of Experience	Teaching Experience	Curriculum Experience	Administration Experience	Other
Sarah	24	16	3	5	N/A
Ruth	29	7	3	18	1
Rebekah	27	8	N/A	19	N/A
Hannah	19	10	N/A	9	N/A
Abigail	22	6	N/A	16	N/A
Rachel	23	6	N/A	5	2

Sarah

Sarah is a 24-year veteran educator who taught for 16 years, worked as a

curriculum coordinator, and served as both an assistant principal and principal.

Currently, she is principal of an elementary school. Sarah describes herself as an avid

reader and writer. She is the mother of five in a blended family dynamic. Sarah believes

that faith should always come first when making priorities regarding the lived

experiences in our lives, followed by family, and then friends.   Although Sarah loves

being an administrator, she never envisioned herself in any role other than that of a

teacher. In addition to being a school administrator, Sarah plays many other roles. Those roles include: counselor, entrepreneur, partner (of a husband), mother, daughter, and a woman of faith. She believes her lived experiences throughout her life have molded her to become the woman she is today.

It's so interesting that you ask about my experiences because I really feel I am living out my purpose in so many ways through all of these incredible experiences in my life. Being a Black woman has been its own experience. I mean, I really think as a Black woman, I have to have a level of faith that keeps me. You know, it keeps me sane. Faith also says to me that as a woman I have a special responsibility. Does that sound weird? Right. Faith says women are created to be a helpmate. I am sure you have read Proverbs 31. Doesn't that just sum it up? Proverbs 31 says women are efficient, effective, up early. They are planned and organized and are the change agents for absolutely everything. Women know the truth and live the truth. Women innately actually give birth to things. Women actually understand what it means to work and labor with no reward because we are mothers, and I don't mean just those of us who give birth. We are all mothers. (Sarah, 2022)

Sarah believes the trifecta of being a Black woman can be summed up in the ideals of race, class, and gender. She feels as if keeping faith in the forefront of her mind has helped her to deal with the challenges she has faced over time as a Black Woman. Especially a black woman tasked with leading a school. Sarah shared, "It would be great if we didn't have to speak of color, but as unfortunate as it is, we do." Therefore, when

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prioritizing the concepts of race, class, and gender, she feels like her personal journey has been most impacted by race.

> My faith is actually the great equalizer for me. There are times when it feels like a person might be looking through you. This is even though they really don't even know me. They don't know my story. I am so much more than what you might see when you look at me. It can be "emptying". I don't know if that's even a word, but oh well. So, I said "emptying", and it doesn't even really matter. You know. I can tell you get it. You know exactly what I am saying. People see you. I mean they see you. They actually see you before they see you. They see — you know your – your (color). They see you before they see you, and definitely before they know you. It's like when they (people) don't actually see you they make their own assumptions. For example, I have had a parent who has mistaken me as White, based on my email correspondences and telephone conversations. (Sarah, 2022)

Sarah draws strength from within. She feels like she really does not have a choice. Sarah believes her strength is what has helped her to persevere and experience the reality of a principalship. She says, "I think that women start out as APs and just get stuck there. They end up staying there forever. It's just so difficult for Black Women to break into the principalship unless you have connections." Sarah also credits her strength as what has kept her through those periods of uncertainty and having no one to support the hard work and commitment she was pouring into her career.

Although the Africana Womanism paradigm was new to Sarah, she was intrigued by the characteristics from our initial conversation about my study. Sarah asked, "Why have I not heard of something so profound that could have such a lasting impact on my life? My career? My family? My faith?" She was immediately able to connect with the characteristics and how they have influenced her decisions throughout her life. She spoke about how those characteristics have also guided her in her practices as a leader, because she has worked so hard to ensure the world knows that she is not the quintessential "angry Black Woman". Rather, she is a bold and confident individual who knows who she is and wants the world to recognize her for who she is and what she offers to humanity. Sarah said, "I live by this motto – If I stay calm – while you're rattled when we are playing checkers, actually, I am playing chess." Sarah is a strong, intelligent, and very capable Black Woman who aspires to honor God by listening to his every word and obeying. She says she listens even when the voice is just a whisper. In Sarah's opinion, "It's the job of the adjective to describe the noun." Sarah believes someone has to be the "teller" of the story. She believes this study to be an excellent opportunity to have the story of Black Women principals told so that the trajectory of education for students, especially those of color, are forever changed. She says that she would hope that the lives of Black Women will also be impacted by understanding their worth, finding their value, and knowing their experiences are actually significant. Sarah stated:

> You are strong. You are strong because you are doing this research work.
> I could say you are strong and smart because you chose me to be a part of
> what I believe is going to seminal, but I won't go that far. (Laughter)

However, what I will say is now that I have heard about this Africana Womanism and your mentor, I am going to be studying this for myself. I want you to know that doing this work is very important, and I don't want you to take what you're doing for granted. (Don't) Take it lightly. This is truly important, because I think this can help with dismantling some of the misconceptions out there about us. Us as Black Women. I want people to know we are smart. I want people to know we are capable. I want people to know I can be a mother and a professional, because I know how to – what was it you said – adapt. That's right. I know how – we know how to adapt to whatever we need to adapt to. And, I know how to fulfill ALL of my roles. I am a mother. I am a wife. I am a sister. I am a friend. I am a missionary. I am a prayer warrior. I am a choir member. I am a Black Woman. And, guess what, Tammy, I am good at all of it. I want people to recognize that. I think your work can also eradicate the demons of racism that continue to divide us from each other. That is why I believe this work that you are doing is so important. (Sarah, 2022)

Ruth

Ruth is a 29-year veteran educator who taught for 7 years, worked as a curriculum coordinator, and served as both an assistant principal and principal, as well. Ruth also worked as a Principal Intern before becoming an Assistant Principal. Ruth is one of only two participants in this study who had such an experience to prepare them for entering into a school leadership role. Currently, she is principal of an elementary school. Ruth

describes herself as a pleasant individual who has not self-actualized in any area. She

says she is a person who is constantly evolving. She is the mother of two adult children.

Ruth emphasized that she has been in a monogamous marriage to the same man for more

than 30 years. Ruth is the grandmother of three youngsters all of whom she adores. She

takes pride in the fact that God has called her to be a faithful minister of the gospel as an

ordained Baptist minister. Ruth describes herself as a woman who is committed to many

causes. Although Ruth loves being an administrator and feels she has found her niche, her

intended career was that of a Biologist. In addition to being a school administrator, Ruth

plays many other roles. Those roles include: wife, ordained minister, daughter, mother,

niece, aunt, sister (oldest), counsel to her family, friend to many, and educational advisor.

She believes her lived experiences throughout her life have molded her to become the

woman she is today. She credits her parents and her upbringing with her unique ability to

be able to work with almost anybody.

> I have had a wonderful run in Taylorville County. I have had some of the
>
> most amazing Professional Development experiences an individual can
>
> have. I shared with you in another conversation how I was once paid with
>
> Professional Learning Opportunities, didn't I? Yes. I have had some
>
> amazing experiences. You know forcing me to reflect, actually brings me
>
> back to some of the things that aren't at the forefront anymore. Forefront
>
> of my mind, yeah. I guess really, Tammy, it's good we're having this
>
> conversation. It takes me back. It takes me way back. Back to a time
>
> when I had to make decisions about what I was going to do in life. I am
>
> an activist, so I had to decide who and what I was activating for. This

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made people view me in a certain way. Yes. It did. People know when they see Ruth, she can be trusted. She is going to do what is right. I guess for that reason, I have been able to enter into arenas that others aren't able to access. I am certainly not bragging, but I have to be for real, and what I can say about Ruth is this. I will never make anyone uncomfortable. My parents feel safe with me. They know they can trust me. I really put a lot of – well, I will just say – I invest a lot in my relationships. At school, at home, at church, and in the community. So, Tammy, I guess what I am saying is this, my upbringing allows me to reach people in a very special and unique way. This is why I am so respectful of the elders in my village. Nobody does that better than Ruth Joseph! It's really a big part of who I am. (Ruth, 2022)

When discussing how race, class, and gender have impacted her journey as a professional, Ruth chuckled and said,

You know what? Gender is sort of a vibe. At least it is for me. I have always had that "motherly vibe" going on. No. Honestly, it has always been present for me. I guess I have just been matronly. When you talk about this – what do you call your version? I say matronly – but you called it something else when we were answering questions before. Goodness Tammy, it escapes me. How do you reference it? (Mothering). Yes! That's it. Mothering. That's me. I am viewed as the mother at school. I am certainly a church mother. A community mother. I am a great mother to my children and now to my grandchildren, but it is so

much deeper for me. I am seen as mother in my family. I am the go to

person for everything and everyone. Even my nieces and nephews. When

they need advice, they're coming to Ruth. So, I guess to answer your

question. Being motherly is associated with gender which is extremely

impactful and important to me. However, if I have to prioritize those three

big ideas (race, class, and gender), there is no question about what is

probably pretty obvious. All three are crucial to living a productive life.

Yet, in my mind and in my heart, I know that everything about me, and

everything about most Black Women always has to go back to race. Yep.

Race has definitely had the most impact on my life. For a number of

reasons. And, I must say, not just one particular race. (Ruth, 2022)

Ruth was very clear that one of her most trusted mentors was a White woman, and she

values her mentorship (and friendship) just as highly as she does any of the other

relationships she has had throughout her life. Ruth considers herself to be well

assimilated. She said, "Another reason I am able to get along with anyone is that I am

excellent at code switching." She is thankful that her Black families do not find her

intimidating, and she is also able to use her middle-class values and conversational skills

to put her White parents at ease, as well. Ruth said, "I know how to meet all of the

Eurocentric expectations placed upon me, but I also know that can't change the fact that I

am Black." She says,

 Standard English sounds great, and in some settings, it may even make

you look pretty smart. For me, I am pretty standard all of the time, so it

doesn't feel funny. But, guess what? Standard English doesn't keep me

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from being counselor to my family and friends. It helps to validate me as

an education advisor to my family and friends. It helps to validate me as a

Board Member for Habitat for Humanity. It helps people to take me

seriously as a community activist. It makes people take me seriously as a

"voice" "the mouthpiece" for those who have no voice. It also gives me

the chance to represent the Lord as an Associate Pastor at a Baptist Church

when I deliver Bible Study on Tuesday (nights). See – I can see so clearly

now how all of these things go together because I just went back through

all of my roles, didn't I? I am so glad I am a part of this work that you are

doing. (Ruth, 2022)

Ruth equates being adaptable to being a problem solver. She feels like this is just a

natural part of who Black Women are. She explained her position, "Being Black requires

a certain amount of resiliency." She went on to say, "There's a resiliency and a level of

confidence that I have that comes from what my parents have instilled in me. I am

enough." Ruth believes Black Women to be the ultimate problem solvers based on her

opinion that being adaptable is a necessary part of survival.

Ruth shared that she has been raised to be a "lady". As such, she truly believes

that her mere presence causes her to be recognized. She said, "You don't have to be a

buffoon or a bojangler to get recognition. You can and should be recognized for being an

individual who displays intelligence, commitment, and good character." Ruth believes

that recognition goes hand in hand with respect. She believes in order to have true

respect, you must have a high level of credibility as someone who is knowledgeable,

consistent, dogmatic, and capable. Ruth claims, "We can all create a respectful

environment if we draw on our inner strength and believe our own rhetoric." She says, "Possessing that confidence causes people to respect you, and respect causes you to be recognized." Ruth also pointed out, "All recognition is not public."

Ruth says that throughout her life, she has been given permission to show up authentically each and every day. She realizes that walking in your authenticity does sometimes present some challenges.

> Yes, people learn to appreciate and respect your authenticity. However, I
>
> believe it all goes back to my upbringing. I understand racism. I always
>
> have. I mean I learned this from a young age. I have always been told
>
> how smart and how beautiful I am. That's really something special. I
>
> just want to be clear about that. I mean I hope this gets included because
>
> sometimes dark-skinned African Americans get told – "'You're too dark
>
> for that.'" You know that could be a color or an outfit or whatever. So,
>
> honestly, being authentic requires being honest. So, I am honest. No
>
> sugar coating. Each group you asked me about, Tammy, each
>
> one knows exactly where they stand with me because I am honest. Now
>
> that doesn't always get received the way it is intended. In fact, my
>
> authenticity has gotten me described as nice-nasty. (Ruth, 2022)

When asked about her leadership style, Ruth hesitated before replying. She said, "I want to say visionary or progressive, but I can't. I have to say – pragmatic." Ruth says she subscribes to pragmatic leadership because it just makes sense. She says that for her, leading in a way that makes sense helps her to move the school towards great.

Ruth's reaction to Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems' poem, *I Got Your Back, Boo* was profound. For several moments, we sat in companionable silence as she processed and read through the four stanzas of the poem on the screen once more. When she finally responded, she did so very softly.

> You have made me think of things I had literally forgotten, and moving
>
> forward with what is expected of me as a Black Woman principal. I am a
>
> reflector. I am a thinker. I feel so empowered just being able to connect
>
> with another Black Female. This doesn't happen nearly enough. We need
>
> more opportunities to do this. The poem was literally making me think
>
> how important a genuine sisterhood is, and how important it is to build
>
> strong communities. Remember that when you finish this. We need
>
> opportunities to support each other as sisters. Tammy, I think your study
>
> topic is anointed. Remember, when something is anointed, it has the
>
> ability to accomplish what God has intended. It solidifies what He needs
>
> for us to do. Thank you for your obedience. (Ruth, 2022)

Rebekah

Rebekah is a 27-year veteran educator who taught for 8 years and served as both an assistant principal and principal, as well. At the time of the interviews, Rebekah was the principal of an elementary school. Following the second interview, Rebekah retired as a school principal. Currently, she is working in higher education. Rebekah describes herself as a rarity.

> You know, Mrs. Taylor, in today's world. I have to tell you that I think I
>
> am a rarity. I have been married to the same man for 36 years. I am the

mother of three adult children, and most importantly, I am a believer. It's

what's most important to me, and honestly, it is really in actuality who I

am. My faith has sustained me through every aspect of my life. I grew up

in poverty. My parents together made a little over twenty thousand

dollars. You look like you're thinking that's not really poverty.

It was. My parents had twelve children. Mrs. Taylor, I grew up in

poverty, but even then, I had so many dreams and aspirations. I knew they

were going to come true. This is why I have been able to see children for

what they are. To me, it doesn't matter what our children look like,

they're our children. (Rebekah, 2022)

Rebekah reflects on working in affluent schools with mostly White students. She

laughed as she remembered, "When you work in an affluent school, parents think they

can tell you exactly what to do. I think poor children's parents trust you more with their

kids." As she continued to reflect, she continued by saying, "I really think the Lord has a

sense of humor. He sent me from an affluent White school to a poor White school.

That's when I learned what classism is really all about, and that is poverty." Just as the

Africana Womanism paradigm is based on interconnectivity, Rebekah believes to be

successful as a Black Woman principal is to be able to connect with the people she is

serving. Rebekah said,

If a Black Woman is going to be successful, she is going to have to be able

to make the necessary connections with the folks who are in her care.

That is what Black Women principals do. They connect with those they

get the privilege of serving. The other really important thing for Black

Women is for them to connect with themselves. That's one reason I wear

my hair natural. It helps me to stay connected with my roots and who I

am, and it also helps me to connect to my girls who have natural hair or

who may be thinking of going natural. Now that

sounds like a simple thing, but when you see young ladies afraid to be

who they are because (because) well because they don't know who they

are, you want to help. (Rebekah, 2022)

When thinking about the various roles she has in her life, Rebekah gets excited

about her life. She believes that the role she was created for can be summed up into a

single thought, "My role is to serve others." She continued to say, "I was created for this

purpose." Her service to others is threefold. Rebekah says,

I have humility no matter what role I am playing. My three main goals are

God, others, and then myself. I am a wife. I am the planner of the family.

I am the organizer. I am a wife, and I am clear that I am not the head.

