African American Women’s Perceived Barriers to the Position of High School Principal

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This dissertation titled
African American Women's Perceived Barriers to the Position of High School Principal

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Abstract

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The ratio of African American females in the position of high school principal in the State of Ohio is disproportionate to the number of credentialed, willing candidates. The central focus of this study was to examine whether or not gender and racial barriers exist when obtaining the position of high school principal. This study also posited to identify perceptions of gender and racial barriers, which could also inhibit access to the principalship for African American female assistant principals. Nine African American urban female principals and assistant principals were interviewed to ascertain their beliefs regarding barriers, supports, race and gender to the position of high school principal. This study found that African American female principals and assistant principals identified several barriers to the high school principalship of which race and gender were the most influential factors.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of a phenomenal woman, my mother Shirley Ann Randolph. Her support, dedication, encouragement, and love are ever present in my life.
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To all the women of this study, I appreciate your courage to share your experiences and stories with me. You are great leaders in the world of education, keep pushing through.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Background of the Study

For quite a number of years, more women than men have been employed as teachers in K-12 schools. Nevertheless, most school leadership positions have been and are still filled by men (Thurman, 2004). Moreover, most school leaders are White (ODE, 2012). Despite improved prospects for women and African Americans in other careers in the United States, women and African Americans still have somewhat limited access to positions of leadership in schools such as the assistant principalship, the principalship, and the superintendency (Reis, Young, & Jury, 1999; Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). Based upon these issues this study will address perceived factors African American women face within the urban public school culture at the secondary school level.

Female and African American Educators’ Access to School Leadership Positions

This dissertation will discuss the access to school leadership positions for African American women who have historically had difficulty obtaining such admittance to secondary school principalship. It will also highlight particular difficulties confronting these educators at the intersection of the two other groups, namely African American women and women in general by highlighting challenges of both populations. Following discussions of the access to school leadership that each group has, the discussion will address legislative and judicial actions taken in an attempt to provide greater access for women and minorities in career advancement. Research shows that even with legislation to assist, women have still experienced difficulty securing school leadership positions.
African American women, moreover, face particular difficulties obtaining positions of leadership due to their race and gender. This study will examine specific barriers confronting those African American women who aspire to advanced positions as principals.

**Women’s Access to School Leadership Positions**

Early in the development of the teaching profession and throughout the 1800’s, women were often excluded from either receiving or providing formal instruction. According to Blount (1998), men treated women as if they had lesser intelligence and saw the practice of educating women as a waste of time. By the nineteenth century, however, more U.S. women were receiving formal education and more of them were being hired as teachers. During this time period, some female pioneers, such as Sarah Pierce, Mary Lyon, and Catharine Beecher, opened educational facilities with the sole purpose of educating women and preparing women for careers as teachers (Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999; Grogan, 1996).

Presently, female teachers represent 76% of the teaching force. Many women also hold the position of school principal. Thurman (2004) reported that women make up 43% of all principals, 52% at the elementary level and 26% of the principals at the secondary level. According to some authors, the limited number of females in principalship positions at the secondary school level is a concern of national significance (Eckman, 2000).

As Mertz (2006) noted, the passage of Title IX in 1972 resulted in an increase in the number of women who were hired as public school administrators. Thirty years later
in 2002, however, men still remained the majority in four leadership roles: 
“superintendent (79.5%), deputy superintendent (55%), high school principal (59%), and 
high school assistant principal (54%)”, … [She contends that the], “number and 
percentage of women who have moved into administration in the largest school districts 
in the nation in the 30 years since the passage of Title IX appear dramatic” (Mertz, p. 
549).

Changes in the percentage of females who were employed in school leadership 
positions occurred slowly. McCarthy and Zent’s (1982) research indicated that progress 
had been made in the representation of females in roles as school administrators, bringing 
the percentages more in line with those for the general national workforce at that time 
period. But at the time, these researchers noted that far less progress had been seen in 
terms of positions at the secondary school level. McCarthy and Zent reported that 
women and minorities were represented in large numbers for “recent hires.” 
Furthermore, these researchers found that nearly half of the elementary principals and 
assistant principals were women. Still, even by 2000, only 26% of high school 
principals were female despite the fact that 54% of secondary school schoolteachers were 
female (Brunner, 2000; Thurman, 2004).

The lack of appropriate credentials is not, what seems to be keeping women from 
obtaining positions as secondary school leaders. Several studies show that women have 
been securing the necessary credentials for becoming principals (Cooley & Shen, 2000; 
NCES, 2009; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). As early as 1999, studies began to indicate
that the number of females who were obtaining certification to work as principals exceeded the number of males (Reis, Young, & Jury, 1999; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008).

**African Americans’ Access to School Leadership Positions**

In some ways, circumstances for African American educators prior to the 1900s were even worse than they were for women. Prior to the Civil War, for example, educating people of African American decent was illegal and they were not permitted to attend school (Alston, 2005; Lerner, 1972; Shakeshaft, 1989). During the emancipation of African Americans in the South, however, some individuals began to establish schools to educate their own children (Pollard, 1997). During this time period, Jeanes Supervisors were established by the Negro Rural School Fund of 1907 to promote educational improvement in rural areas. These supervisors were African American females with college degrees who worked in southern states to help improve the educational conditions for Blacks (Alston, 2005; Shakeshaft, 1989). These women were responsible for administrative duties and were supervised by the area superintendent.

Over the course of the 20th century, African American women and men worked together to create schools for African American children, first as private initiatives and then later through the system of segregated public schools (Anderson, 1988; Murtadha & Watts, 2005). As efforts were made to desegregate schools, however, African American educators sometimes lost their seniority and even their jobs (Karpinski, 2000; Reed & Evans, 2008; Tillman, 2004). These circumstances contributed to already evident institutional barriers to the access of African American educators’ to principalships (Alston, 2005; Bridges, 2010).
African Americans Women’s Access to School Leadership Positions

As noted previously, African Americans and women, as separate groups, have limited access to school leadership positions. This circumstance means that the group constituted at their intersection, that is, African American women therefore have particular difficulty obtaining such positions. Alston (2000) found that nationally, African American women held fewer than 5% of all superintendent positions. The lack of access for African American females to the position of high school principal is obvious due to their lack of representation in this position. The Council of Great City Schools reported that women made up 43.7% of all school principals and minorities represented 17.8% of the total (Gates, Rangel, & Santibanez, 2004).