(Deep sigh) I know my role. I support my husband. We are in this thing

together. I know this. That is something that helps me to be free. I am a

family person. I am very connected with my roots. I am organized

enough to do what needs to be done. I LOVE family. One thing I believe

is that where you rank in line in the family makes a difference. It impacts

all of the roles you play in life. For instance, I am a choir member. I am a

co-chair. I am a planner. I am a member of the prayer ministry. I am a

mom, and I am a real mom. I am one of those moms who is a mom first.

I am not interested in being your friend. I am a mentor because I want to

be able to grow teachers and staff. Once again, everything for me goes back to me being a believer. That's where everything starts and where everything ends. It's all so important. It's very humbling to think about it all because all of my roles actually intertwine and make up the fabric of who I am. I think this is true for everyone. Yes. Our roles intertwine and make up the fabric of who we are. (Rebekah, 2022)

Rebekah believes it's important to be authentic. She shared a very personal story about how she was once questioned about why she walks around with her nose in the air.

Once someone said to me, "You always walk around with your nose in the air." It definitely took me aback. However, I proudly made it clear, I do walk around with my head held high. I walk around with my head held high as a proud, educated Black Woman who knows who I am. And, you know what? I do not apologize for that! It's true, I am very professional. However, my staff knows I am extremely approachable. So, being proud of who I am and what I have accomplished is something I refuse to minimize. (Rebekah, 2022)

Rebekah believes one of her main responsibilities as a Black Woman principal is to ensure her children have a safe and nurturing environment. For Rebekah, this means she has to sometimes call people on things she cannot accept or tolerate for her children. Rebekah explained, "My children (students) deserve so much more than they get sometimes. It's up to me to be that mothering nurturer to them." Rebekah asked, "May I go back to one more thing on poverty?" Rebekah commented that she had shared a lot about poverty which she equates with classism because she has worked in such abjectly

impoverished situations. She also explained, "In my opinion, race and class go hand in hand. However, if I have to prioritize, I have to say that race is going to always be first." She continued by saying, "Being brown is an honor. It's something to be proud of for sure. However, being brown doesn't automatically qualify you to be a teacher of brown children."

Rebekah made a very profound comment that was preceded by a powerful question, "Mrs. Taylor, this is all wonderful discussion, but how will we truly elevate one another? Sometimes I think we are all just a little too competitive honestly speaking." She concluded with, "Just like this work you are doing, as African American women, we have so much to share. I am thinking about what I can do to contribute to the cause.

Hannah

Hannah is a 19-year veteran educator who taught for 10 years and has served as both an assistant principal and principal. Hannah is the principal of an elementary school. Hannah describes herself as a born educator. She is very proud to come from a long line of educators, making a career in education a logical choice for her. Hannah was also excited to share that her mother was one of the first Black females to integrate Dacus High School. Her grandfather was the first Black dentist in Dacus, as well. As such, Hannah says she learned very early the value of ancestry. "I am so blessed to have my grandparents. I respect their wisdom so much!" She also recognizes the significance of being Black and having to work hard to prove herself. She stated, "I have had to be 110% better and give that level of effort just to get noticed." Having worked in different contexts, Hannah believes that the dynamics of racism show up differently depending on where you are. She said, "I have been exposed to racism in bigger cities – just the

nuances of race." This is so disturbing to Hannah because in her mind, there is no room for racism in the education arena. "We have to be real about it. Biases have to be addressed." She went on to explain, "This is very important because not everyone even realizes their biases."

Hannah has grown accustomed to facing challenges and dealing with them head on.

At Davenport (Elementary), I have seen a lot of things happen that can hold a school back from being as successful as they can be. (Do) You know what I am saying? Things are not always done fairly. I have gotten used to that. That's not what I want. Nobody does. It's just the way it is in some places. I must admit, I had my share of struggles. Is that because I am a Black Woman? I don't know. Maybe. I can tell you this, it sure has felt that way at times. I don't allow it to bother me. I just roll up my sleeves and make it happen. You know. I make it happen for the kids. I don't allow them to be hurt by the actions of people who have issues that have nothing to do with school. You get what I am saying, right? People do things to promote their own agendas even when it is not best for the school. I have seen that happen at Davenport (Elementary) too many times to count. (Hannah, 2022)

When talking about her roles, Hannah explains that she often feels substantial guilt about having to sacrifice time with her two daughters to be at the top of her game as an elementary principal. She says,

Sometimes I feel a little uncomfortable talking about roles because I carry

some degree of guilt with me over mine. I am a Black Woman principal,

wife (of a husband), a mother, a daughter, a granddaughter, a church

member, a friend, but not really though, a sister, and an aunt. Yep, that's

pretty much me in a nut shell. (Hannah, 2022)

The discussion on roles with Hannah concluded with her personal assessment, "For me,

having to give 110% makes it very difficult to navigate. So, you see, I have a lot of

guilt." Hannah says she has to pray constantly and rely on faith to keep her from

becoming weary in all of the well-doing she is attempting to do.

Hannah believes possessing the ability to be flexible allows for Black women

principals to be able to code switch. "I always try to adapt to every situation and be

flexible because I don't want to ever be viewed as an angry Black Woman." She

explained how her flexibility looks very differently based on the context upon which it is

needed. Hannah said,

I have to say, you should never look to see yourself when you walk into a

classroom. You have to recognize that everyone has strengths and

weaknesses. You have to consider all perspectives. All mindsets. You

have to support everyone. All demographics. That's really important.

(Hannah, 2022)

Africana Womanism, as a theoretical construct, allows the opportunity for

individuals to connect with themselves. Hannah did this in a very reflective way.

I had never heard of this Africana Womanism concept before we started

working together. I am just speechless when you ask some of these

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questions because they really make me think. I have to think about how

important being a part of something so important is. Like when you talk

about support, I know that's not my reality. I mean I have a network of

support that I am very thankful for. It is actually a sisterhood where we

support one another, but that's totally on us. If you – you know. If you

were to really dig deep into why we as Black Women don't support each

other the way we should, then it would make more sense to someone like

me who just doesn't get it. We need each other, yet we always seem to be

in competition with one another. Well some of us do. I am all about the

sisterhood. I love this concept and believe that we will see some

important things change for Black Women in all areas of education

not just the principalship. (Hannah, 2022)

Abigail

Abigail is a 22-year veteran educator who taught for 6 years and has served as

both an assistant principal and principal. Abigail is the principal of an elementary school.

Like Hannah, Abigail is very proud to come from a long line of educators. She knew

early on in her life that she wanted to give back and that giving back to her community

could be done through equipping children with an education. That passion for reading in

Abigail's life has lasted through sundry opportunities to impact the lives of children. She

has taken courses, undergone trainings like Reading Recovery to provide student

interventions, and even took some coursework in counseling. Although she has been

successful in each endeavor, Abigail truly found her niche in leadership. Abigail is a

fiercely determined educator with a fiery passion to blaze her own trail. Her trailblazing

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has not left her without challenges and obstacles that had to be overcome. Abigail stated, "One of the most important things I had to learn early on is that I am defined by ME, and only ME," Abigail stated passionately. In Africana Womanism self-naming and self-defining are two of the first characteristics that must be addressed. Abigail explained her position on this in a very poignant way. She says, "Tammy, if you let them, people will try and place you into a tiny little box that they've created for you. Not me. I decided a long time ago that I am more than what someone else thinks about me, and I mean that."

As with other participants, the roles Black Women play are also a way to name themselves. Abigail defines herself as a Christian Black Woman. She says that she is a Black Woman who is driven by mission and vocation. She also describes herself as private. Abigail says that she is a mover and a shaker, a very personable person, someone who likes to get to know people culturally, and the ultimate professional. She also defines herself as a sister, a daughter, a friend, and a community activist. Abigail thoughtfully stated, "Sometimes there are so many roles, it can be absolutely overwhelming." Just as Hannah recognizes the significance of being Black and having to work hard to prove herself, Abigail shares that same sentiment. She said, "It has been my experience that less concern was placed on what I knew many times than how I looked or what people perceived about me. So, I made it my mission to lead with excellence."

When discussing the prioritization of race, class, and gender, Abigail emphatically indicated her experiences with race being the factor that supersedes the other two.

I think gender is important because I know I have been stereotyped and
overlooked because I am a woman. However, if we are honest, the issue
of race sort of speaks for itself. I mean, if we even just look
around us, we can see how atrocious things can be. It's bad, Tammy.
Really bad. I think as bad as I have ever seen it. I mean, I have known
my entire career that I would have to show up and be better. You know,
bringing my own standard of excellence. I knew fitting in would require
proving yourself. You honestly have to be better. A lot better. If you
aren't your competence is questioned. I have always known because I am
Black, I have to show up on time. In fact, I have to be early. I have
always known, I have to speak in a tone that doesn't frighten anyone or
make them uncomfortable because I don't want to be perceived as the
angry Black Woman. I have to rely on my faith to keep me from reacting
to people in a way that could cause them to view me differently or
honestly to get me fired (chuckle). (Abigail, 2022)

Abigail has worked hard and given her all in every capacity in which she has
served. "I had to work hard and leave my mark. I had to make sure that everyone knew
that I am a professional and that I am capable."

Abigail believes in the power of positive relationships. "Showing grace is how
you create these relationships. The relationships are how you reciprocate respect," she
proudly declares. "I go through things, too, so I model humanity. I am not heartless. So,
there are times when I have to let them (my staff) see my vulnerability," Abigail

continued. Shaking her head, Abigail recalled a time when she did not feel respected or recognized.

> These questions are really making me think. Reflect. Think back to some
>
> things that I didn't realize I had forgotten. It took me back your whole
>
> idea of naming yourself. I am not an arrogant person by any means.
>
> However, I am very thankful that God brought me through my doctoral
>
> journey in my right mind. Girl. I had one assistant principal who was a
>
> white male. Do you know he refused to call me Dr. Benjamin? Yes
>
> ma'am. He absolutely refused, but you know what? I corrected him every
>
> time he did that. I needed him to realize I will be recognized for the work
>
> I have done. Shakespeare said, "What's in a name?" I say there's a lot in a
>
> name. I love that about this Africana Womanism paradigm because I
>
> agree – I define myself! So powerful. (Abigail, 2022)

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare claims, "That which we call a rose by any other name would smell just as sweet." He uses the quote to suggest that naming things is irrelevant. The Africana Womanist would disagree just as Abigail does. The Africana Womanist is going to strive to live up to her name each and every day; however, for her, it is so much more than just naming and defining herself. Abigail clarifies this point, "It's not just about the name (although it is about the name, too). It's also showing up and giving 110% each day. That's what earns you respect and recognition." She continued by saying, "It's about being professional and student-centered so that you see students performing academically and developing productively."
Abigail said,

I believe that we can see changes in how our children are performing in schools. It's very clear, things have to change. We are failing too many students. Teachers are teaching, I am leading, the commitment is there. Yet sometimes we still see some kids who don't perform. They're disengaged. When I taught, I made my lessons culturally relevant to capture my kids' interests. We have to bring diversity into our schools and classrooms or we are doomed. (Abigail, 2022)

Abigail describes herself as a collaborative leader. "I don't have to know everything. When I let the staff know that I know this, that is me being my authentic self." Abigail says, "I know that having a strong network of people who know me and understand my intentions helps me to create a student-centered culture where everyone can thrive."

Abigail believes there are not enough Black educators who have each other's backs today. She wonders why there is always such a disconnect amongst our Black educators especially Black Women. She explained, "One of the things that I may never understand in life is why we as Black Women feel the need to compete with one another. It sounds like I am being cliché here, I am sure, but I really do wonder, why can't we all just get along?" Abigail went on to ask,

You think people are wondering how I know? Well, it's like Jay Z said, "Men lie, women lie, but the numbers don't lie.". There are too few Black Women working together. But, you know what Tammy? You can bring us together. I just know you can. This is a perfect start. (Abigail, 2022)

Rachel

Rachel is a 23-year veteran educator who taught for 6 years, and served as an assistant principal and principal, as well. Rachel also worked as an Administrative Assistant before becoming an Assistant Principal. She is the second of only two participants in this study who had such an experience to prepare them for entering into an assistant principalship. Currently, Rachel is principal of a large middle school, adding a layer of variety to the study with a different grade span. Rachel emphasized the significance of faith in her life at the onset of our discussion. She said, "I come from a Christian home with parents who taught me to be loving, compassionate, and to show empathy for humankind." She continued by saying, "I grew up to be a servant and until this very day, I am still serving." Like many other participants in the study, Rachel comes from a family of educators. She shared that most of her family members were in counseling and were star athletes, including her.

> I am a leader. I have always been a leader. In high school, I was a
> standout athlete. I was also a really good band student. I was in the Jazz
> Performance Band. I continued in band in college. I was really good. I
> am definitely musically inclined, but I did not want to teach music. Yes,
> that's funny. I taught math. I was Drum Major in high school and did
> great with that. Then, I was actually the first female Drum Major at
> Georgia State University. I made history. I really feel like my life has
> always inspired others to be better. At least I hope it has. (Rachel, 2022)

Rachel explained how her parents had left a legacy at Georgia State before her since both of her parents were Bull Dogs. She felt like she was walking in shadows with something to prove.

I felt like I always had to prove that I was good enough. My parents were

not necessarily applying the pressure, but it was there. I was supported in

everything I did, but I was still out to prove my worth. You see my dad

was somewhat famous. Yes. My daddy is a Hall of Famer. Yes ma'am.

He played for the Detroit Lions. That's a lot to live up to, especially in a

house where everyone has that Bull Dog tenacity. (Rachel, 2022)

Rachel truly believes that is why she possesses the drive and passion that she does. She

lives by this passion and leads with the same tenaciousness. She pours herself into

getting people on board. She said, "You can have all the vision in the world, but without

people to bring it to fruition, you have nothing." She is excited that she has found her

"groove" at Grandview Middle Academy.

Rachel says that as a child growing up, for fourteen years she lived between two

states. This, in her opinion was not easy. She credits her mother with being a strong

enough woman to keep the family together.

My mom is an amazing woman. She was an awesome mother. She was

the glue that kept things to stay stuck together. With Dad being a

professional athlete, it required a lot of sacrifice, and she was the one to

make most of them. I have always drawn from that strength. You know

I guess in essence, that's why I am so strong. When you talk about being

in it together, I know how that works because my mom was my dad's

biggest supporter. (Rachel, 2022)

When asked about the prioritization of race, class, and gender, Rachel talked at

length about how she never realized there were so many disparities from school to

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school. Luckily for Rachel, when she began her teaching career, she started teaching at Oakdale Middle School, which is the same middle she attended as a student. For Rachel, school was as she had remembered. Students and staff had what they needed to be successful. Soon after, she moved to Brownsville Middle School with a very different and much more diverse group of students and teachers. Rachel said, "This was the first time I saw there were differences. My eyes truly opened up to some things. Not necessarily things I wanted to see, but things I had to see." She continued, "Race has been a pretty big thing for me." Rachel recalls being the only Black person in many spaces. "It was really crazy at times. I remember my first year. I had to hire like 20 people. I am glad to say, though, now things do seem to be changing."

Rachel believes service with kindness and empathy is the only way to lead. She describes herself as a flexible and adaptive leader. She said, "To sustain your leadership, you have to be flexible and adaptive." Besides being an outstanding principal, Rachel says that she is also a daughter, an auntie, a friend, and a sister. Each role she takes very seriously.

Rachel defines her leadership style as dedicated. She says that whatever she commits to, she gives 100% and more to the cause. She also shared that no matter what she has had to go through, she has remained resilient through it all. She explained, "I think Black Women in general are built to be resilient. I think it's in our nature or something." Rachel has definitely had to be resilient through some of the adversities she has faced on her leadership journey. She credits these challenges with helping her to become even stronger.