The circumstance in Ohio also reflects the limited number of African American females represented in public school leadership positions. A total of 1723 high school administrators were employed in Ohio (Ohio Department of Education, 2012). This figure was inclusive of principals and assistant principals in the state. Among the 817 principals in this group, the gender and racial balance was as follows: White males, 571 (69.8%); White females, 135 (16.5%); African American males, 54 (6.6%); African American females, 46 (5.6%); Other/not specified males was 9 (1.1%); and Other/not specified females, 2 (.24%) (Ohio Department of Education).

Data from the Ohio Department of Education (ODE)(2012) also indicated that females represented approximately 31% (n=281) of the total number of (n=906) assistant principals in the state. During 2009-2010, ODE reported the employment of 82 African American female assistant principals at the secondary school level (out of a total of 906
assistant secondary school principals statewide). These data reveal that, in Ohio, approximately 9% of all secondary school assistant principals are African American women.

Female and minority representation and access to school leadership positions have shown increases the past 20 years. The study conducted by Guthrie-Jordan (1990), specifically related to Ohio, showed minority female administrator represented 4.3 % of the total number. In 2010 ODE reported that minority female administrators represented 5.8 % of the total population of school administrators in Ohio. It is possible that these minimal gains were perhaps due to legislative remedies and to the positive contributions African American women make when they are given the opportunity to serve as school leaders.

According to various scholars, African American women face many obstacles to their entry and advancement in positions as school leaders as a result of the dual disadvantage of being female and African American. Pollard’s (1997) study, for example, showed that African American female leaders were impeded during their careers and that these impediments had a direct impact on their career advancement. Several other authors have suggested that a “good ole boy” network produces a glass ceiling effect that influences opportunities for women and African Americans who are pursuing positions of leadership, including positions as school administrators (Christie, Jackson, & Babo, 2007; Peters, 2003; Pirouznia, 2006). Furthermore, when African American women do secure positions as principals, school districts often place them in schools that are poorly funded
and academically challenged (Bridges 2010; Jeffcoat, 2008; Murtadha & Larson, 1999; Pollard, 1997).

Alston (1999) and Witherspoon & Mitchell (2009) found that gender and race were so intertwined for African American women that they had difficulty discerning which feature of their identities (i.e., being African American or being a woman) was actually the more significant contributor to constraints on their advancement into leadership positions in education. Wrushen and Sherman’s (2008) study also found that for minority women, race and gender doubly complicated their role as leaders. The study’s participants spoke of their difficulties in earning the respect of employees and colleagues. By contrast, male counterparts did not seem to experience similar difficulties. This study found that, in the case of African American women, participants felt that their gender was more significant than their race as a factor impeding their success as school leaders.

Legislative Remedies and Their Impact

Legislation passed within the last 50 years has attempted to redress the inequities that have historically kept women and African Americans from playing a significant role in educational leadership. The 1954 Supreme Court case, Brown v. Board of Education resulted in the ruling that legislation requiring ‘separate but equal’ education was unconstitutional. The determination that ‘separate but equal’ schools were unconstitutional changed the educational climate for African American administrators, teachers, and students. Notably, in 1964 the United States Civil Rights Act, Title VII was a ruling against employment discrimination based on a person’s race or ethnic
background (Conway & Ahern, 2005; Rusher, 1996). In order to monitor compliance the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) began in 1974 to record the racial and gender backgrounds of public school administrators. This information told the story of legislative inequities women and minorities faced in their attempts to secure administrative positions in public schools.

Additional legislation directed toward the employment of women in management positions was enacted with The Glass Ceiling provision of the Civil Rights Act of 1991. Lawmakers hoped this provision would combat gender-based discrimination in hiring for high-level positions within organizations. According to Dardain-Ragguet (1994) “[the provision] offers double protection by establishing the Glass Ceiling Commission to conduct a study of and offer ideas on ways in which women and minorities can be given greater representation in management and decision-making positions” (p. 402).

Despite these legislative efforts to improve access to leadership positions for individuals from underrepresented groups, some authors have demonstrated that the 1954 decision in the Brown vs. the Board of Education case and the desegregation resulting from that decision actually contributed to the loss of employment for many African American teachers and principals (Alston, 2005; Karpinski, 2006; Loder, 2005; Tillman, 2004; Walker, 2000). Ladson-Billings (2004) reported that, as desegregation occurred, school boards and state legislatures began campaigns against African American educators. According to several scholars, the motive for these campaigns was primarily economic. Further, with desegregation, the push was to save the jobs of the White
administrators by reassigning them to predominately African American schools (Alston, 2005; Karpinski, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2004).

Other researchers have noted that desegregation caused schools to be closed and/or consolidated (Fultz, 2004; Tillman, 2004). As a consequence of these mergers, leaders from the White schools were maintained while those from the Black schools were fired (Shakeshaft, 1989). Similar dynamics also affected African American teachers. Between 1954 and 1965, school districts in 17 southern states dismissed more than 38,000 African-American educators from their teaching positions (Tillman, 2004).

Recent trends continue to show that African American principals are greatly outnumbered by White principals. Not only are African Americans given limited opportunities to fill principalships, the few who are employed tend to work in the country’s most difficult schools. According to research conducted by Brown (2005), African American principals are often hired in large urban, segregated, and underfunded schools. This situation does not differ much from what researchers discovered in the 1980’s. Ortiz (1982), for example, reported that when school districts hired educators from minority groups for administrative posts, they expected these administrators to supervise primarily other minorities or to take charge of special projects; they were not allowed to pursue a career path leading to higher positions. Current literature provides evidence that Ortiz’s insight still applies, and shows that African American administrators continue to serve as building leaders in struggling school districts and those where the students also are primarily African American (Alston, 2005; Pollard, 1997).
The Leadership Contributions of Female and African American School Administrators

Despite their difficulty in obtaining leadership positions, women and African Americans are effective as leaders when they are given opportunities to serve. For example, some research has shown that African American leaders are deeply aware of and sympathetic to the difficulties that confront African American students (Foster, 2005; Loder, 2005; Reed & Evans, 2008). Research also suggests that African American educators are more inclined than White teachers and principals to involve parents and community members in the daily operations of the school (Echols, 2006). Loder’s study (2005) showed that African American female school leaders identify with and see themselves as working on behalf of the African American community. In addition, according to some research, the leadership that African American females provide is nurturing and maternal (Reed & Evans, 2008).

Female school administrators have been shown to bring to the job particular interests and skills that are consistent with current school reform efforts focusing on distributed leadership and instructional improvement (Grogan, 1996; Normore & Jean-Marie, 2007; Riehl & Byrd, 1997). Funk and Pankake’s (2002) study, for example, identified professional and personal characteristics of six successful female superintendents in Texas. According to Smulyan (2000), both male and female teachers tended to be more satisfied with the working conditions in schools that were under the leadership of female principals. Female principals interacted more frequently and regularly with students and teachers, and involved teachers in the decision making
process more often than male administrators did. Findings from this research suggest that teacher satisfaction resulted from the female principals’ close personal relationships with their teachers as well as the concern that these principals have for the well-being of the whole educational community.

**Trajectories of School Leadership Careers**

In administrative ladder, and common path to the highest position of superintendent, is through employment first as a teacher, then a “curriculum specialist, secondary assistant principal, secondary principal associate [deputy] superintendent, and then superintendent” (Marshall & Hooley, 2006, p. 10). Other theorists concur with the assessment of career paths of Marshall & Hooley including Noel-Batiste (2009), Ortiz (1982) and Telluric (1999). The paths that men and women take are similar; but women spend more years in the positions leading to the secondary school principalship than men do (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Ortiz, 1982).

The most marked difference between male and female administrators is in the credentials they seem to need in order to gain employment in similar positions (Alston, 1999; Glass, 1992; Ortiz, 1982). Some studies, for example, have shown that women start their careers as administrators much older than men, with more years of classroom experience than men, and with higher levels of educational attainment than men (Alston, 1999; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Piele & Smith 1989; Shakeshaft, 1989).

**The Assistant Principalship as a Step in the Career Trajectory**

According to some authors, the assistant principalship is a key position in the administrative career path and a stepping-stone to the principalship (Glantz, 2004; Gregg,
2007; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Marshall and Hooley (2006) reported that effective job performance as an assistant principal often helps an educator advance to another administrative position. Their survey also found that approximately 45% of all assistant principals go on to become principals. In *The Assistant Principal’s Handbook*, Glantz (2004) suggests that it is unusual for individuals to become secondary school principals prior to being an assistant principal.

Research relating to the African American women’s experience as assistant principals is limited. These limitations can hinder the paths of promotion for African American women. Most literature concerning African American women deals with their perceptions after they have secured the position of principal, deputy superintendent, or superintendent (Alston, 2005; Bass, 2009; Loder, 2005; Reed & Evans, 2008). Nevertheless, research conducted by Gregg (2007) concluded that female assistant principals have scarce access to becoming principals at the secondary level and are expected to perform at higher levels than males in the same positions.

**Summary**

In summary, the literature shows that women outnumber men in the field of teaching, but men outnumber women in positions of school leadership. Nevertheless, despite legislation intended to direct more women into leadership in schools and school districts, men continue to dominate the upper echelon, particularly in positions as high school principals and superintendents. Many women, and especially African American women who hold the necessary credentials, however, are not currently working as
principals. Based on their race and gender, African American females face a double disadvantage in obtaining secondary school principalships.

Relevant research supports the assertion that the position of high school assistant principal is instrumental for securing the high school principalship (Gaetner, 1980; Glantz, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Palermo, 2004). For African American women the position of assistant principal may be a crucial pathway to a secondary school principalship and other high-level leadership positions in schools and school districts. These African American female school administrators are often promoted less than their White counterparts to the role of principal.

**Problem Statement and Research Questions**

As previous discussion suggests, African American females are underrepresented among the population of principals in the United States. Nevertheless, limited research examines the experiences of these school administrators—their career paths, the impediments to advancement they have experienced, and the sorts of support that have enabled them to move forward. Less research has focused on the experiences of African American female assistant principals, even though that role often prepares school administrators for advancement to the principalship.

To address this gap in the literature, the proposed study will examine the conditions African American female assistant principals and principals in Ohio perceive to be enablers and barriers to their advancement into the principalship. The research questions that will guide this study are:
1. What do African American females who hold the position of assistant principal and principal identify as barriers and supports to their career advancement into the principalship?

2. How do African American females believe race and gender have influenced their career advancement?

**Significance of the Study**

The Black feminist perspective encourages scholars think differently regarding oppression (Bridges, 2010; Reed, 2012). By embracing the perspective that oppression based on race, class, and gender functions in an additive manner to exclude groups such as African American women whose characteristics fit with those of two or more marginalized groups, Black feminist thought offers a particularly rich basis for understanding the difficulties that African American females encounter when they seek to obtain leadership positions (Collins, 1997). According to some writers in the tradition of African American feminist theory (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Collins, 1991; Reed, 2012), efforts to expand research that centers on African American women’s experience of obtaining and serving in leadership positions will contribute to theoretical claims about how gender and race influence career advancement.

By exploring the experiences of African American female assistant principals, my study will either help to confirm or offer evidence counter to claims made by Black feminist theory. Notably, that theory supports the likelihood that African American females would experience roadblocks to advancement that were greater than those experienced either by African American men or by White women. Although my study
will not offer a comparison of oppression based on group membership, it will provide evidence of the ways in which African American women perceive their opportunities for advancement and barriers that limit those opportunities. Therefore, my study will at least gather impressions from African American women regarding their advancement paths and timetables in comparison to those of African American men and White women.