All educators are not created equal. We don't all have the same level

of compassions. I have learned this through some of the things I have

faced over the past few years. Especially during COVID. I now know

that your leadership will be tested. There were times when I had to just

ebb and flow, bob and weave, you know. Every day felt like a mystery. I

never knew what to expect. But, I must say, my resiliency increased

during all of these things. (Rachel, 2022)

Rachel shared that she had to persevere through the death of two staff members within a

week of one another and speak at the services. Her bravery and determination allowed

her to be able to do this.

For Rachel, knowing her "who" has made her a more successful leader. She says,

"You have to point out that you are Black. I let them know I am a Black Female, but I

can still connect." She also shared that being a Black Woman principal does not

automatically give you a connection with other Black Women principals. Rachel says,

"Lots of my opposition is actually from other Black Women. That's why I have to stay

so strong."

Rachel says she wants to leave a legacy of kindness. In order to do this, Rachel

says, "I have to show up authentically." She believes there must be something more

intentional to truly effect systemic changes. Rachel says,

We have to learn how to really support each other and stop all of the

madness we have going on today. We have to learn how we can protect

each other. Like this. You have truly made me reflect and think about my

journey. You know, maybe I can help somebody. You just never know.

Thank you for this opportunity. (Rachel, 2022)

Characteristics of Leadership of Participants

Presenting the stories of the participants is foundational in responding to the intent and purposes of my research. The study sought to determine the impact of the lived experiences, as they relate to Hudson-Weems prioritization of race, class, and gender, of Black Women principals on the way they lead in their respective schools. The research concluded that the lived experiences of Black Women principals have a tremendous influence on the way these Black Women lead. The research aligned to five distinct characteristics of leadership identified by the Human Resources Development Quarterly group. The data revealed a sixth characteristic that was very important in the leadership of the six participants and manifested as a major theme. Five of the characteristics corresponded with the five leadership characteristics identified in a 2019 Human Resources Development Quarterly-U Ideas for Learning Five Transformational Leadership Characteristics and Qualities blog. These categories are adaptable, integrity, good listener, accountability, and inspiring.

For the research study, I found the five characteristics (also major themes in the data) identified by HRDQ easy to use as a frame to categorize my findings in a manner that allowed me to apply the eighteen characteristics of Africana Womanism to each of them as specific categories. The sixth category, although not one identified by HRDQ, was one that was very pronounced in the data. The theme was connectivity. During the research, I found these six Black Women principals' lived experiences to have connected them with themselves and others; have caused them to lead with integrity; have caused them to be accountable to themselves and to others; have caused them to be inspiring individuals who allow their lights to shine so that others can see who they are, whose

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they are, and why they are; have caused them to be good listeners who truly care about others, and have caused them to be adaptable. For the purpose of this study, the lived experiences of the six Black Women principals have influenced the way they lead without question. As evidenced through interview transcripts, these Black Women explained that they lead with tenacity, bravery, boldness, humility, commitment, competence, fortitude, strength, courage, grace, resilience, determination, perseverance, and patience.

The sub-question for this research reflects how the lived experiences of Black Women principals impact their styles of leading and the effects of those leadership styles on the culture and climate in their schools. Although it is clear that the lived experiences of these Black Women participants have had a tremendous influence on them as leaders, it is less clear in a formal sense as to how to contextualize their leadership styles and the culture and climate of their schools within existing frameworks for defining such aspects of leadership. Using a formal tool for gathering this information would have been helpful for answering this sub-question formally. However, informally and according to the account of each of the participants, they each lead a school where the culture is strong, positive and wholesome. During the research, I determined that each of the study participants provided transformational leadership in their schools based on their responses to interview questions. In a 2019 HRDQ-U Ideas for Learning Five Transformational Leadership Characteristics and Qualities blog, the five top characteristics (that I have organized into categories for the purpose of this study) of leadership identified were good listener, adaptable, inspiring, accountable, and integrity (HRDQ, 2019) aligned to the themes that emerged from the data with the addition of the

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lived experiences connecting the Black Women to themselves and others. It was also revealed in the research that there is overlap amongst the characteristics and how the eighteen characteristics of African Womanism fit into each of the leadership categories. When none of the participants connected themselves with the traditional styles of leadership (transformational, transactional (autocratic), laissez-faire, instructional, or integrated), I was forced to go back to the research in order to be able to make sense of the data. Finding no existing frameworks or defined leadership paradigms to match the leadership styles of the Black Women participants, I was forced to create a framework for how Black Women principals' lived experiences shape them as leaders. This framework included the use of the top five characteristics of leadership identified by the Human Resources Development Quarterly group, as well as the sixth theme from the data, as categories to organize the eighteen characteristics of Africana Womanism. These leadership characteristics are in addition to the identified leadership styles in Chapter Two. As previously mentioned, multifactor leadership theory is one of the most researched theories in the social sciences field because it focuses on leadership and organizational effectiveness. Using the multifactor leadership inventory would have provided me with more formal data on the leadership styles of the participants if I had been able to administer it. There are different forms of this approach in the literature, and it is considered in three dimensions: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles (Hoy & Miskel, 2010). I was required to continue the research process when neither of the three dimensions were explicitly stated during interviews. Further research revealed the categories of the five leadership characteristics identified by Human Resources Development Quarterly-U. Using the five characteristics (referred to in this

study as categories) identified by HRDQ (and the sixth category identified from the data) served as the basis for creating the framework for presenting the findings. Having to create this frame forced me as a researcher to realize that further interrogation is needed to explicate the differences noted in the study regarding characteristics of Black Women's leadership. Currently, the literature available on identifying leadership styles have been designed by White Men (Bass & Avioli, 1996, Bass & Avioli, 2004) and do not naturally fit the needs for defining (categorizing) the leadership of Black Women. As such, I have contacted a behavioral analysis company to design an instrument, based on the framework I have put forth in this study, that will be designed specifically for use with Black Women leaders in the future and will be unique as it is designed by a Black Woman leader.

Lived Experiences

I began the discussion of this chapter with an introduction to each of the participants in the study, sharing a snippet of the stories of these n women. Their stories are steeped in relevancy to their experiences; therefore, longer quotes are a result of attempting to accurately and adequately tell the stories of these Black Women. Now, following the profiles of each participant, the remainder of the chapter highlighted are the five leadership characteristics and their connectivity with the eighteen characteristics of Africana Womanism, together supported by interview data with references to each of the interview questions. Melded into that discussion is the presentation of each of the interview questions and an analysis of participants' responses. Following the discussion of the characteristics and their connectivity to the eighteen Africana Womanism characteristics, with questions from interviews one and two, will be the presentation of

the lived experiences of these amazing women. These varying aspects of the presentation of the data allows for me, as the researcher, to demonstrate the significance of the lived experiences of the participants relevant to how they have impacted the way these Black Women principals lead in their respective schools. These Black Women principals' lived experiences have connected them with themselves and others, have caused them to lead with integrity, have caused them to be accountable to themselves and others, have caused them to be inspiring, have caused them to be good listeners who care about others, and have caused them overall to be adaptable leaders.

Table 4.2 represents the assignment of the Africana Womanism characteristics to the leadership categories.

Table 4.2 Africana Womanism Characteristics/Leadership Categories

Good Listener	**Adaptable**	**Integrity**
	Flexible Role Player	Self-Namer
Nurturing	Male Compatibility	Self-Definer
Mothering	Adaptable	Genuine in Sisterhood
Respectful of Elders		Authentic
		Spiritual
Inspiring	**Accountable**	**Connectivity**
Ambitious	In Concert with Males in the Liberation Struggle	Ambitious
Family-Centered	Whole	Respectful of Elders
Strong	Recognized	Respected
Respected		Spiritual
Spiritual		Genuine in Sisterhood
		Adaptable
		In Concert with Males in the Liberation Struggle
		Whole
		Self-Namer
		Self-Definer
		Strong
		Mothering
		Nurturing
		Authentic
		Male Compatible
		Flexible Role Player
		Family-Centered
		Recognized

Settling on interview questions that could be answered within an hour and not have participants feeling rushed or overwhelmed was not an easy feat. However, once the interview questions were finalized, the interviews were scheduled. All participants preferred meeting via Zoom to keep them in their school buildings so as not to create an inconvenience for themselves. The following are findings from my research outlining the

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six themes revealed in the data and how the interview questions and responses from interviews one and two correspond. I created an interview question matrix to assist me with data analysis and coding of the interview transcripts.

Lived Experiences: Connecting Them with Themselves and Others

One finding revealed for how the lived experiences of Black Women principals, as they relate to race, class, and gender influence the way they lead is found in the way those lived experiences connect them with themselves and others. Knowing who you are is imperative to the survival of the Black Woman. Africana Women have had to name themselves since antiquity. Therefore, a number of interview questions and Africana Womanism characteristics correspond. The Black Women principals in the study were able to connect with themselves by taking the time to connect with their inner nurturing and mothering instincts. They were also able to connect with others by connecting to themselves as spiritual beings. Ruth commented during her second interview, "We are not natural beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings living this natural experience." Ruth's philosophy on connecting with a higher power is one that was shared by each of the participants. This connection seemed to help the women to better connect with others along their leadership journey, as well. Many of them felt their connection with the "higher power" helped led them to treat their parents, students, and staff with respect, compassion, empathy, and grace. This created for the participants that sense of wholeness (feeling like you are complete with no need for validation from others and the permission to walk in your authenticity) and being just fine with who they are and what that means to them. Having that sense of self-awareness and being able to connect

with who they are made these women feel better equipped to connect with those around them, especially those individuals to whom they provide leadership.

The participants were also able to connect with their validation of being family-centered. These powerful Sisters also had no problem naming or defining themselves as Self-Namers and Self-Definers. They each embrace living authentically every day. Each of the participants emphasized the need to define herself to truly define who she is. The Black Women realize naming and defining themselves sets the expectation for the names they will answer to. This is extremely important in leadership since there is no room for error. Black Women leaders must answer to names that validate their confidence and competence so that others recognize those qualities as well.

In the study, the Black Women participants were able to connect with themselves and find a level of peace in realizing, they deserve to be recognized and respected for all they do and who they are each and every day of their lives. However, they also deserve to be respected and recognized for who they are as leaders and what they are doing to improve the lives of children, families, and the communities they serve. These Black Women principals have learned how to rely on their own intrinsic motivation when accolades do not come from others. Rachel said, "I believe I have the respect, but recognitions are not always timely." Being the people, they are, they do not wait for others to publicly recognize what they are doing, they just keep doing what needs to be done with the satisfaction of knowing they have done what they needed to do. Sarah said, "When I go home at night, I have no regrets. I know that I have given my all, and that's what matters. A pat on the back is good from time to time, but not necessary for me."

While connecting with themselves, the Black Women participants revealed how important it is to connect with others, as well. In general, Black Women highly regard the elders in their lives, families, and communities. This was no different for my study participants, these ladies believe whole heartedly in being respectful of elders, honoring their ancestry, and serving their communities. Connecting with others also included the participants willingness and desire to demonstrate their male compatibility and their willingness to be in concert with males in the liberation struggle (as well as with Africana children). These connections were especially important to participants, as these familial connections allow them to forge strong connections with the children they serve, as well as their families. One of the participants described her first experience with having to support a single Black father secure resources and a home for his family. Being an effective leader is multi-faceted and may call for unconventional (non-traditional) methods of supporting the people being served.

Finally, being able to connect with others is a part of being genuine in the sisterhood. The participants believe this to be a missing component of their leadership experiences, as many times rather than form a genuine sisterhood, Black Women feel the need to compete with their Sisters.

Beginning the interviews with a question to allow participants an opportunity to discuss who they are both personally and professionally, provided an opportunity for them to get comfortable with the conversation and me as the researcher. This was accomplished with each participant, as they each seemed very at ease to speak freely. The participants even indicated their level of comfort with the conversation we were engaging in. Rebekah admitted she was very skeptical initially, "I wasn't really sure

what to expect. I don't usually just open myself up to strangers." Ruth shared her eagerness to participate. She said, "Tammy, I feel like I have known you forever. It's very easy to talk with you." Rachel shared, "I am a servant leader." The connection I was able to make with participants, as the researcher, was a part of the "sisterhood" that Black Women can share and often long for. This is an important aspect of leadership because having these types of connections with other Black Women can help combat the feeling of loneliness and isolation that can be associated with leadership (Arao, 2016).

Four of the six Black Women participants were married with children. They all shared how their families, both immediate and extended, mean everything to them. Ruth and Rebekah are both considered to be the "go to" people in their families. Ruth said, "Everyone knows, they can come to Princess (her family nickname) whenever they need anything." Each of the participants talked at length about how being a mother and the myriad number of experiences they have had nurturing and caring for their children have impacted the way they interact with the children they serve in their schools. Hannah shared how blessed she feels to be a mother. She said, "I am a mother, I am always going to go the extra mile for kids because that's what I want for my girls. I am always going to treat children the way I would want mine treated." Although the other two participants are not biologically mothers, they, like their colleagues, believe that family comes first. Abigail said, "I love my family, and my family loves me. I stand firmly on that!" Abigail connected intimately with the Africana Womanism family-centered characteristic. She said, "I come from a family of educators, so everything we do is centered around our family and some aspect of education. I know that being an educator was a part of my destiny." She also shared how all of the experiences she has had over

her lifetime have shaped and molded her to be the educator she is today. During one of

my interviews with Rachel, she was traveling out of town to attend a playoff basketball

game for her niece. She said, "I couldn't miss this opportunity; however, I had to get on

the road to get to Marlboro on time to see my niece play." Her commitment to her

children was very evident, as well. She spoke passionately about ensuring all of her

students had equal access to a quality learning experience in her school. She stated, "I

am obligated to my kids to ensure they get what they need."

The first question from interviews one and two encompassed all of the eighteen

characteristics of Africana Womanism. A major aspect of Africana Womanism is

knowing who you are. The amazing responses by these phenomenal ladies demonstrated

that each of the participants have a strong sense of self and know exactly who they are.

These women confidently present who they are in an intriguing way that confirms their

commitment to sharing their lived experiences.

Lived experiences based on race, class, and gender of Black Women principals

are the foundation upon which this study was framed. Therefore, the responses of each

participant were reviewed multiple times. Two participants struggled with the question

as they reflected on their leadership journey. Both women explained their experiences

would be quite different if they were beginning their leadership journeys at this time in

history. Ruth, especially, is thankful that she is close to the end of her career. She said,

"I have had a lot of really incredible experiences that have made me the person I am

today." She explained how the leader she is today is not the same person that entered her

first administrative position so many years ago. For Ruth, she claimed, it was difficult to

speak about race without talking about gender and class. As such, she vacillated between

the three as she reflected on her journey. Rebekah, like Ruth, had a difficult time responding to each of the ideals individually. Rebekah said quietly, almost to herself, "I entered education back in 1995 when race was about seeing discrimination." She continued, "Public education is now just a business, and racism means so many different things. I think race really kind of speaks for itself." Rebekah explained that although being able to lead boldly is a direct result of her experiences with race, class has probably been the thing that fueled her and was the basis of her many dreams and aspirations. She said, "I grew up in poverty. So, I definitely know how poverty works." Rebekah believes growing up in a two-parent family where both parents' combined incomes were a little over twenty thousand dollars helped her to learn how to focus on what was most important in her life. She has carried those practical truths learned during her youth with her on her journey to becoming a successful leader who leads with humility and boldness. Like many Black Women throughout history, Rebekah has always desired to be a trail blazer. She believes it's her calling to serve. This is typical of Black Women leaders. Dorothy Height, a civil rights and women's rights activist, lead with boldness and tenacity as a trail blazer and anti-lynching crusader (Bell, 2020). Mrs. Height, like Ruth and Rachel, had a personal awareness of how race and class tremendously impacts the lives of some people. This knowledge creates a level of trust and honesty when it comes to parents and their children. Rebekah said, "Poor parents trust you a lot more with their children than the affluent ones do."

Having a slightly juxtaposed position, Abigail spoke very candidly about the three ideals and how they have impacted her journey to and throughout the principalship. She reflected on what it all means to her. Abigail said, "Honestly, for me, at this point, it's

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about race first. Then, I have to say gender." She shared that she knows this does not look the same for everyone and how we should be willing to share our realities no matter what they may be. Abigail feels like having to look at her journey through the lens of race, class, and gender also forced her to recognize the strength and passion she has developed as a leader comes directly from the experiences she has had. She stated, "I have had some wonderful opportunities in my life, but they haven't all been good. And, I know it, yet I am still grateful." Similarly, Rachel has faced many challenges along the way; however, she has been determined to remain focused and committed to being an impactful leader. Rachel says that she believes all of her experiences have been designed specifically for her. She said, "I am going to show up, no matter what. I am going to be there. I know I haven't had all of these things happen for nothing. They are supposed to help me learn and grow."

Sarah feels like segmenting her journey by race, class, and gender is an interesting way for her to really face some of the demons that most of us carry. She said, "I really can tell you that starting my career in Barnville County should give you a sense of who you're working with." She said,

> The place is predominantly minority, so you can't just go there thinking
> you're on a cake walk. You gotta work. Every day and night. All day,
> every day. I did. I figured it out. You sacrifice yourself to be the leader,
> even when it is in the classroom, that you don't want to be in. Seriously.
> (Sarah, 2022)

Sacrificing is not something that is foreign to Black Women. They know how to sacrifice, and often they do it with pride and bravery. Both Coretta Scott King and

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Myrlie Evans knew the roles their husbands were playing in the fight for justice for

Blacks for during the Civil Rights movement, yet with bravery and courage, both women

through sacrifices for their husbands and families supported their husbands in every effort

to make life as they knew it better for Blacks (Bell, 2020).

In my opinion, race, class, and gender shape the experiences of all people. These

three categories, although overlapping in a sense, are interpreted and analyzed very

differently from participant to participant. Each Woman's individual struggles,

challenges, and celebrations create for them a unique and intriguing set of experiences

that have helped to define them as Black Women principals. These experiences have

influenced them as leaders strengthening and fortifying them to be strong, courageous,

brave and bold leaders.

The poem written by Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems in 2007, "I Got Your Back

Boo" and published in her book, Africana- Melanated Womanism was dedicated to all

Africana-Melanated people. In the poem, she says it all, particularly in respect to the

prioritization of race, class, and gender as she lays out the tripartite facing Africana

Women today (Hudson-Weems, 2020).

The Africana Woman

Question three from the first interview was a follow up from question two,

actually spanning across all leadership characteristics and each of the eighteen Africana

Womanism characteristics. After discussing how race, class, and gender had been a part

of their journey to the principalship, the participants were asked to prioritize the one that

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took priority over the others throughout their leadership journey. Without fail, the answer of each participant was race. Therefore, it can be interpreted that race is a significant factor in the lives of these six Black Women principals. As with every other aspect of this study, although the experiences of each of the participants may vary, they all feel like race has taken priority over gender and class in impacting them as leaders. According to Daphne Williams Nitiri this is aligned to the realities of Africana Women across the globe. She asserts,

> Women, no matter what continent or race, suffer from sexist domination
> and exploitation. Indeed, this is a basic tenet of human cooperation. But
> the discourse involving Africana women cannot escape the historical
> realities of hegemony and ethnocentrism by Western cultures and the
> accompanying atrocities of slavery, colonialism and oppression. In
> reality, the prototypical image is of a poor, struggling, Africana woman
> overburdened by labor-intensive, domestic and non-domestic projects and
> multiple offspring. This is not the same for the White Woman. Is it not
> true then, that race precedes sexism in a racist world? Or that society has
> conditioned its lookers to see race before sex? And that racism and
> classism go hand in hand? (Nitiri, Introduction Hudson-Weems, 2020).

Sarah spoke about this, at length, during her interview. She talked about the perceptions of others based solely on what they see serving as a motivator for her. Sarah also remembered when she was once mistaken for a White Woman based on her email and telephone correspondence. She said, "Honestly, it has happened more than once. I see the surprised look on their faces when they meet me for the first time. It's like

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they're thinking – I did not realize this was who I was talking to." Sarah was not the only participant who realized that Black Women are often stereotyped regarding society's expectations for them. For example, Ruth has been told for many years, "You don't act like other people." She and Abigail have also heard many times, "You really write very well." Although meant as a compliment, to a Black Woman comments such as those can be highly offensive. Rebekah says that when people offer her backhanded compliments like those, she has begun to feign ignorance. She asks, "Oh really. What exactly do you mean by that?"

Race is a societal challenge that forces us to face very harsh realities at times Weiner & Burton, 2020). We can make the decision to learn and grow from our experiences or to become angry and embittered by those experiences that challenge our resolve. The dynamic women in my study all embrace their lessons learned from the aspect of race and allow them to make them better leaders. As such, they are able to lead with boldness, determination, and confidence.

Question three, like questions one and two from interview one can be applied across the Africana Womanism question matrix as race informs every characteristic of the paradigm. When responding, the Black Women participants connect race with each characteristic. However, their responses most strongly align to the characteristics of self-naming and self-defining. Self-naming and self-defining are important to the cause of leading, especially for them as Black Women leaders because the naming process is of extraordinary importance. Lerone Bennett, Jr., an activist and social critic shares that sentiment in his discourse on the lost identity of Blacks and Black consciousness (Hudson-Weems, 2020). Daphne Williams Ntiri quotes Bennett as insisting that the way

people have been classified and named in the social order in the past has created the distorted images others (especially the dominant culture) have of Africana people. Bennett says at this phase in our history, naming is too critical to be left in the hands of the dominant group. He asserts, "We have been named, we should now become 'namers'."

Question four, from interview one, allowed participants to have a formal introduction the Africana Womanism characteristic of being flexible role-players. All six Black Women could identify innumerable roles they play in addition to being Black, being Women, and being principals. These Black Women took pride in also being mothers, aunts, sisters, cousins, friends, daughters, nieces, and granddaughters. They each expressed genuine love and devotion to their families; therefore, their identification with these familial roles was not surprising. When discussing the varied roles, they hold, participants added roles like counselor, believer, servant, prayer-warrior, help-mate, activist, motivator, and intercessor. Each of the participants wove in the characteristic of faith because the role of believer was paramount with all of the participants. Two of the Black Women specifically spoke to their community activism and how that role was extremely important to both of them. Ruth said, "Our communities are depending on us. I love the way you mention the Africana community. That makes me think things are so much bigger than us." Abigail also considers herself an activist and said, "I remember hearing from someone once. It might have been my grandfather, actually. I am asking myself now, if not me, then who?" The women described experiences that forced them to lead with tenacity and confidence. Their activism and advocacy are direct reflections

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of the Africana Womanism characteristic of strength. They have the boldness, strength and courage it takes to lead with influence and power.

Rachel said, "I take all my roles very seriously, but the one I take most serious is my responsibility to be me. I am responsible to myself to keep it real." Rachel's powerful statement aligns with the Africana Womanism characteristics whole, strong, and authentic.

Rebekah understands her role as a supporter of her husband. She is well aware that her job is to "help" him in every aspect of the word. She shared how she is never intimidated by "submitting" and being a wife because she views her marriage as a partnership. She understands and has aligned herself to the Africana Womanism characteristic of male compatibility, as well as with in concert with males in the liberation struggle. She asked, "Why would I fight against my husband? I would be fighting against myself. That wouldn't be very smart, would it?" She also shared how much she enjoys preparing meals for her husband (her family). She said, "I love to cook and see someone enjoy it. But, I have no problem with someone cooking for me either." This is a common concept in the Africana family. There are times when the roles within the Africana community are indistinguishable as everyone does whatever needs to be done to keep the family moving forward (Hudson-Weems, 2020). Africana men, women, and children believe in and respect traditional roles, but they also understand there are times when the lines between those roles get blurred. This interconnectivity and willingness to support the male in the liberation struggle validates the need for and significance of male compatibility.

Having the opportunity to reflect on the various roles they play from day to day provided these Black Women principals with much needed affirmation that being a flexible role player does not diminish who you are as a Black Women principal. In fact, the reciprocal is true. Those roles and the experiences they provide enhance their leadership and their ability to respectfully serve others.

Lived Experiences: Causing Them to Lead with Integrity

Africana women believe in being true to truth. Therefore, there is a moral obligation, of sorts, that Black Women live by. It's their own moral code that prevents them from doing and saying certain things that do not align with their mission of building others capacity to be better. The participants in my study are these type women. They have allowed their amazing lived experiences to strengthen their desire to make a difference in the lives of everyone they encounter. Two of the participants are strongly involved in community activism. This level of bravery and commitment to being true to themselves rivals that of the ancient warrior queens who were willing to fight for truth and what is right. These Black Women principals are strong descendants from a long lineage of strong, proud African women activists and culture bearers, dating back to ancient Egypt (Hudson-Weems, 2004). Queen Hatsphepsut (1505 – 1485 BC) was a warrior queen whose reign was one of the most outstanding in the 18th Dynasty of Egypt. This incredible leadership proved that a woman can be both a strong and effective ruler (Hudson-Weems, 2004).

Being willing to take a stand and lead with truth and honesty was a common theme throughout my data collection. Each of the six participants shared how important honesty and trust is to them. These Black Women want to be viewed as trustworthy and

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honest in their leadership. Rebekah stated, "No one is willing to follow someone they don't trust and believe in, and I don't blame them." Rachel said, "I have never felt like people wouldn't trust me or my leadership because I don't give them a reason to."

Abigail believes that her open and transparent leadership has led to her having a culture of success in her school. She said, "I didn't work this hard to have my people leave and go someplace else because they think I am not relatable." This is powerful because Africana Womanists must possess the ability to relate. It is imperative that they can relate to the individuals they encounter, as well as those who depend on them for their leadership. Strong Africana Women must be able to relate to others so that goodness, responsibility, and commitment are all passed on to those individuals who are bringing up the rear. These qualities must also be passed on to our Africana children, as they are the legacy of the Africana community and must assume their rightful places.

Additionally, it is also imperative when remembering the lived experiences of Black Women principals have caused them to lead with integrity to remember leading with integrity also requires a willingness to speak up when things are not right. The women in my study all demonstrated their willingness to speak up and out against the injustices in society today. One hundred percent of these women are eager to learn what else can be done to further the cause. Sarah asked me, "So, Tammy, what comes next? What do we do when you finish your dissertation?" Ruth said, "I really wish there were more." The Black Women participants in my study and Black Women across the world are eager to see things change in a way that provides Africana people with opportunities to promote true cultural relevancy and build cultural consciousness in all communities.

These role models have existed throughout history. Brave queens like Hatsphepsut, Queen Nzingha (an astute military strategist), and Queen Mother Yaa Asantewa (who lead the Ashanti people against British colonist) all represent the bravery and integrity it takes to be a good leader. More modern accounts of strong Africana Women are Ida B. Wells, Amy Ashwood Garvey, Shirley Graham DuBois, Fannie Lou Hammer, Ella Baker, and Mamie Till Mobley just to name a few. These Black Women have paved the way for today's Africana Womanists.

Lived Experiences: Causing Them to Be Accountable to Themselves and Others

Another finding revealed through my research was that the lived experiences of the Black Women principals have caused them to be accountable to themselves and others. Leadership is a journey. The journey is filled with highs and lows, challenges and celebrations, and decisions that have to be made minute by minute. Making good choices is essential to being a successful and effective leader. As leaders, the decision made is not always the right decision. Therefore, decisions must be made with thoughtfulness and careful planning. The French philosopher, Jean Paul Satre makes it clear that from an existentialist point of view, which is a perspective claiming that we have to understand, recognize and appreciate the importance of choices (Hudson-Weems, 2020). We have to account for what we do. The participants in the study share this philosophical belief. Leading is about deciding. Rebekah said, "And, we have to make the right decisions or it could ruin you." Hannah talked about hindsight and how making a hasty decision could be very costly. She said, "I don't just jump into something without weighing it out."

Being accountable is also an important aspect of leading because truth is so automatic. When a leader leads with truth and integrity the people they are leading are eager to follow them. However, when you have leaders who lead with a "pass the buck" mentality, there is no trust in leadership and the entire organization suffers. Sarah said, "I remember thinking, should I take the responsibility for this, or should I just…I just tell them what really happened?" Needless to say, like the great leader she is, Sarah decided to assume responsibility and handle the matter herself.

These school leaders are faced with the same challenge as leaders across the country when the word accountability is spoken, the first thought is test scores. Each of these women have strong feelings about the current accountability system creating a profile and defining schools based on a single assessment that varies from state to state. Rebekah said, "My test scores are actually really good. I just don't believe it's an effective way of appreciating the staff and students for who they are and the talents they bring to school." Rachel shared a similar thought, "Our scores are great. They are actually getting better every year, but I really don't care because there are so many other things to worry about." Sarah's school is a CSI school who is in state sanctioned school improvement. As such, she studies her data in depth and knows that her students are more than a simple test score. Sarah said somewhat frustratedly, "You know, I don't really put a lot of stock into test scores anymore. This experience has soured me, I think." She continued, "I can help them to create an accountability system that holds everybody accountable, if they are interested. You see, what we have now doesn't work." Leaders have to be able to navigate all aspects of accountability in order to be

successful in schools today. Rebekah said, "I know that my reputation and my school's good name are all riding on test scores, and I think that shouldn't be."

Black Women principals and principals across this nation have to be willing to be accountable to themselves by working to change these antiquated and outdated systems of accountability that don't allow for the individuality of students or staff to be valued. Educators must be willing to stand up for what is right and speak up when schools are assigned failing ratings based upon a single assessment, with no opportunity for the school to demonstrate excellence in any other manner.

Lived Experiences: Causing Them to Be Inspiring Individuals

Serving as an inspiration to others is a tremendous responsibility. Research has revealed that the lived experiences of the six Black Women participants have made them inspirational to others. To be a true inspiration requires that these Black Women allow their lights to shine so that others can see who they are, whose they are, and why they are.

I Know Who I Am

For centuries, Black Women have had to know who they are without allowing the definitions of others to define them. During slavery, plantation owners wanted to name Black Women as breeders, but these strong women refused the label and demanded to be identified as mother and companion because of her focus on her family even under the most incorrigible conditions (Hudson-Weems, 2021). Black Women saw their husband and children sold and sent away, sometimes deeper into slavery. The Black Woman was often left with only fond memories, while in her heart and mind yearning for a reunion because she still saw herself as wife and mother. She would not be reduced to simply being a "breeder". Even in antiquity Black Women knew they had to name and define

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themselves. To fully appreciate the way the woman is regarded in Africa provides a

strong background for why Africana Women know exactly who they are. The woman in

Africa must be viewed within an African socio-political religious system. African

Women's history embraces a wide variety of societies in more than fifty countries with

different geographies, social customs, religions, and historical situations (Sheldon, 2019).

Although this vast range exists, it is possible to discuss some common threads. Africa

remains a predominantly agricultural continent where women are engaged in cultivating

food for their families (Sheldon, 2019). Kathleen Sheldon says,

> The centrality of agriculture influences the control of land and of labor by
>
> kin groups and clans, usually represented by male political and religious
>
> leadership. Africa had a high incidence of matrilineal descent, a social
>
> system that placed a woman and her female relations at the center of
>
> kinship and family, though male clan leaders influenced the arrangement
>
> of families through marriage. (Sheldon, 2019 p. 112)

She went on to say, "Women used a variety of routes to exercise authority – through

women's organizations, as spiritual leaders, and sometimes as queen mothers, advising

male rulers and serving as co-rulers or regents (Sheldon, 2019, p. 112). The late 20th and

early 21st centuries has been marked by many localized wars in some African countries;

however, expanded opportunities for education, new job possibilities, increased political

activity, and improved family expectations are now more prevalent for African Women

(Sheldon, 2019). Once again, knowing who you are is foundational in providing a strong

reality that Black Women know and have always known exactly who they are.