This study will also add to the limited research that exists relating to African American females in leadership roles within the education arena. Some recent studies have explored the experiences of women in educational leadership positions (Eby, 2004; Gregg 2007; Pirouznia, 2006; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008); others have explored the experience of African American women in educational leadership positions (Alston, 2010; Bridges, 2010; Byrd, 2008). Furthermore, among these few studies, only a very small number focus on dynamics relating to advancement from the assistant principalship and the principalship.

The findings of this research will aid school districts in their recruitment and retention activities in the areas of racial and gender equities relating to educational administration. Women represent 76% of all the teachers in public education, therefore; they should be equally represented in positions of leadership within the schools. Assistant principals within the same school district usually fill principal vacancies at the secondary school level. The findings resulting from this study will provide potential leaders with information regarding the experiences of African American Assistant Principals and thus assist with their individual pathways to the principalship. Additionally, this study will provide insights and guidance to potential female secondary
school principals and allow them to gain firsthand knowledge of the challenges, obstacles and supports they may face.

**Self as a Researcher**

Growing up female in a single parent, middle class African American community, I was consistently told that I would live in a double standard world throughout my life. I was subject to judgment based on the color of my skin and by the mere fact that I was a female. The covert expectation was that I had to perform at 110% to be better than the White man to stay on equal ground. I was assured by most of the adults in my social community that I would have to matriculate through high school and pursue post-secondary school options. Black people (the term at that time) had to go to college if you wanted to be successful; there were no other acceptable options for a little Black girl in my family.

Elementary and Middle school was a White world for me and most other school age students in my neighborhood during the 1980’s. We were bused to the White neighborhoods to be educated due to desegregation in Columbus, Ohio. Our teachers were White. The school community was White. The actual brick and mortar of my school was White. We Black students were to be educated in and for the White world. During these formative years my vision of education was one-sided. The message being communicated to me was that being educated by White teachers, a White administrator, in a White community was superior to an education in a Black school community.

I had no educational experiences with Black teachers or Administrators. I knew they existed because I had family members that were in the education field but I had
never actually seen or come in contact with one until my first year in High School. The High School I attended had one principal and three Assistant Principals, one of which was a Black male. I remember going home and telling my mother we had a “Black Man” that had some authority. My senior year at the same school would be my first exposure to an African American female Assistant Principal.

I knew from personal experience that African American female Assistant Principals and Principals existed because my maternal Aunt held those positions at some point in her educational career. It would be twelve years after high school while teaching in a public, urban, high poverty, predominately African American high school before I would encounter another African American female Assistant Principal and Principal.

On my path to the secondary school principalship, there have been few African American females that were in the leadership positions from whom to seek guidance or to model behaviors. For aspiring African American female leaders, due to the lack of research, it is difficult to find oneself in the literature. In my graduate level leadership coursework, little to no research spoke specifically to female African American Assistant Principal or Principal. Administrative Programs prepare students to view education from a generic White male lens and often fail to highlight the specific experiences of women or African Americans.

Leading to the position of high school principal, many female assistant principals I met had at one time, expressed an interest in the principalship; however, after many occurrences of being passed over by male leadership or not being given the opportunity to put their hat in the ring, they no longer had the desire to become principals. I would
like to explore the career experiences and expectations of African American assistant principals.

After becoming a secondary school Principal, I found that things were extremely different than that of my White colleagues. The community, teachers, and students view female African American principals in a different light than the White principals. My experiences of the treatment of the African American female principals are not the same as my White male or female colleagues. There has been no road map or role model that could prepare me for the race and gender inequality that I was subject to face.

**Limitations of the Study**

The population of the study was limited to nine African American female Assistant Principals and Principals, and it could have included more than the number represented in this study. The researcher wanted to use manageable participants in Ohio. Therefore, the researcher selected participants in several cities in Ohio to get a representative sample. In addition the researcher focused on urban assistant principals and principals because many African American principals are in urban communities.

An additional limitation was the location of the study that focused only on participants from the Big Eight schools of Ohio. The Big Eight consists of Ohio’s largest urban school districts Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, and Youngstown. These school districts have nearly 3 billion in combined budgets and over 200,000 students (ODE, 2012). As a result, working with the assumption that these study participants’ school experiences may or may not have been the similar. The study did not explore communities smaller than the Big Eight that may have had African
American secondary school female Assistant Principals. These three districts were selected because larger urban districts are more likely to have a greater representation of African American educational leaders in schools.

A final limitation of study is my own experiences as an African American female Assistant Principal. There is a connection between the researcher and participants. Creswell (2009) states there may be particular bias or compromise in the researcher’s ability to disclose information.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion this is a qualitative study of nine African American female Assistant Principals and Principals in Ohio and their perceptions of the challenges and benefits associated with the position. In addition, this research seeks to identify how race and gender have influenced their career paths. The literature focuses on female leaders, African American female leaders, Principals and Assistant Principals, and philosophical theories regarding race, gender and their impact on leadership.

This chapter consists of the introduction to the study. Chapter two will present the literature in support of this topic. The methodology for the study is included in Chapter three and Chapter four will present the researchers findings from the data collected. Chapter five will provide conclusions, recommendations, and topics for further study.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This section will include a historical review of literature regarding leadership circumstances for women, African Americans and African American women, and legislative remedies related to these areas. Additionally, this chapter will provide a review of literature that directly speaks to the theories and perspectives that inform this study. The major theories include Critical Race Theory, Critical Feminist Theory, and Black Feminist Theory. This theoretical discussion will elaborate on feminism and critical race and the impact that these and other perspectives have on gender trajectories for positions of leadership for African American women. Finally, this literature review will explore the issues related to the position of secondary assistant principal at the secondary level in urban education. The lens for this literature review will consider the educational and leadership journey for women and Black women.