Each of the participants in this study know exactly who they are. These extraordinary women understand their roles and take them very seriously. Four of the six respondents are wives and mothers. These are roles the four women take very seriously. Rebekah considers it an honor to be a mother. She stated, "My children are my greatest accomplishment, in a way." She explained that she believes when children are raised in the right way, they will not depart from what has been instilled in them. She said, "That's why I took raising my kids so seriously. I never wanted to be their friend. It was clear. I was their mother." Hannah loves being a mom. She says it is one of her greatest joys. "My girls bring me joy. I look at them, and I see wonder." Hannah; however, has struggled with being able to balance the mommy act with the demands of being a Black Woman in the principalship while trying to prove to the world that she is worthy of that post. Hannah said, "I have a lot of guilt." She continued and her voice cracked a little, "I sometimes struggle with that because I see myself doing all of these amazing things for my school, and my kids are getting what's left." To some degree, Hannah's "mommy guilt" interrupts the basic ideology of Africana Womanism, the implication that the family is always at the center of the Africana Womanist's agenda. As Hannah adores her family, but can't always seem to find a way to create the perfect balancing act. Balancing personal and professional responsibilities can be very challenging. However, according to Sarah, eventually things start to balance themselves out. Sarah remembered, "When I was younger, I remember how difficult it was. I remember not knowing how to turn off." She says that when your children are small, it makes things more complicated. She explained, "If you want to go to a special event with your child, you just have to pray that nothing comes up at the school because the job is 24-7/365." Ruth has many different

roles. Her roles included being an ordained Baptist Associate Pastor and spiritual and

educational counselor. Ruth believes all of the roles are able to be rolled into one. She

said, "I do have a great deal of responsibility on these shoulders, but it's all a part of my

purpose in life. I am here to serve. We all are." Ruth shared a number of stories that

outlined the different facets of her life and how she keeps it all together. She said, "It's

nothing but the Lord. He keeps me and carries me through it all." Ruth also spoke of

being a mom, actually a grand mom. She said, "It really is the ultimate joy to be a

mother, but I wonder sometimes, what gave you the right to be a mother. That's such a

long story, though." She continued, "Then I correct myself since that's not my decision.

I know where children come from." She said, "The thing is, we are all mothers. Black

Women. We are all mothers. This is whether we have birthed a baby or not." Abigail

shares that sentiment. She said thoughtfully, "I am not a biological mother of a single

child, but I have hundreds of kids counting on me each and every day of my life. Those

are my children." Rachel has a slightly more comical perspective on her role in

parenting. She jokingly said, "I am the best kind of mom in a sense. I am Auntie-mom.

I get to love on them, keep them when I want to, and take them home when I get ready.

How cool is that?" Rachel also spoke to her commitment to each of her students on a

more serious note. She explained, "I have to be there for them. I can't give up even

when I want to sometimes, I can't. They're mine. These are my children." It is in the

nature of the Black Woman to be a nurturer. The desire to keep children (families) safe,

happy, and healthy is one that Black Women have possessed for centuries. Mothering

and nurturing were recognized by White slave owners during slavery, leaving such a

lasting impression that slave owners forced Black Women to be "mothers" to their own

children. Sojourner Truth makes an assertion of her own regarding how seriously Black Women take mothering. She spoke of having borne five children and unfortunately saw most of them sold off into slavery. She said that when she cried with a mother's grief, no one but Jesus heard or cared (Hudson-Weems, 2020). The incredible experiences of these Black Women leaders and their understanding of who they are as it relates to race, class, and genders demonstrates how their leadership has been influenced. These Black Women leaders lead with fearlessness, bravery and boldness. Perhaps my research findings will elicit some meaningful discussions around the need to consider adding a characteristic to the paradigm that validates the Africana Womanist's professional obligations that often interfere with and even, at times, prevent the family from being at the center of everything the Africana Womanist does. Since the term "family" can now be contextualized (traditional – nuclear family versus school – work family) the Africana Womanism paradigm could be further interrogated to determine whether the characteristics defined in the early 1980s have shifted and under current realities in the Africana family might require some reframing.

Each of the participants had multiple roles that included all familial roles like, mom, daughter, sister, granddaughter, aunt, and grandmother. Each of the participants also considered the role of friend to be one she held. However, Hannah was the only participant who felt like her life right now does not allow for "real" friends. Hannah shared, "I am…a friend, but not really, though." Each of the six participants were at the center of their family dynamics. They spoke of the love and respect they had for family and how they worked hard to keep their families at the center of things. This included making time to attend family events, including those with extended family. Rebekah

shared, "I am a very different person when you get me with my family. My colleagues might not even recognize me in my element." She shared how much she loves spending time with family and is a part of her rich family legacy. Strong Black Women have always served in multiple roles over time. Black Women like Coretta Scott King and Myrlie Evers were Black Women who were wives, mothers and supporters of their husbands who were leading an earth-shattering movement (Bell, 2020). These women, like the participants in my study, understood how to be flexible in the roles that they played. Each of the incredible experiences as they relate to race, class, and gender of the Black Women principals in the study have impacted each of the roles they play. These roles impact the way the women lead as tenacious, determined, and patient leaders.

Although all of the participants shared accounts of having to go to task for children and being their biggest advocates, only two of the participants specifically referred to themselves as social or community activists. Ruth is a Board Member for Habitat for Humanity. She said, "I am proud when I see things happening that I am directly responsible for. That's how I feel about Beacon Hill." Beacon Hill is an area of Frayersville that has been unavailable to certain demographic groups in the past that is now becoming home to brand new home owners because of the work that Ruth is a part of. Abigail is our second activist. She defines herself as a community activist. Abigail said, "I see a disparity, and I want to fix it. I want to right the wrongs I see and not necessarily just in school." She continued with, "Who knows? I am keeping my options wide open for when I retire. I am a mover and shaker. You know me, Tammy, you know me like I know you, it's like our Black Girl code, we have to stay ahead of the game." Black Women are known and highly regarded for their activism. Black Heroines

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like Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells, Rosa Parks, and Frances Ellen Watkins-Harper have been strong activists for the rights of Blacks throughout history. Harriet Tubman led many Black Men, Women, and Children to freedom from enslavement. Ida B. Wells was the leader of many anti-lynching campaigns to bring a halt to the horrible crimes being committed against Blacks in the south. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper stood up for the right to vote for Blacks during the suffrage movement (Bell, 2020). Like these astounding historical figures, several of the Black Women participants understand activism and take the opportunity to advocate very seriously.

These participants are highly intelligent Black Women. Two of the participants held advanced degrees. Both women held Doctorate of Education degrees. All four of the others plan to obtain their doctorate degrees, as well. One of the participants is currently enrolled in an Ed.D. program. Although all very educated, neither of the six women emphasized their degree attainment as one of their roles. Abigail discussed a White assistant principal who refused to acknowledge her title of "Dr." as a type of microaggression towards her in an effort to be disrespectful. She said, "I called him on it simply because of the deliberate disrespect." She went on to explain that although she had to do that with that particular individual that she does not make that a practice. Abigail said, "I am very proud of my accomplishments. I worked really hard for that, so I know I earned it, but I don't make a habit of telling people, 'Oh, I am Dr. Abigail.' Because it just isn't necessary." The data revealed the Black Women principals in this study found themselves to be are impactful, competent, and versatile. They know exactly who they are and now have documented experiences that have a major influence on how they lead in their respective schools.

I Know Whose I Am

Six of the six Black Women participants define themselves as believers. Each of them spoke of their leadership journey from a "faith perspective". One hundred percent of the ladies said without God's guidance, they would not be where they are at this time. They each spoke of prayer, and how prayer has gotten them through mishaps and challenges that seemed insurmountable at the time. Rachel spoke of a low point when all she had to rely on was her faith because she truly did not know what else to do. She talked about how discouraged she felt and how overwhelming it was to have to be the person that everyone else looked to for strength. Within one week, two of Rachel's staff members died unexpectedly which would be a devastating blow to any staff. She remembered sadly, "It's only by the grace of God (we survived)! You want to talk about a praying faculty, I can!" Ruth also spoke of how important prayer has been on her journey. She said, "I pray. I pray. Oh, I pray. I have to pray."

Having the faith to ensure that when things get tough, you are able to stay the course takes grit, determination, and tenacity. These women all expressed how strong their faith has had to be to sanely become the people they are. Sylvia has prioritized what is important in her life, and she has no problem ensuring that everyone is aware. Sylvia said, "For me, everything related to me personally comes down to three things. Those three things are faith, family, and friends. Faith always has to come first." Abigail also relies heavily on faith and family. She said, "There have been so many times when I have had to fall back on my faith and what my parents taught me about what is right. I have had to go back to my foundation. I had no choice but to fall back on my faith." Ruth, a Baptist Associate Pastor, informed me that it does not matter what a person does

in life, it's going to require a measure of faith. Ruth spoke of many instances where she

has had to have mountain moving faith. Ruth said, "I am a woman of faith. I am." Ruth

spoke of times when she has had to pray for staff and family for major things, sometimes

overtly and sometimes discreetly. She remembered, "But, pray I did." Ruth explained

how her genuine care and compassion for people puts her in many unusual positions.

Ruth said, "Sometimes I am the voice of the downtrodden. That takes a degree of faith in

and of itself." Ruth concluded with, "Honestly, I do have faith. I do. I also know that I

have the gift of faith. The Bible says God will give to each of us a gift according to His

grace."

Each of the participants spoke of knowing from whence their help came. These

Black Women connected with a God who they count on to deliver in their times of need.

Sarah reflected on a very low point in her leadership journey. A time when I felt like I

was up against the world. She said, "I learned though a long time ago, that's when God

is going to do His best work." She did not know exactly how she was going to get

through such a difficult experience; however, she knew she would because of her faith.

Sarah explained it this way, "You see, I know who I belong to. I know that God guides,

but I also know beyond a shadow of any doubt that He provides." Sarah shared instance

after instance where God had, in fact, provided for her when there seemed to be no way

out. Sarah's experiences and the experiences of all of these phenomenal Black Women

keeps them grounded. They are able to focus on the things that are truly important while

never losing sight of what they are facing. Rebekah said, "Mrs. Taylor, first things

always have to be first." Hannah shared a similar belief, "I know who I am and I know

whose I am, so I know how to make the main thing the main thing." She continued, "I

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won't lie. It gets hard sometimes, but I promise you my faith never fails. And, because of that even when I am tempted to, I won't allow myself to fear." Rachel places her complete trust and confidence in the Lord. She says, "I know my limits. I guess because I recognize where my abilities end, I know where His begin." Ruth says, "I know He is Jehovah Jireh. He's the ultimate provider. I move and live and have my being because of Him. He sees me as Queen, and I am content in knowing that." One theme that was central throughout the study was faith. Each participant had a strong spiritual connection and unwavering faith. This faith allowed them to connect with their higher power and trust that His guidance is a part of how the experiences they have had and continue to have in their lives impacts who they are as leaders. Several of the participants spoke of being able to lead with grace and humility because they believe that God has graced them.

I Know Why I Am

In a study of Black Women principals, the subject of race is what adds depth and breadth to the study. In America, women have been subjugated based on race, class, and gender for centuries. Black Women have struggled to earn an appropriate recognition as the incredible leaders they are. From the antebellum south through Jim Crow and on throughout the Civil Rights Movement to the challenging and perplexing present filled with social and political unrest, Black Women have demonstrated their intelligence, fortitude, and superior leadership skills in sundry ways. For example, The National Council of Negro Women was led by Dorothy Height, who also served as the president of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority (Bell, 2020). Another strong example of Black Women in leadership is Margaret Wilson, the first woman to lead the National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.). Black Women have boldly fought to free

our country from the vestiges of slavery and Jim Crow (Bell, 2020). They were active in

the Civil Rights Movement in an effort to make life better for their communities. Black

women continue to be an active part of the movement to achieve social justice in

Africana communities. Black women had significant roles in this fight but were too often

invisible. These women, who served as agents of societal change, have paved the way

for Black Women in education, politics, and other careers to blaze new trails (Bell, 2020).

During those difficult times, race mattered, and race continues to matter today.

One hundred percent of the women who participated in this study, when asked to

prioritize the three ideals, agreed that race has the most profound impact on them as

individuals and as leaders. Interestingly, each participant held her own unique rationale

for why this is her opinion. The experiences of each participant are vastly different. To

my surprise, only two participants directly spoke of how racism had impacted their

careers. Although the remaining participants discussed the impacts of race on education

in general, none of them referenced specific and personal issues. Each participant could

speak of racist incidents they had observed or heard of, but none that were specific to

them. As the researcher I wondered if the reluctance to be forthright or specific about

race relations related directly to them was based on their skepticism of true anonymity or

if the blurred line that often exists between race and gender for some women kept them

from opening up completely.

In the 1970s Chester M. Pierce, a professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical

School and Professor of Education at Harvard University, was the first to propose the

term microaggressions. Colin Kaepernick explains microaggressions to be intentional (or

unintentional) small behavioral indignities that communicate racial insults that are

derogatory and leave us feeling degraded, offended, and dehumanized (Geoffreys, 2015).

The microaggressions and racism experienced by many Black Women often manifests in

the work place. This has been the case for both Hannah and Abigail. Hannah described a

time when she was not considered for a principal's position because she was Black.

Hannah shared,

> There was once a time when I was AP, and of course I am a Black
>
> Woman, and I had a Black Woman principal that was being promoted.
>
> You know Amber Baker, right? Well she was leaving.   I was literally
>
> told with a Black principal and a Black AP, parents would have no one
>
> they would feel comfortable talking with. I was like WOW! I wasn't sure
>
> what to think. I just knew something was terribly wrong with that picture.
>
> A white male was brought in to be the principal. It's sad, but you know, I
>
> am not surprised. As a Black Woman, I feel like I have always had to
>
> work hard to prove myself. I have always felt like I have to give more.
>
> (Hannah, 2022)

> Abigail has a similar recollection of a discouraging encounter with a White

colleague. She recalled,

> When I was a teacher, just like I am now, I was driven. I was mainly
>
> concerned with growing as a professional. I was passionate! So
>
> passionate. I was rocking it in my classroom, too. As a teacher, I brought
>
> diversity to my classroom and my students. I wasn't waiting for anyone to
>
> tell me what to do since there was nothing in place for me to do to

introduce students to important aspects of their culture. This may have been wrong, but I truly felt like it was what I had to do. So, I was looking for other leadership opportunities as a teacher and thought, I want more. I was told by my principal who happened to be a White female, "I don't think you're ready yet." That was her sage advice. I don't think you're ready yet is what she said to me. Tammy, I really took that personally. In my head I was thinking, so you think I am not ready. I guess I have to show you then. And, you know what? I did. I have never settled. I have always had to be better than good. I know when it comes to fitting in, you have to prove yourself. How many times have you heard someone call a vocal Black female an angry Black woman? This really helps me to remember some things that I am determined to never forget. (Abigail 2022)

These incredibly brave Black Women have learned to love who they are. These women have learned to be okay with making some people uncomfortable simply by being who they are. These Black Women have learned to not allow others to control or break them for any reason.

Each of the participants wanted to be clear that, as a researcher, I was clear that she was in no way a racist. Ruth commented, "Wow. Race, class, and gender. All three are crucial." Although Ruth also stated that she believes for Black Women everything will always go back to race, she was emphatic that it be documented that Stormy O'Ryan is her long-time mentor and she is a White female. Ruth volunteered the following information on her relationship with Stormy, "Personally, I believe you just need the

right person. I mean I don't think it really matters what race a person is. I believe that what matters is that you have the right person." She continued by saying, "I live the Black experience, so I don't have to have a Black mentor. You just have to have someone who is the right fit."

Hannah also shared, "There is no place for racism in my school." Rachel says, "In 2012, I was actually the only Black female AP. That's crazy isn't it?" Rachel also shared that in her first year as principal race was a big thing for her, but she is thankful that she was able to survive.

It is no accident that any of the Black Women in my study were born Black. These incredible women were born for the purposes they are fulfilling today. Being a Black Woman at this moment in time has certainly afforded them experiences that are unique to this generation of Black Woman; however, these Black Women remain proud to be strong, capable, and caring Black Women leaders. These women understand that race often dominates in the conversation where class and gender are its companions. As such, recognizing what race has taught (is teaching) them creates an awareness that did not exist heretofore. These women realize their lived experiences directly impact who they are as leaders and how they choose to lead their schools, how they are obligated to lead their schools.

Lived Experiences: Causing Them to be Good Listeners Who Truly Care About Others

A common theme throughout each of the interviews for these truly inspirational Black Women Principals was their compassion and genuine concern for others. They each expressed how imperative it is to build good, strong, trusting relationships with their

students, staff, and parents.   The participants all revealed their desire to ensure that their stakeholders know they are there to serve. Sarah says it isn't always easy for her to listen, but she does. Sarah said, "I am a big talker. I talk a lot. So, when I am listening to a problem, I am saying, Sarah, listen. Don't say anything, just listen." Ruth also talked about how important it is to just spend time listening. She said, "What's the point of me doing all the talking? I already know exactly how I feel and what I think."

Active listening takes practice. Therefore, there may be times when you have to make a conscious effort to find out exactly what is happening. Hannah said, "You really have to listen to every conversation going on around you, so you don't miss anything. You don't want to be last to know something you should've been first to know."

To the person speaking, listening could possibly be equated with concern. Rebekah said, "If I care enough to listen, then you know I care." Abigail said, "I don't always get everything right. I know I don't, despite trying to be sure everything is perfect. But, what I do get right every time is being there." She went on to explain that she isn't just there when there is a crisis or an illness or death. She said, "I try to be present for every conversation. I like to know how the family is doing and what is going well, also."

Staff and students have to trust that a leader has their best interest at heart. Trust is important in every vein of leadership. A Forbes report said that the one attribute of great leaders throughout history that stands above all the rest is trust (Horsager, 2012). Building trusting bonds and showing others that they truly cared about them was a strength throughout my study.

Lived Experiences: Causing Them to Overall Be Adaptable

Question five from interview one, according to participants' responses, was an extension of interview one's question four. When speaking to the Africana Womanism characteristic of adaptability, these Black Women were proud to share how adaptability has impacted the experiences through which they have lived and how those experiences have made them stronger leaders (in and outside of school). Ruth spoke very passionately about how adaptable she has had to be. She shared a story of a time when she was dissatisfied with the unjust and discriminatory practices she was experiencing. She said, "I had two choices. I could either speak up, or I could sit quiet[ly] and allow these things to keep happening." Ruth chose to speak up and as a result, she was afforded an opportunity like no one else had access to in her district, at that time. Ruth said, "They offered to compensate me with PD. Who can beat that? I had access to the best PD out there." Ruth benefited from using her voice and being willing to adapt to the situation that was a unique one for her. This is true in the case of most Africana Women. Africana Women learn to adapt and make sacrifices for the betterment of their family. For example, Hannah shared a personal desire (that cannot be included verbatim, as we agreed it would not). She wanted something and the something she desired, if she chose to get it would have an impact on the entire family. Before deciding, she discussed the situation with her husband, who thought the timing just was not quite right. As such, Hannah decided to postpone fulfilling this particular desire because she knew there would be implications for her family. Although delaying the desire was going to continue to pose an inconvenience for her. In her book, *Africana Womanism Reclaiming Ourselves*, Hudson-Weems (2020) explains that when an Africana Woman has to use family funds

for anything other than the family, she will likely view the act as taking necessities from the family, which most Africana Women are not going to do. She goes on to say, when an Africana Woman does not seek out and follow after her own desires, it does not render her non-creative, nor does it render her unsuccessful because she is going to find a way to make it work for the good of the entire family. One of the leading mainstream feminists, Virginia Woolf, once insisted that women must have a separate space, "a room of one's own," preferably a place away from home in order for her to be truly creative (Hudson-Weems, 2020). Most Africana Womanists and the six Black Women in my study disagree. Sarah exclaimed, "We can work anywhere!" She says, "I can work in my car going through the drive through to pick up dinner." Abigail said, "That's what we do. Black Women know how to adapt. We have no choice. If we don't, you know we get perceived a certain way."

Rebekah spoke of the challenge with knowing when to "fold em". She explained that as a leader, she never wanted to appear weak or fickle, so she was firm. She emphasized, "I was very serious about my work, and I wanted people to know I was serious. But, everyone knew, I was easy to approach and I cared about them as people." Rachel shared a similar sentiment. She said, "I am very adaptable. Remember I am an athlete so I have to be versatile, but I am not "wishy-washy". I know how to be relentless when I need to." She shared a story about some repairs that her school needed that no other administrator had been able to get done. Under her leadership, the repairs were completed because she knew when and how to adapt.

Being adaptable is one of the leadership characteristics identified by the Human Resources Development Quarterly (HRDQ-U), a free learning community for

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professional trainers, and is also one characteristic that is also one of the eighteen

Africana Womanism characteristics, because it is a very influential aspect of the study

and an essential characteristic of these Black Women's leadership. Being able to adapt to

what is required of you at any given time can cause your impact to be even greater.

Therefore, for the purposes of my study, adaptability sums up how the lived experiences,

as they relate to race, class, and gender influences the way they lead. Black Women

remain strong and steadfast even in the face of adversity. Ruth said, "Black Women are

like chameleons. We can blend. And, people have to be careful because if they aren't

careful, they just might miss us."

These Black Women's leadership is strong and bold. They are proud of the

experiences they have had that have molded and shaped them into being the magnificent

leaders they are today. Their ability to evolve as leaders over time based on their lived

experiences has influenced them as Black Women leaders.

After a careful analysis of the data, I realized that without the School Climate

Survey (SCS) and the Multifactor Leadership Inventory, question four of interview two

was not a good one to ask. I received responses that were the opinions of the

participants, but are not able to be formally presented as findings since each participant

provided a different description and word to describe their leadership. However, four of

the six participants provided a description of their culture/climate that allowed me to

capture the essence of them. The participants used descriptions like, "family-oriented",

"supportive", "friendly", and "helpful" which allowed me to code the cultures as being

collegial. The same proved true of their single word to describe their leadership. All of

their descriptions led back to them being truly transformational Black Women at their respective school sites.

Both interviews concluded with me asking questions "Is there anything else you would like to share" and "Do you have any questions for me." At that time, participants were given an opportunity to provide any additional comments they wanted to make, as well as to ask any questions they may have had for me. Some interesting facts were added and some clarifications were provided during these discussions. For example, Ruth asked a question regarding the Africana Womanism paradigm. She said, "How is it that I have never heard of this?" This was unthinkable to Ruth because she takes pride in being a student of cultural relevance and African American history. This gave me an opportunity to provide Ruth with other impactful information about ancient history and what life was like for African people prior to slavery. None of the questions posed during these opportunities related to information that is pertinent to the study.

It was also suggested during this time that an area I need to include in my research is the need to have opportunities for Black Women leaders to be able to learn and grow from one another, maybe through some type of mentor program where Black Women could be paired with other Black Women to have opportunities to share experiences and/or garner advice from someone who is living or has lived your actual experience.

Lived Experiences: They Matter

Lived experiences in qualitative research, especially of the phenomenological type, refers to a representation of the experiences and choices of individuals, the knowledge gained from these experiences, and how that knowledge is applied (Bhattacharya, 2017). Each of the six participants brought a plethora of lived experiences

to the study. The respondents provided responses that shaped the research study into one that can have lasting implications that will empower Black Women principals to connect with themselves and lead their schools authentically, while committing to a greater cause the salvation of the Africana family including the Africana child.

The lived experiences of the study participants have influenced the way they lead their schools because each of the participants brings a unique and valuable set of experiences that shape who she is as a Black Woman. The study revealed that no two scenarios are the same. The beauty and value in the individual experiences of each participant is the validation that each of the respective participants has experiences that makes her leadership so impactful.

Each of the Black Women principals in the study represents a special and unique blend of experiences that will someday become life-changing knowledge to others. Through these experiences, six virtual strangers have come together to be a part of something so profound and prolific because they want to be change agents and blaze new trails. Engaging in reflective dialogue allowed participants the opportunity to reflect on those experiences that have been paramount in their lives. Those experiences that have brought them to this space and time. Ruth stated during her first interview, "There are things that happen in your life that are larger than you when you are chosen to make a difference in the lives of others." These women are determined to do just that. Making a difference in the lives of others is what they consider to be a part of their life's mission. Rebekah explained why she does not take her responsibility to be a beacon for others lightly. She reflected, "I hire for heart. This is not something I take lightly. I am where I am supposed to be." After a brief pause, she continued, "It's my responsibility to be a

light for others to be able to travel by, and I do mean even in the deepest fog. We (you and me – shucks, and all the others, too – Black Women) are lighthouses." The metaphor of the lighthouse is a powerful one as it authenticates the value of the Black Woman in her role as principal. Throughout my research, I have had to refer back to John Bunyan's book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a strong allegory of the Christian's spiritual journey to remain motivated, endure setbacks, and to remember that even when coming up against the "Giant of Despair" it's all a necessary part of the journey. Like mine, each of the participants' journey is quite different. However, inexplicably, at the very same time, all of our journeys are exactly the same. This is quite the oxymoron. We are strong, capable, compassionate, committed, dedicated, authentically impactful, Christian Black Women (making a difference).

The amazing stories of these powerful Black Women principals created a narrative that not only validates their personal lived experiences, but will validate the lived experiences of Black Women principals everywhere. I have chosen to illuminate their stories further through two sections that I have based upon two of the recurring themes that were prevalent throughout my data analysis – the women knowing who they are and the women knowing whose they are.

Summary

Life as a Black Woman comes with its own challenges and encounters that differ from woman to woman. The lived experiences of the Black Women in this study are no different. The experiences of these committed and dedicated educators are both intriguing and inspiring. Getting to know them through such tremendous experiences has

emboldened my resolve as a Black Woman principal to be the strength and encouragement that other Black Women principals need.

The lived experiences of the study participants influence the way they lead their schools because each of the participants brings a unique and valuable set of experiences that shape who they are as Black Women. The study revealed that no two scenarios are the same. The beauty and value in the individual experiences of each participant is the validation of the value of each respective participant.

In respect to race, class, and gender, it was revealed throughout the study that the participants believe that all three factors have significantly impacted their leadership journeys in sundry ways. The element of race was prioritized to have been the factor that most profoundly influenced the way they lead. This impact was noted to occur in multiple ways. The impact was different from person to person; however, all equally impactful. The lived experiences influence on the way participants choose to lead such as drive, compassion, commitment, dedication, impact, authenticity, and passion. Participants also shared how their faith and strength have shaped their leadership, as well.

The lived experiences of the participants have directly influenced them as Black Women principals. These women lead today with resilience, fortitude, and compassion because of the experiences they have had throughout their lives and because how those experiences are a part of something deeper. A paradigm that they did not know existed yet has connected them on all levels. That paradigm is Africana Womanism and those eighteen amazing characteristics that help to define who we are as Black Women.

Conclusion

Six Black Women principals in a southeastern state identified many ways their lived experiences have influenced their leadership and their leadership styles. The participants also indicated that race, class, and gender also impact the way they choose to lead their schools. When the three factors were prioritized, race was the factor identified as having the most impact by the participants. However, the data revealed that all of the lived experiences of each of the participants has had tremendous influence on how they lead their schools. My attempt to answer the sub-question of the study was thwarted by the lack of formal leadership styles responses. As a result, I had to do additional research where I discovered there are leadership characteristics that better suited my context. The five leadership characteristics: good listener, adaptable, integrity, inspiring, and accountable all became categories that I was able to mesh with the eighteen Africana Womanism characteristics. Data revealed that all six Black Women principals possessed the leadership characteristics that have led them and their schools to functioning as collegial communities.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Discussion of Findings in Relations to Conceptual Framework

The theoretical construct of Africana Womanism was used as a tool to examine the lived experiences of participants in the study. The study confirmed Hudson-Weems' claim that to a varying degree all Africana Women possess the eighteen characteristics that anchor the Africana Womanism paradigm.

In Toni Morrison's riveting novel *Beloved*, the narrator of the story suggests the forced position of Africanans during slavery was one where these individuals were not able to define themselves, but were defined by the dominant culture instead, those individuals were their definers. According to Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems, this peculiar predicament has plagued Africana people for centuries. She insists that this intentional subjugation must be stopped. Her profound paradigm, Africana Womanism, is an impressive attempt at helping Africana people to realize their true rights to parity. Africana Womanism is helping Africana Women to be reclaimed, renamed, and redefined. With her eighteen distinct and diverse characteristics she helps Africana Women to realize a true Africana Womanist possesses all of these qualities to a varying degree, encompassing all aspects of her life (Hudson-Weems, 2021).

Hudson-Weems (2021) has identified a list of eighteen empowering and very distinct characteristics of Africana Womanism via the overall characteristics of Africana Womanism via the overall character of the Africana Womanist: She is Self-Namer; Self-

Definer; Family-Centered; Genuine in Sisterhood; Strong; In Concert With Males in the Liberation Struggle; Whole; Authentic; Flexible Role Player; Respected; Recognized; Spiritual; Male Compatible; Respectful of Elders; Adaptable; Ambitious; Mothering; and Nurturing (Hudson-Weems, 2021). In the study, each of the six Black Women participants were able to connect their lived experiences with the eighteen characteristics of Africana Womanism. See Table 5.1 for the alignment of the characteristics to the leadership categories. These experiences have influenced the way the participants lead in their respective schools. The data reveals that each of the participants lead their schools with resilience, commitment, boldness, and bravery.

From the broad list provided by Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems, the responses of my participants were categorized into five overarching categories as these characteristics create a uniquely intricate cosmos where the characteristics of Africana Womanism orphically collide with the humanity of Black Women principals. Hudson-Weems (2021) posits that sixteen of the eighteen characteristics of Africana Womanism vividly reflects the overall physical and spiritual essence of the Africana Womanist, actualizing the beauty of the rich legacy of Africana people. As a researcher, I must challenge this assumption. During my research I found that each of the eighteen characteristics are vividly and actively a part of the Black Woman's essence. Although I completely agree with Dr. Hudson-Weems' assessment of the characteristics: self-naming and self-defining being where this conversation must begin, I also know those characteristics (self-naming and self-defining) are the foundation upon which the Africana Womanist's integrity is built. In Africana Womanism Reclaiming Ourselves, Hudson-Weems (2021) says,

The Africana Womanist on the other hand, in realizing and properly

accessing herself and her movement, properly names herself and her

movement. Needless to say, she is her own person, operating according to

the forces in her life, and thus her name must reflect the authenticity of her

activity, not that of another culture. (p. iv)

During my research, I determined that each of the study participants provide

transformational leadership in their schools. In a 2019 Human Resources Development

Quarterly (HRDQ-U) Ideas for Learning Five Transformational Leadership

Characteristics and Qualities blog, five top characteristics of leadership were identified:

good listener, adaptable, inspiring, accountable, and integrity (HRDQ, 2019). During the

research as themes manifested themselves in the data, I was able to make logical

connections between the leadership characteristics with the eighteen characteristics of

Africana Womanism. The categories of leadership fit into the themes identified in my

data with a single exception. My research revealed a sixth theme, connectivity, was a

theme that emerged very powerfully in my data. In fact, when relating the categories of

leadership to the characteristics of Africana Womanism, the theme of connectivity

aligned with each of the characteristics of Africana Womanism. This is not surprising, as

the Africana Womanism paradigm is one of inclusivity and interconnectedness. The data

revealed there are six ways the lived experiences of the Black Women principals have

influenced their leadership.