Women, Education, and Leadership

“Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating, individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (Yukl, 2006, p. 8). In the early 1800’s women were considered less intelligent than men and to educate them was seen as a waste of time and resources (Blount, 1998). As a result, schoolhouses were predominately filled with boys, young men, and male teachers. Massachusetts and Connecticut were the first states in the United States (U.S.) to pass laws and collect taxes, which required parents to ensure that their children received an education (Blount). This
would later be known as compulsory education for those students whose family could not afford to educate them privately.

As a result of compulsory education, educational doors for women began to open beyond the primary and secondary levels. Opportunities for women to be educated at the collegiate level were initiated during the period of 1790-1850 when seminaries, academies and colleges opened their doors to female students with an emphasis on the teaching profession (Blount). The shift toward women to being educated formally, also lead the way for more women to be hired in the field of education. Women were employed at this time as teaching aides and teachers.

In the mid 1800’s, state and local officials created the leadership positions of School Supervisors for men. School leaders during this time performed duties such as administering promotional exams for students, evaluating teachers, and assisting with student discipline (Blount, 1998). As men moved into the administrative areas of school systems, there was an increase of women in the classrooms in order to educate more students. Current data indicates that women represent approximately 76% of public school teaching staffs nationally (NCES, 2012). These numbers show that there still continues to be an imbalance between the number of women teaching and women in leadership.

In the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, men dominated the administrative positions in public education and women began a gradual move into positions of educational leadership (Shakeshaft, 1987). Thus, women moved into positions of educational leadership even prior to the women’s suffrage movement in 1920 after which they were
considered citizens and earned the right to vote (Blount, 1998). Gregg (2007) reported that in 1928 women served as principals in 50% of all public schools. Most of these women held administrative positions at the elementary level. Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, and Ballenger (2007) reported that keeping accurate data in the mid 1980’s regarding women in administrative positions was difficult to obtain. These authors also assert that, in the last two decades, the number of females occupying leadership positions nationally has increased. However, “women still do not fill administrative positions in proportion to their numbers in teaching or in proportion to those who are now trained and certified to become administrators” (p. 104).

Women currently occupy 43% of all of the principal positions nationally (Mertz, 2006; Shakeshaft et al., 2007) and outnumber men in the administrative position of elementary principal, which is 52% nationwide. Even with the increase of females in leadership within the last 20 years, men are still the majority nationally as superintendent (79.5%), deputy superintendent (55%), high school principal (59%), and high school assistant principal (54%) (Mertz, 2006, p. 549).

**African Americans and Education**

The institution of slavery did not allow for the formal education of Black slaves. In the southern states, there were extreme consequences for individuals who were discovered teaching slaves (Johnson, 2012). The education of Black students was accomplished with leadership from, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Booker T. Washington, who were African American pioneers in the fight for the equality of educational opportunities for all. The passage of the Education Act of 1870 (163 U.S. 537) allowed for ‘separate
but equal facilities’ for the education of Black students. This Education Act was highly contested in the south region of the U.S. (Walker, 2005). The passage of the Education Act of 1870 (163 U.S. 537) allowed for ‘separate but equal facilities’ for the education of Black students. This Education Act was highly contested in the southern region of the U.S. (Walker, 2005). During the Reconstruction Period in the south, Black educators formed teaching associations, held conventions, and attempted to change legislation regarding formal education for African Americans. The state of Louisiana passed a law in 1890 requiring railroad companies to offer, ‘separate but equal facilities’ for Black and White passengers (King & Napp, 2005). Although initially this case dealt with seating on the railroad, it was also used to justify separate facilities for Blacks and Whites in many areas, especially educational conditions for Black students (Johnson, 2012; Walker, 2005). The 1896 Supreme Court case of Plessy v. Ferguson had worldwide ramifications for Black administrators, teachers, and students during this time (Johnson, 2012).

The ‘separate but equal’ principle continued in education until the landmark 1954 court case of Brown v. The Board of Education (347 U.S. 483). This Supreme Court case had devastating effects for African American principals nationally. Many public school administrators and teachers lost their positions due to the consolidation of schools or elimination of programs. Principals in southern states were the hardest hit with restructuring, consolidation, and job loss during desegregation (Karpinski, 2006; Tillman, 2005). In an attempt to address the educational inequalities that existed, many states and school districts initiated desegregation. Desegregation defined as “the elimination of laws, customs, or practices under which different races, groups, are restricted to specific
or separated public facilities, neighborhoods, schools, organizations” (Merriam-Webster’s, 1998 p. 203). The most severe job loss for Black principals came at the secondary level. For example, Virginia in 1964 had 107 Black secondary school principals, however, by 1971 this number decreased to 16 as a result of desegregation in the public school system (Karpinski, 2006). Prior to desegregation a large number of African American administrators and teachers were employed in Black schools in the segregated South. Black teachers and administrators were seen as role models and important leaders within their communities (Tillman, 2004).

**African American Women in Educational Leadership**

Some of the earliest examples of African American women in educational leadership positions during the 1800’s were the Daughters of Africa, the Colored Ladies Literary Society, and the African American Female Intelligence Society of Boston. These groups made educating Black students a priority and were instrumental in ensuring success in segregated schools during that time. These groups established schools for the education of Black students and provided educational leadership for the African American communities (Murtadha & Watts, 2005). The National Association of Colored Women (NACW), established in 1896, worked to dispel negative stereotypes for Black women (McCluskey, 1997). This organization’s intent was to “improve the status, material conditions, and image of the Black race and gender by forming clubs, founding institutions, becoming teachers, and creating educational programs” (McCluskey, p. 405).

Other early examples of Black female contributions to educational leadership were recorded with the actions of Mary McLeod Bethune, Fanny Jackson Coppin, and
Nannie Helen Burroughs. Mary McLeod Bethune started Bethune Cookman College with $1.50 in 1904. It served Black students and the community that began to settle in Daytona, Florida (Murtadha & Watts, 2005). Fanny Jackson Coppin was the highest appointed Black woman of her time with the position of principal at The Philadelphia Institute for Colored Youth in 1869. She was also a leader in several organizations (National Association of Colored Women and National Council of Negro Women) that fought for the educational rights of Black students and teachers (Johnson, 2012; Murtadha & Watts, 2005). In 1909, Nannie Helen Burroughs opened The National Training School for Women and Girls in Washington DC. The school’s mission was to train women for the veracities of both the workplace and being a Black woman (Murtadha & Watts, 2005).