The first way, the lived experiences of participants have influenced their

leadership is through connectivity. This has caused them to be able to connect with

themselves and others. This connectivity allows them to be able to draw strength from

within and connect with the power they possess. Throughout their leadership, they have been able to lean on their faith to guide them along their way. They have been able to confidently communicate who they are because they have named and defined themselves as strong, authentic, whole, ambitious and adaptable leaders. These Black Women principals have been able to create strong connections with others, as well. Hudson-Weems explains connectivity and the significance of that need to connect with others with the phrase "in it together" (Hudson-Weems, 2020). In it together represents the interconnectedness of men, women, and children working together to make our communities strong enough to survive. They have all learned how to be flexible as role players in the many roles they all play. They understand the importance of being respected and recognized. They also understand and appreciate that males are not their enemies. They realize to further Africana communities, we will all have to work together. Therefore, being in concert with males in the liberation struggle is a must. They also understand in order to work as one, women have to be compatible with their counterparts. Additionally, these Black Women have tremendous respect for the elders in their communities and strive to honor them and the rich legacy they have created in each community. Family-centeredness is at the heart of the Africana Womanism paradigm. Therefore, it's an essential component of the connection Black Women have with others. They are care-givers who often place the needs of the family before their own. Being mothering and nurturing is a natural part of the Black Woman's essence. As such, this is another strong indicator of how Black Women connect with others. Although being genuine in the sisterhood is something each participant expressed a desire to have a connection to, this is one area that was not evident in the data documenting their lived

experiences, thus far. Therefore, there is space for further discussion on why this area of the Africana Womanism paradigm is still so severely lacking in the experiences of Black Woman so many decades after the paradigm has been put forth. It's also worthy of discussion to determine what is needed for this to be corrected.

The five leadership characteristics identified by the Human Resources Development Quarterly align with the eighteen Africana Womanism characteristics; however, when applying the themes from the data, it was very clear to see that the strongest theme of connectivity (also a leadership category), was woven throughout each of the other categories and characteristics because it is a such a major aspect of the Black Woman's leadership. As such, I was able to link connectivity to being inspiring, being accountable, being Women of integrity, being adaptable, and being good listeners. Therefore, the second way, the lived experiences of participants have influenced their leadership is through their ability to be adaptable. Adaptability is both a characteristic of Africana Womanism and one of the leadership categories I identified from the five leadership categories defined by the Human Resources Development Quarterly. Being identified by both of the primary structures of the study indicates the significance and importance of adaptability on the lived experiences of participants. As does connectivity because it is woven throughout each of the other categories. Hudson-Weems claims the true Africana Womanist demands no separate space (Hudson-Weems, 2020). The ability to connect with one's self as well as others requires high levels of adaptability. As previously stated, this includes the Black Woman's ability to take comfort in their compatibility to their male counterparts and to appreciate the role of the Black Man in their lives. Being flexible role players is also the result of being able to connect with

others. Black Women understand the significance of collaboration and are always willing to take risks. The willingness to take risks and to be lead learners often endears them to others. This serves as inspiration to many. Their adaptability also encourages accountability. The Black Women demonstrate an accountability to themselves, as well as to others. Black Women demonstrate high levels of integrity and trustworthiness in their leadership inspiring others to trust and appreciate their leadership. They also demonstrate active listening that lets others know they truly care. I have just documented how adaptability is interwoven through each of the other leadership categories, as well as through the interconnectedness of Black Women to themselves and others. As can be noted, adaptability and connectivity were major themes from the data. The themes were both central throughout the data and across participants.

The third way, the lived experiences of participants have influenced their leadership is through their ability to inspire others. Black Women are ambitious and strong. They are whole and respected for the strength and fortitude they display at all times. Black Women are willing to acknowledge their spirituality by recognizing the existence of a power higher than them. Finally, the way that Black Women center the family all add to the strong character they possess. All of these attributes make up the essence of who they are. They also serve as an inspiration to others.

The fourth way, the lived experiences of participants have influenced their leadership is through accountability. Black Women have a special way of being accountable not just to themselves, but to others as well. They are not willing to sacrifice their communities in a selfish effort to achieve accolades or accomplishments. Instead, Black Women work hard to partner and be in concert with males in the liberation

struggle. They recognize and respect that we are all stronger together. They use accountability as a means of continuous improvement and a mechanism for learning and growing as strong leaders.

The fifth way, the lived experiences of participants have influenced their leadership is through being Women of integrity. Although the true Africana Womanist seeks wholeness and authenticity in her life because she wants it all, she won't neglect the focus she has on her family and community (Hudson-Weems, 2020). The Black Woman is a self-namer and a self-definer, refusing to answer to anything other than what she chooses to be called. Her strong resolve refuses to allow anyone to define her. The next generation of Africana Womanist is hopeful that the day when Black Women are able to truly be genuine in their sisterhood will come. Having that sisterhood where women are able to trust one another, share their true feelings without fear of judgement, and confide in one another sharing their hopes, fears, and dreams will be a benefit to Africana communities at large.

Finally, the sixth way, the lived experiences of participants have influenced their leadership is through demonstrating their ability to be good listeners. Actively listening to others shows a genuine concern for them and what they have to say. Black Women are naturally nurturing and mothering which makes it easy for them to empathize with others. These women take pride in spending time listening to the stories of the elders in the families and communities to learn from them and to better equip themselves to be pillars of strength in their own communities and schools. Being good listeners also places a genuine emphasis on being someone who cares about the individuals they serve.

These six areas have had an influence on Black Women principals leadership were revealed as themes from the data and later confirmed as categories for my study based on the five top characteristics of leadership by the Human Resources Development Quarterly. This validation of the themes from my data further confirmed the positive influence of the Black Women principal participants and the leadership they bring to their schools each day.

Table 5.1 represents the assignment of the characteristics to the leadership categories.

Table 5.1 Africana Womanism Characteristics/Leadership Categories

Good Listener	**Adaptable**	**Integrity**
Nurturing Mothering Respectful of Elders	Flexible Role Player Male Compatibility Adaptable	Self-Namer Self-Definer Genuine in Sisterhood Authentic Spiritual
Inspiring	**Accountable**	**Connectivity**
Ambitious Family- Centered Strong Respected Spiritual	In Concert with Males in the Liberation Struggle Whole Recognized	Ambitious Respectful of Elders Respected Spiritual Genuine in Sisterhood Adaptable In Concert with Males in the Liberation Struggle Whole Self-Namer Self-Definer Strong Mothering Nurturing Authentic Male Compatible Flexible Role Player Family-Centered Recognized

In Dr. Mark Christian's Afterword to *Contemporary Africana Theory, Thought and Action: A Guide to Africana Studies*, he explains,

> African centered thought and practice must co-exist on equal terms. The
>
> collective role of Africana women [and men] scholars, then is to ensure
>
> that this part of the mission reaches fruition… The next generation of

Africana scholars have the potential to become key players in providing

the necessary knowledge needed to combat what could be deemed

"technological racism" and the exclusion of Africana paradigms in

mainstream cyberspace. Our collective work ought to foster an

acknowledgement that there is an "information war" taking place with

regard to the creation of knowledge. Without being fully cognizant of

this, Africana scholars may pay the ultimate price of continued

marginalization and exclusion in the Academy (p. vii).

In my study, it was revealed that race is unanimously a priority for all of the

participants. Race had an impact on each of the Black Women and how they lead in their

respective schools. In some contexts, race had a broader impact on the participants,

while in others, specific and unfortunate experiences generated a more specific and

personal impact on what was brought to the leadership experiences of those women.

Although the experiences of each participant were unique to her context, there were some

common threads throughout the research. For example, all of the participants leadership

is influenced by their faith. These exceptional Black Women principals believe that God

will provide for them what is needed to lead and serve within their respective school

contexts. Mothering and nurturing were also characteristics that had a direct influence on

the way these women lead in their schools. Each of the women found honor in serving

children and providing the foundation for a better life for them. Finally, honoring their

authenticity was a strength for each of these Black Women, as they all fully embraced the

multiple roles they play each day and how those roles help them to be flexible and adapt

to whatever dilemma they might be up against.

The leadership experiences of these Black Women principals are influenced in relation to race, class, and gender tremendously by their lived experiences. These lived experiences are so deeply woven into the fabric of who these women are that they are a natural part of how they lead and who they are. They are not a separate set of "experiences" that singularly influence these Black Women and their leadership, but are instead pluralistic in every aspect of the term.

Recommendations for Black Women Principals (Current and Future)

The study revealed that the lived experiences of Black Women principals influences their leadership. I would like to recommend to current and future Black Women serving in the principalship or desiring to serve as school principals to take the time to determine what their lived experiences mean in their lives. Sarah reflected on her participation in the study by saying, "There are so many things that I did not even know about myself. I never knew why I did certain things, but now I realize it comes from all of my experiences." I would suggest that Black Women principals take an opportunity to network and connect with other Black Women who can serve as support to them on their leadership journey, as they embrace their genuine sisterhood. Finally, I would suggest that Black Women principals familiarize themselves with the Africana Womanism paradigm, to connect with themselves and to be able to focus on themselves and provide support to their Africana students and families to strengthen those communities so that the Africana child is able to live out their legacies. I would also encourage Black Women principals to find courage and draw strength from leading from their hearts and knowing that they can draw on their inner power to embrace the experiences they have lived and learned through.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further research could focus on using formal collection tools to collect data on the leadership styles and culture and climate of Black Women principals' schools. A quantitative study can be done to determine how student achievement is impacted by particular leadership styles. Further research could also be done in a comparative nature. For example, the studies could be grade span specific in order to compare different levels of leadership (elementary, middle or high). Finally, further research could include individual case studies on Black Women principals to comprehensively measure their leadership against the impact of their lived experiences and the eighteen Africana Womanism characteristics. In the early stages of my dissertation research and planning, I had planned for this to be a major aspect of my study. I contacted and gained permission from Mind Garden to use the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire developed by Bernard Bass and Bruce Avolio in my research to measure the participants' lived experiences impact on their leadership. Additionally, I received permission to administer the School Culture Survey (SCS) developed by Jerry Valentine to measure the participants leadership on the culture and climate of their schools. Neither of the tools were used in this research study as they can both be independent research topics to be explored at a later time.

Recommendations for Impact

One central notion that my research has hyper-focused upon is the lived experiences of Black Women. My experiences and research have revealed the need for formalized structures to be in place for Black Women to provide the greatest impact possible for students, especially Africana students. Ultimately, I would like to see Black

Women given access to Africana Womanism, Afrocentricity, the Sankofan Approach, and other empowering theories that strengthen them and their leadership. Ruth said, "We desperately need something that puts us on the same page with all of those people who already know who we are, even though we do not know ourselves." (Ruth, 2022) Rebekah shared a similar sentiment, "If I had had access to this when I was coming through. You know making my way. I would have been a better educator." (Rebekah, 2022). Participants recognized the need for an opportunity for studies like mine to have a greater impact. Therefore, using my research to serve as a catalyst for needed changes is a way to empower future generations of Black Women educators. Although such empowerment is crucial for Black Women leaders, the reach has to be far greater than me and my study. The message here is of how Black Women and their lived experiences are co-constructed and shaped by the characteristics of Africana Womanism and how they define themselves.

Further impact can result from the contents of the study being presented at state and national conferences where there could be large audiences of Black Women principals. For example, presentations could be made at the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE). There are state affiliations that could facilitate such an organization, where empowering presentations can be made, as well. For example, the South Carolina Alliance of Black School Educators (SCABSE), the North Carolina Alliance of Black School Educators (NCABSE), the Alabama Alliance of Black School Educators (AABSE), and Black Educator's Rock (BER). Presentations at such power-packed conferences can also allow for Black Women school leaders to form affinity groups to share their experiences, passions, skills, and creativity to assist one another

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with creating schools that are high achieving and can become epicenters of cultural competence and relevance. Both Abigail and Rachel asked me to reach out to their Superintendents to share how important it is to have supports in place to create those sisterhood bonds that are longed for by Black Women principals. Additionally, I have reached out to Dr. Hudson-Weems to discuss updates to the Africana Womanism paradigm as it currently exists. Suggested updates will surround adding the child to the paradigm in an explicit way. Additionally, serious discussion surrounding the lack of progress of the past five decades for Black Women to feel like they are a part of a genuine sisterhood is also necessary.

Additionally, impact can result when more studies and articles are written on the subject for publication in scholarly journals and periodicals. Journals like the *Western Journal of Black Studies*, the *African Studies Journal*, and the *Journal of Black Studies* are all journals that can be applied to for publication. Such publications will help to get the message out to the masses while providing pertinent information for others interested in studying Black Women, Africana Womanism, and/or the lived experiences of Black Women. These publications can be used in principal preparation programs across the nation as a means of supporting Black Women as they enter into school leadership. I would suggest that the Africana Womanism paradigm become an essential part of principal preparation programs' curriculum.

Such a seminal study could have a lasting and permanent impact on Africana communities and modern society. As such, the implications for further studies cannot possibly reside with a single individual, as the possibilities, as well as the needs, are, indeed colossal. My experiences and this research lend themselves to being foundational

for national (and possibly someday even global) implications and discussions surrounding the work that is needed in this area for the real salvation of our children. Therefore, as a final aspect of my dissertation, I have worked with my mentor, Dr. Clenora Hudson (Weems), and my dissertation advisor, Dr. Suzy Hardie, to create a National Advisory Board to continue the discussion surrounding this work. The Board — The National Africana Collectivity Advisory Board: Social Justice for Ultimate Human Survival (NACAB) – composed of a myriad of diverse committed thinkers/activists, will be instrumental in working together to create opportunities for significantly impacting society on a whole, beginning with our children via creating in them a better sense of themselves. In order for there to be lasting impact or see needed changes actualized, top scholars and influencers from all professions must have a seat at the table to continue to discuss what can be done to save our communities and preserve the legacy of our beautiful and talented Africana children, too many of whom are daily disallowed or even dissuaded from opportunities of exercising their many talents for the ultimate betterment of our/their world. Indeed, our children are our future, and we must determine exactly what we can do to create conditions that will allow them to thrive. The National Africana Collectivity Advisory Board is a much-needed board, which I will chair, designed to facilitate strategies in bringing this initiative to fruition. The Board will convene (virtually) twice each calendar year. The group will discuss ideas for further work in the field, as well as other relevant topics to the Africana community and its survival. These discussions will include: Africana Womanism, Generational Wealth, Moral Responsibility, Implications for Higher Education, Public Schools, Equity and True Diversity in Education, and Student Achievement, and many more.

This twelve-member Board is comprised of eight women, four men, plus five alternates who are representatives in various fields, representing sundry professions. These varying professions include: Education, Media/Entertainment, Entrepreneurship, Law, Faith & Spirituality and much more. The Board will identify critical areas/issues of concern (i.e. Generational Wealth; True Cultural Diversity, Equity and Diversity in Education Settings, and Emmett Till Continuums) in authenticating Africana life for true human survival. Thus, ultimate victory for Africana people will ensue, as the Advisory Board will put forth key strategies for radically changing the trajectory of Black life today. Reminiscent here is the perceptive rhetorical question posed by one of the Board Members, Veronica Adadevoh, a successful Atlanta Black Businesswoman and co-author of the "Conclusion" in the 2022 edited volume, *Africana-Melanated Womanism: In It Together.* In expressing her sentiments regarding the dilemma of African Americans following the January 1, 1863 signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, which clearly reigns true yet today, she muses, "Freedom to do what? Freedom without resources is another type of enslavement." (p.220).

The work that lies ahead is critically important. There must be individuals who are committed and willing to be a part of effecting the change necessary to preserve the legacy of our Africana communities, our children. The children are our future, and as the future, they must be properly prepared and equipped to assume their rightful places to carry on the rich legacy that comes with being an Africana people. In the words of W.E.B. DuBois,

"Now is the accepted time, not tomorrow – not some more convenient

season. It is today that our best work can be done and not some future day

or future year." (DuBois Center, p.1)

Now is the time. This is the study.

The following individuals have proven to be both perceptive and committed and hence,

have been chosen to serve as members of the National Africana Collectivity Advisory

Board: Social Justice for Human Survival (NACAB):

1. Veronica Adadevoh, an entrepreneur and the retired owner of a National Business
   for thirty years in Atlanta, Georgia

2. Dr. Molefi Asante, the Conceptualizer of *Afrocentricity*; Founding Chair of
   African American Studies at Temple University; Founding Editor, *Journal of
   Black Studies*; Author—*The Afrocentric Idea* and *The Afrocentric Manifesto*

3. Atty. Alvin O. Chambliss, Jr., the Lead Counsel for the *Ayers v. Fordice* Supreme
   Court Case, and the Last Original Civil Rights Attorney in America

4. Dr. Mark Christian, Professor of Sociology and Former Chair, Department of
   Africana Studies, City University of New York; Author—*The 20th Century Civil
   Rights Movement*

5. Dr. Sheka Houston, the Co-Founder of *Create & Educate, LLC.* and a Public
   School Educator in South Carolina

6. Dr. Clenora Hudson (Weems), Professor & Progenitor of *Africana Womanism*;
   Establisher of Emmett Till as Catalyst to the Civil Rights Movement; Author—
   Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves and *Emmett Till: The Sacrificial
   Lamb of the Civil Rights Movement*

7. Rev. Deborah Jackson, Dmin, Dean, Foisie Business School, Worcester Polytechnic Institute; Author—*Meant for Good: Fundamentals of Womanist Leadership*

8. Principal Baruti Kafele, an International Leadership Expert and an ASCD Best Selling Author

9. Lillian A. Smith an entrepreneur, and Former Senior Producer of *The Phil Donahue Show*

10. Dr. James B. Stewart, *Senior Fellow*, New School's Institute on Race, Power, and Political Economy; Dir, Blk Economic Research Center for the 21st C.; V Provost/Prof Emeritus, Penn State U; Past Pres—NCBS/ASALH/NEA; Author—*Intro to African American Studies*

11. Tammy S. Taylor, Dissertator; Co-Founder of *Create & Educate, LLC*; Public School Principal (South Carolina); Chair of the Board (NACAB)

12. Zakiya Sankara-Jabar, Director of Education Policy and Activism in the DMV

The following individuals have committed to serving as alternates on the Board:

1. Dr. Chike Akua, Professor, Clark-Atlanta University; Author—*Education for Transformation*; Member of my dissertation committee

2. Dr. Suzy Hardie, Professor, University of South Carolina (USC); Co-Chair of my Dissertation Committee

3. Principal Shawn Hurt, School Turn-Around Specialist; Author—*How to Transform Your Inner-City School*

4. Dr. Sharon Porter, is the Editor-in-Chief of *Vision & Purpose Lifestyle Magazine*; Editor of a series of volumes on the Value of HBCUs

5. Sandy Stackler, the co-owner of *San Martin International Bridals* and a Certified Senior Advisor (CSA)

6. Principal Josh Tovar, Latina principal in Sachse, Texas

Conclusion

In a meritocracy, a system in which the talented are chosen and accelerated on the basis of their achievement, only the talented benefit. However, in an egalitarian system, the belief in human equality prevails because the greatest resource in any system is the human resource. During my research, I discovered the Black Women principals included in the study are trend setters. These Black Women represent the greatest resource in the educational system today, the one that makes the ultimate difference, the human resource.

I have had the distinct pleasure, honor, and privilege of conducting a research study that has afforded me the opportunity to be a part of something so profound that it will create prolific changes in the way we recognize and use lived experiences to make us better educators. This study afforded me the opportunity to become a Cambridge author and protégé of my mentor, the progenitor of the Africana Womanism paradigm. This opportunity and many more confirm for me that my work matters. I look forward to continuing my work with such an inspirational icon. I look forward to furthering the work as a new generation Africana Womanist and continuing the legacy of a living legend, Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems, extraordinaire.

Our experiences matter. They matter to those of us living them, however, they matter to the world and society, too. We must value each of our experience and look for

the lessons that come with having lived through them. My study sought to determine how the lived experiences, as they relate to race, class, and gender of Black Women principals impact the way they lead? The findings revealed the lived experiences of Black Women principals influence the way they lead in six ways. Their lived experiences have connected them with themselves and others, have caused them to lead with integrity, have caused them to be accountable to themselves and others, have caused them to be an inspiration to others by allowing them to see their light so that others can see who they are, whose they are, and why they are, have caused them to be adaptable and have caused them to be good listeners who truly care about others. These findings are firmly grounded in the eighteen characteristics of Africana Womanism. They are to be a springboard to the next generation of Africana Womanist as we seek to save our children and preserve the rich legacy they have as an obligation to protect Africana communities across the land.

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APPENDIX A: Principal Interview Invitation

June 20, 2022

Dear Principal,

I hope this email finds you doing well. You have been selected to be invited to participate in my research study because you identify as Black and as a woman. If this is not how you identify, please disregard this invitation. As a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership PhD program at the University of South Carolina, I am conducting research for my dissertation. You are invited to participate in an initial interview that will help me to learn about the experiences of Black Women Principals. There will be a follow up interview, as well.

Once again, participation in the study requires that you identify as Black and as a woman. The interviews and your experience will be utilized to investigate the collective experiences of Black Women principals in a southeastern state. The interview will be guided by the following research question:

How do the lived experiences of Black Women principals impact their styles of leading and how their leadership impacts the culture and climate of their schools? The question will be broken down further as:

How do the lived experiences, as they relate to race, class, and gender of Black Women principals, impact their preferred leadership style?

The initial interview will take approximately one hour. The follow up interview is scheduled for clarification purposes and will only take as long as necessary to obtain needed clarifications, but no longer than 45 minutes. I will make myself available to interview you at your convenience and will work around your schedule to include evenings and nights, if necessary. I am requesting an interview within the next three weeks to complete be able to complete all data collection before July 31, 2022, if possible.

If you accept this invitation to participate, please send me three times you are available for your initial one-hour interview. I will send you a Zoom invitation to solidify your interview during our virtual interview time and location. If you would prefer an in-person interview, please let me know.

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT: IF YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY, I WANT TO ASSURE YOU THAT YOUR NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION WILL BE HELD IN THE STRICTEST CONFIDENCE. DURING DATA ANALYSIS AND THE DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, YOUR NAME WILL NOT BE ASSOCIATED WITH YOUR RESPONSES. YOU WILL BE ASSIGNED A PSEUDONYM ONLY KNOWN TO THE RESEARCHER.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tammy S. Taylor

APPENDIX B: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me a little about who you are.
a. Personally.
b. Professionally

2. Describe your journey to the principalship…as it relates to:
a. Race
b. Class
c. Gender

3. Which of the three factors (race, class, and gender) has taken priority on your leadership journey? Why?

4. How would you describe your leadership style? Why? Is this the way you think your staff, colleagues, and supervisors would describe you, as well?

5. The theoretical framework for my research study is Africana Womanism. One of the things that makes us able to connect with a concept like Africana Womanism is its emphasis on understanding that we are flexible role players. Although I am a Black Woman who is a principal, I am also a wife, a daughter, a sister, a friend, an aunt, and so many more things. For instance I am a pastor's wife. One of the things Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems says about being flexible as role players is…a woman doesn't stop being a mother when dinner is served…even though she might have to pin up her hair and grab her computer to finish some work at the kitchen table when everyone else has retired to bed. I know you are Black. I know you are a Woman. I also know you are a principal. With that said, what roles do you associate yourself with?

6. The previous question was based on Black Women being flexible role players, I would like to follow that up with an opportunity for you to speak to why it is so imperative to be adaptable – as a Black Woman principal?

7. As Black Women, it is imperative that we KNOW the name we want to be called by. How have you self- named or self- defined yourself? How does spirituality/faith factor in to how you define yourself?

8. Being a Black Woman principal, how do you relate to the characteristics Respected & Recognized? How does strength play into your leadership?

9. Today, we hear so much about authenticity, how do you show up authentically?
a. For your students?
b. For your staff?
c. For yourself?
d. For your family?

10. How would you describe the culture/climate of your school?

"Africana Womanism: I Got Your Back, Boo" (2009)

Don't you know by now, girl, we're all In It Together! Family-Centrality—that's it; we're going

nowhere without the other

That means the men, the women, and children, too,

Truly collectively working—"I got your back, Boo."

Racism means the violation of our constitutional rights,

Which creates on-going legal, and even physical fights;

This 1st priority for humankind is doing what it must do,

Echoing our 1st lady, Michelle—"I got your back, Boo."

Classism is the hoarding of financial privileges,

Privileges we must all have now in pursuit of happiness.

Without a piece of the financial pie, we're doomed to have a coup;

Remember—protect the other—"I got your back, Boo."

Sexism, the final abominable sin of female subjugation,

A battle we must wage right now to restore our family relations.

All forms of sin inevitably fall under 1 of the 3 offenses.

Africana Womanism, "I Got Your Back, Boo," corrects our common senses.

APPENDIX C: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Part One: The first part of our interview will focus on getting to know you as a

Black Woman principal.

1. Tell me a little about who you are.
    a. Personally.
    b. Professionally

2. Describe your journey to the principalship…as it relates to:
    a. Race
    b. Class
    c. Gender

3. Which of the three factors (race, class, and gender) has taken priority on your leadership journey? Why?

4. How would you describe your leadership style? Why? Is this the way you think your staff, colleagues, and supervisors would describe you, as well?

5. The theoretical framework for my research study is Africana Womanism. One of the things that makes us able to connect with a concept like Africana Womanism is its emphasis on understanding that we are flexible role players. Although I am a Black Woman who is a principal, I am also a wife, a daughter, a sister, a friend, an aunt, and so many more things. For instance, I am a pastor's wife. One of the

6. things Dr. Clenora Hudson-Weems says about being flexible as role players is…a woman doesn't stop being a mother when dinner is served…even though she might have to pin up her hair and grab her computer to finish some work at the kitchen table when everyone else has retired to bed. I know you are Black. I know you are a Woman. I also know you are a principal. With that said, what roles do you associate yourself with?

7. The previous question was based on Black Women being flexible role players, I would like to follow that up with an opportunity for you to speak to why it is so imperative to be adaptable – as a Black Woman principal.

Part Two: Part two of our interview will allow you to respond to questions that capture your lived experiences and are grounded in the elements/characteristics of Africana Womanism.

8. As Black Women, it is imperative that we KNOW the name we want to be called by. How have you self- named or self- defined yourself? How does spirituality/faith factor in to how you define yourself?

9. Being a Black Woman principal, how do you relate to the characteristics Respected & Recognized? How does strength play into your leadership?

10. Today, we hear so much about authenticity, how do you show up authentically?

    a. For your students?
    b. For your staff?
    c. For yourself?
    d. For your family?

11. How would you describe the culture/climate of your school?

Those were all of our formal questions. However, I want to read you a very short four stanza poem that I want your immediate reaction to. The author of the poem is Dr. Clenora Hudson Weems – the actual definer of the Africana Womanism paradigm. If you have ever watched someone interview with Principal Kafele – he calls the type answer I want you to provide – RAPID FIRE. I just want you to give me one word that comes to mind (or a phrase) when you hear the poem. Here you go:

"Africana Womanism: I Got Your Back, Boo" (2009)

Don't you know by now, girl, we're all In It Together! Family-Centrality—that's it; we're going nowhere without the other

That means the men, the women, and children, too,

Truly collectively working—"I got your back, Boo."

Racism means the violation of our constitutional rights,

Which creates on-going legal, and even physical fights;

This 1st priority for humankind is doing what it must do,

Echoing our 1st lady, Michelle—"I got your back, Boo."

Classism is the hoarding of financial privileges,

Privileges we must all have now in pursuit of happiness.

Without a piece of the financial pie, we're doomed to have a coup;

Remember—protect the other—"I got your back, Boo."

Sexism, the final abominable sin of female subjugation,

A battle we must wage right now to restore our family relations.

All forms of sin inevitably fall under 1 of the 3 offenses.

Africana Womanism, "I Got Your Back, Boo," corrects our common senses.

APPENDIX D: NACAB Board

National Africana Collectivity Advisory Board:

Social Justice for Ultimate Human Survival

The following individuals have proven to be both perceptive and committed and hence, have been to serving as members of the National Africana Collectivity Advisory Board: Social Justice for Ultimate Human Survival (NACAB):

1. Ms. Veronica Adadevoh, an entrepreneur and the retired owner of a National Business for thirty years in Atlanta, Georgia.

2. Dr. Molefi Asante, the Conceptualizer of *Afrocentricity* and Chair of African American Studies at Temple University.

3. Atty. Alvin O. Chambliss, Jr., the Lead Counsel on the *Ayers v. Fordice* Supreme Court Case.

4. Dr. Sheka Houston, the Co-Founder of *Create & Educate, LLC.* and a Public School Educator in South Carolina.

5. Dr. Clenora Hudson (Weems), the Progenitor of the *Africana Womanism* paradigm and the Establisher of, *Till* as Catalyst to the Modern Civil Rights Movement.

6. Dean Deborah Jackson, Dmin. the author of, *Meant for Good: Fundamentals of Womanist Leaders*hip.

7. Principal Baruti Kafele, an International Leadership Expert and an ASCD Best Selling Author.

8. Lillian A. Smith, an entrepreneur and Former Senior Producer of *The Phil Donahue Show.*

9. Sandy Stackler, the co-owner of *San Martin International Bridals* and a Certified Senior Advisor (CSA).

10. Dr. James B. Stewart a Political Economist and *Senior Fellow* at the New School's Institute on Race, Power, and Political Economy.

11. I, Tammy S. Taylor, am a Dissertator and the Co-Founder of *Create & Educate, LLC.*, I am also a public-school principal in South Carolina. I will also chair the committee.

12. Zakiya Sankara-Jabar, a Director of Education Policy and Activism in the DMV.

The following individuals have committed to serving as alternates on the Board:

Dr. Chike Akua, is the author of *Education for Transformation* and is a Professor at Clark-Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia. He is also a member of my dissertation committee.

Dr. Suzy Hardie, is my *Dissertation Committee Co-Chair* and professor at the University of South Carolina. (USC)

Principal Shawn Hurt, School Turn-Around Specialist and author of How to Transform Your Inner-City School

Dr. Sharon Porter, is the Editor of *Vision & Purpose Lifestyle Magazine.* She is also the Editor of a series of volumes on the Value of HBCUs.

Principal Josh Tovar, is a Latina principal in Sachse, Texas.

National Africana Collectivity Advisory Board:

Social Justice for Ultimate Human Survival

Veronica Adadevoh – Entrepreneur; Retired Owner of a 30-Year National Business (Atlanta)

Dr. Molefi Asante–Conceptualizer of *Afrocentricity*; Chair, African American Studies, Temple U

Atty. Alvin O. Chambliss, Jr. – Lead Counsel, *Ayers v. Fordice* Supreme Court Case

Dr. Sheka Houston– Co-Founder of *Create & Educate*; S.C. Public School Educator

Dr. Clenora Hudson (Weems) – Progenitor of *Africana Womanism*; Establisher, *Till* as Catalyst

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Dr. James B. Stewart – *Senior Fellow*, New School's Institute on Race, Power, Political Economy

Tammy S. Taylor, Dissertator — Co-Founder of *Create & Educate;* S.C.; Public School Principal

Zakiya Sankara-Jabar – Director, Education Policy and Activism (DC/MD)

Alternates:

Dr. Chike Akua – Author of *Education for Transformation;* Professor, Clark-Atlanta U

Dr. Suzy Hardie—*Dissertation Co-Chair* (USC)

Principal Shawn Hurt – School Turn-Around Specialist

Dr. Sharon Porter—Editor—*Vision & Purpose Lifestyle;* Editor—Editions on Value of HBCUs

Principal Josh Tovar—Latina Educator (TX)