Jeanes Supervisors were African American women that had administrative duties in schools during the time period of 1900-1954 (Alston, 2005; Tillman, 2004). These women assisted the area superintendents, introduced new curriculum and teaching methods, and performed staff development for the teachers. The Jeanes Supervisors, who were former teachers, took on many roles to improve education for Black students and teachers during this time period. These roles included teaching, attendance clerk, enrollment manager, and record keeper (Alston, 2005). When Black and White schools were merged during desegregation, the Jeanes Supervisors lost their jobs due to school consolidation or were replaced with White educational leaders (Shakeshaft, 1989).
Perspectives on the Glass Ceiling Theory

Some researchers contend that the lack of women in high-level educational positions (secondary principals and superintendents) is a result of societal beliefs regarding women and leadership. One common theory to explain the underrepresentation of women in employment and leadership areas is the “Glass Ceiling.” The theory suggests that the lack of women and minorities in leadership roles is due to informal barriers that impose ceilings on achievement for these groups (Christie, Jackson, & Babo, 2007; Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000).

Another term utilized to explain the lack of women in leadership positions is known as the ‘good ole boy’ network. This is a tradition of male-to-male relationships composed of men with like values, norms, and career aspirations; it also provided mentorship. Because this network was established in educational leadership, it promoted those individuals in the field who looked like them. Being outside of this network, suggested that women and men of color received little or no opportunity to participate in educational administration (Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000). Authors continue with the assertion that the ‘good ole boy network’ and the ‘the glass ceiling’ still exist, and are especially prevalent in the positions of high school principalship and the superintendency, which are the most esteemed positions in public education.

Eagley & Carli (2007) dispute the ‘glass ceiling’ theory as a reason for the absence of women in leadership. They assert that the glass ceiling theory suggests that men and women can move equally into midlevel positions of leadership but in actuality the road to leadership is more difficult for women. The authors continue to say that
suggesting the “glass ceiling, fails to incorporate the complexity and variety of challenges that women face in their leadership journeys” (p. 2).

Further contradicting the glass ceiling theory, Sheryl Sandberg (2013) asserts that gender stereotypes make it difficult for women to ascend to roles that are often possessed by men in an organization. She states “An internal report on Hewlett-Packard revealed that women only apply for open jobs if they think they meet 100% of the criteria listed. Men apply if they think they meet 60% of the requirements” (p.62).

Yukl (2006) contends that the limited number of female educational leaders is simply sex-based discrimination. This discrimination is widespread in the upper echelons of leadership in most organizations. Yukl asserts “throughout the twentieth century, gender-based discrimination was supported by age-old beliefs that men are more qualified than women for leadership roles” (p. 427). These set of beliefs make assumptions regarding gender stereotypes, appropriate behavior for men and women, and traits and skills required for effective leadership in organizations (Yukl, 2006). He concludes by stating “there is no empirical support for these beliefs and laws now exist to stop sex-based discrimination in the selection of leaders” (p. 427).

Legislative Remedies

Historically, several legislative attempts were made to address the inequalities that existed for Black students, women, and educators. As noted earlier, Plessy v. Ferguson ruled that a ‘separate but equal’ accommodation for White and colored races was constitutional. The case originally was brought before the Supreme Court to deal with ‘White only’ railroad passenger cars in Louisiana. After the ruling, this law was
used to justify discriminatory acts in many arenas, especially public schooling of colored students (Johnson, 2012; Walker, 2005). Another attempt to address the inequities in public education was the landmark decision of Brown v. Board of Education in 1954. It resulted in the ruling that ‘separate but equal’ public educational facilities were unconstitutional. Many researchers would insist that this law negatively impacted the employment of Black educators, many of who lost their jobs during this time period; however, it moved fair educational opportunities and standards for students to another level (Billings, 2004; Karpinski, 2006; Pollard, 1997).

One of the first laws to affect women and employment was the 1963 Fair Labor Standards Act, (PL 88-38) which would later be commonly known as The Equal Pay Act (EPA) (Conway, Ahern, Steuernagel, 2005; Ragguet, Russo, Harris, 1994). This law was intended to discourage pay discrimination based on gender. It “mandates that equal wages must be paid to women and men for equal work on jobs where the performance requires equal skill, effort, and responsibility” (Ragguet, Russo, Harris, p. 400). The law demanded that women be paid equally for the skills and abilities they brought to the workplace.

The EPA was later infused into Title VII of the 1964 U.S. Civil Rights Act (PL-88-352). Title VII forbids discrimination in employment on the basis of race, gender, religion, and national origin (Conway et al., 2005; Ragguet et al., 1994; Rusher, 1996). The law states that an organization cannot dismiss refuse to hire, train, assign, or promote a woman on the sole basis of her pregnancy. Additionally, the law requires that maternity leave be given to women for a predetermined time period. For school districts, “it
requires the district to reemploy and grant seniority credit to a woman who has been on maternity leave” (Rebore, 2001, p. 207).

The formation of affirmative action policies and procedures grew out of Title VII. Affirmative action addressed the hiring and promotion practices of companies that have federal contracts (Rusher, 1996). The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was established to ensure that organizations adhered to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and all the revisions and additions that grew out of this Act (Jordan, 1990; Rebore, 2001). Employers, who receive any type of federal funding, are mandated to have written goals with implementation dates to address hiring policies for women and minorities (Rusher, 1996).

Additional legislation that specifically spoke to women and education was enacted in 1972 with the passage of Title IX (PL. 92-318). Mertz and McNeely (1994) claim that Title IX made school districts and the general public pay attention to the domination of males in school administration. This law allowed a government office the ability to eliminate or curtail funding to organizations that practiced gender discrimination (Conway et al., 2005). A second Act concerning Title IX called the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 (PL. 100-259) ensured that an entire educational organization could be held liable for gender discrimination (Ragguet et al., 1994).

In 1991, Congress passed a new Civil Rights Act (PL. 102-166) provision that dealt with women being discriminated against by a school system (Rebore, 2001). PL. 102-166 made provisions if a school district was found to have discriminated against women, the law enabled her to gain compensatory damages for emotional pain,
inconvenience, and mental anguish. Prior to 1991, women were only able to receive compensation for lost pay, benefits, attorney’s fees and reinstatement (Rebore). The second provision of this law was a major win for women. It makes allowances for administrators and school board members to be named as codefendants with the school district in a lawsuit. This allows punitive damages to be levied against these codefendants in a sex discrimination case (Rebore).

The Glass Ceiling Act of 1991 (PL. 102-166), as referenced earlier, was put in place to monitor hiring of women and all minorities. Due to the fact that a large number of “female administrators in urban settings are minorities it offers double protection by establishing the Glass Ceiling Commission to conduct a study of and to offer ideas on ways in which women and minorities can be given greater representation in management” (Ragguet et al., p.402).

**Masculinity of Leadership**

Trinidad & Normore (2005) suggest that teaching has been an acceptable occupation for women, but the masculine world of educational leadership continues to be viewed by society as a position for men. Smulyan (2000) found that the male bureaucracy, that dominates public and private institutions, creates a double standard for women when attempting to move from classroom teaching into administration. “Women are expected to be dedicated to their classrooms and children while men may move on and still be seen as committed to the field” (p. 19). Smulyan suggests that female administrators are expected to accept and adapt to male values, language, and models of interaction in order to secure and maintain these educational leadership positions.
Thurman (2004) asserts that the sheer masculinity of secondary personnel, views traditional feminine characteristics of women, as signs of weakness. Thurman continues to list the masculine characteristics of secondary schools as: “highly regulated, conformist, normative, competitive, evaluative, disciplined, objective, and formal” (p. 17). This view of how secondary schools operate and function lends support to explain the smaller numbers of females present at the school levels as assistant principals and principals.

Eagley & Carli (2007) posit that many studies show people attribute diverse traits with female professionals but connect male professionals with traits attributed to leadership. The masculine traits, prescribed to men are: “aggressiveness, independence, objectivity, logic, analysis, and the ability to make decisions. The feminine traits normally associated with women are: emotions, sensitivity, nurturing, expressiveness, and intuition” (Trinidad & Normore, 2005, p. 576). Eagly & Karau (2002) assert that beliefs about the gender related traits deal with communal and agentic attributes associated with the sexes. “Communal characteristics, which are ascribed to women, describe primarily a concern with the welfare of other people. They are affectionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, interpersonally sensitive, nurturing, and gentle. In contrast, agentic characteristics are generally ascribed to men. Which describe men as primarily aggressive, ambitious, dominant, forceful, independent, self-sufficient, self-confident, and prone to act as a leader” (Eagly & Karua, p. 574).

Stereotypes of gender roles and traits associated to male and female leaders exist and affect educational leadership. Successful leaders must portray masculine
characteristics and traits that correspond to their behaviors, which may not match with acceptable behaviors normally associated with women (Coleman, 2003; Grogan, 2000; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010). If the masculine conceptions of leadership are considered the dominated model, then females who aspire to be leaders must conform to these characteristics to be successful (Trinidad & Normore, 2005).

For the African American women, conforming to masculine models of leadership is extremely difficult due to the community expectations that follow them into positions of educational leadership. Collins (2000) asserts that Black women’s perspective of mothering is made up of a series of relationships. She contends “the institution of Black motherhood consists of a series of constantly renegotiated relationships that African American women experience with one another, with Black children, with the larger African American community, and with self” (p. 176). Loder (2005) also uses the term ‘othermothers’ to explain the feelings and characteristics of those African American principals in her study. These leaders, as a result of their racial ties and responsibilities to the Black community, take on a maternal and paternal approach to leadership that their White counterparts are not expected to exhibit (Alston, 2005; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Loder, 2005; Reed & Evans, 2008).

One major issue for all women in educational leadership is the gender roles and expectations that society prescribes to women. Women tend to be cultivated to demonstrate nurturing through their emotions (Brunner, 1998; Trinidad & Normore, 2005). Women are expected to ‘act like a lady’ in all situations. Unfortunately, the responsibility of women to conform to social norms and nurturing behaviors limit them to
occupying supportive roles in educational leadership while men occupy leading roles (Trinidad & Normore, 2005). “As educational leaders, many women experience a landscape to which they are truly strangers; a landscape dominated by a culture of privileged, White, male leadership which sets the standards and norms of the education profession” (Gosetti & Rusch, 1995, p. 15). In a field dominated by male experiences, a view from a feminist lens would change the landscape that Gosetti and Rusch propose.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory can be defined as a critique of previous and current racial improvement efforts (Closson, 2010). This theory looks the relationship between race, racism, and power (Berry, 2010). The use of this theory in research is an attempt to transform the conditions of African Americans by the analyzing their present conditions around race and power.

Derrick Bell is considered to be the author of the Critical Race Theory (CRT) that many researchers explore when discussing race in current society. “Bell resigned from Harvard University’s law school in 1992 in protest that no African American female law faculty was hired during his 23-year tenure (Closson, p. 264).

In the mid 1970’s Bell and his law scholars developed the CRT with the goal of re-examining racism after the Civil Rights Movement (Chapman 2007; Closson, 2010; Crenshaw, 1993; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Thirty-five law scholars, who were a combination of law faculty, students, and legal practitioners, came together to synthesize the CRT beliefs in response to racial politics of America (Closson 2010). These scholars assert that people with power and control in society developed laws that were intended to
neutralize race, however in actuality, the policies perpetuated racial and ethnic oppression (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1993; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). CRT views race and its implications in the lived experiences of individuals in the legislative and policy development area.

CRT positions race as the focal point for studying the relationship between race, racism, and power (Berry, 2010; Chapman 2007). CRT treats race as a social construct and utilizes narratives or storytelling in discourse (Berry, 2010). Alston (2012) contends, “the experiences of people of color are legitimate and effective experiences for analyzing the impact of racial subordination” (p. 128). Berry (2010) asserts that a main principle of CRT is that racism is ordinary and normal in American society. Alston suggests, “Critical Race Theory provides such a framework for the examination and discussion of racial issues, especially the lives of Black female leaders who work in culturally incongruent racial settings. (p. 128). The marginalized position that women in educational leadership occupy can be examined to analyze the prevailing conditions that act as barriers to career advancement.

When racism and lack of achievement are central to the analysis of education, it challenges the traditional methods of examination. Theorists who advance CRT use stories “in the form of discussion, archives, and personal testimonies because it acknowledges that some members of marginalized groups to tell previously untold or different stories based on experiences that challenge the discourse and beliefs of the dominant group” (Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 23). Howard-Hamilton asserts that when utilizing CRT in the educational field “[t]he origins of racial oppression are explored in
ethnic studies, women’s studies, law, psychology, sociology, and history, then discourse is established so that the common themes and threads can be shared” (p. 23). African American educators establish professional communities by finding other people that look like them and share similar experiences. When those individuals are given a stage to let their voices be heard, they find out they are not alone. Those professionals, for example the African American female superintendents, principals, and assistant principals that survived racism then become empowered participants (Howard-Hamilton).

**Critical Race Feminism**

The research of several authors expands on CRT and applies it to women. This is known as Critical Race Feminism (CRF). Pratt-Clarke (2012) asserts the idea that utilizing CRF creates a platform for Black women to share situations they have encountered in a within a racist and patriarchal society. When women of color share their stories, Pratt-Clarke asserts that one of the challenges is often attributed to unsaid norms that regulate what is said and unsaid. Berry (2010) contends that CRF puts “women of color in the center, rather than the margins, of the discussion, debate, contemplation, reflection, theorizing, research, and praxis of our lives as we co-exist in dominant culture” (p. 23). When women of color are central to the discussion and debate, it allows their stories to be told and heard by mainstream scholars. Berry (2010) asserts CRF allows her total self to be brought into the dominant culture and “I can be more free to bring all of who I am into the classroom” (p. 24). Alston (2012) suggests that when race is central to discussions about educational leadership, perspectives about the experiences will be grounded in subjectivity of individual viewpoints.
When women and color are put at the core of the analysis, discrimination for many prevails. Moore (2009) asserts that Black women in leadership who manage to succeed in spite of discrimination are not immune to negative judgments; they experience “costs” to being in spaces previously reserved or occupied by Whites (p. 18). Moore contends that these costs that women of color experience are negative judgments, questioned credentials, and isolation from other people of color that could offer support. Some researchers would contend that these costs of leadership prevent women and minorities from exploring the position of secondary school administrator (Eckman, 2004; Mosley-Anderson, 2001).

**Black Feminist Theory**

Bell hooks (2000) advances that feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression” (p. 1). She continues by asserting “that women are full human beings capable of participation and leadership in a full of human activities” (bell hooks, 1997). Gosetti & Rusch (1995) claim that using a feminist lens to interpret women’s experiences allows for the ability to challenge the reality of the dominant culture, which in educational leadership are White and male, and purposes new realities. Gaskins (2006) contends that feminism is “primarily a White, middle class movement that has tended to focus on problems of White, middle class women” (p. 35). Due to the whiteness of traditional feminism, minority and poor women have been more concerned with problems of race and class (Gaskins). Authors posit that in research on educational leadership, the voices and experiences of the minority women have been absent (Alston, 2012; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). Collins (1986) contends
that women occupy a marginal status in academic environments. “A careful review of emerging Black feminist literature reveals that many Black intellectuals, especially those in tough with their marginality in academic settings, tap this standpoint in producing distinctive analyses of race, class, and gender” (p. 14-15). This perspective is also supported Howard-Hamilton (2003).

In addition, Alston (2012) also posits, “in the field of leadership preparation and leadership studies, the voices of the marginalized are not heard in the discussion or in teaching of leadership theories, concepts, and research in general” (p. 127). She continues to suggest, “gendered hierarchies” explains why Black and other women of color are not found in traditional discussions of educational leadership (Alston, p. 128). Rosser-Mims (2010) and other researchers, declare Black women bring their lived experiences to leadership and they differ from those of White women and White and Black men. Viewing women and leadership through the experiences of African American females is crucial to understanding the present state of feminism and its influence on Black perspectives (Rosser-Mims).

Rosser-Mims (2010) suggests that feminists perspectives were influence by events that shaped African American history namely the abolitionist movement as well as the civil rights movement. At the time of these movements Black women felt their issues were larger than the agenda of White women and most likely that of Black men, due to their duality, Black and Female. The goal of Black feminism during the Civil Rights movement was to inspire a “political movement combating the interlocking systems of racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression (Rosser- Mims, p. 4).
Collins (2002) identifies three key themes for understanding Black feminist thought.

First, the framework is shaped and produced by the experiences Black women have encountered in their lives. Second, although stories and experiences of each woman are unique, there are intersections of experiences between and among Black women. Third, commonalities do exist among Black women, the diversity of class, religion, age, and sexual orientation of Black women as a group are multiple contexts from which their experiences can be revealed and understood (Collins, p. 469).

Crenshaw (1993) suggests that racism and sexism cannot be viewed separately as it relates to the lives of Black women. She states “Many of the experiences Black women face are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as these boundaries are currently understood, and the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women’s lives” (Crensaw, p. 1244).

**Assistant Principal Position**

The development of the position of assistant principal grew from a need to identify someone to assist the principal with the day-to-day classroom supervision within the school (Glanz, 2004; Mertz & McNeely, 1999). In The Assistant Principals Handbook by Jeffery Glanz (2004), he discusses two types of supervisors that came into existence between 1920-1930. The position of Special Supervisor was generally held by a female and gained acceptance from the teachers because most of them were also female. The supervisors were tasked with duties of assisting less experienced teachers
and professional development of the staff concerning curriculum issues. The General Supervisors, usually male, were concerned with administrative duties such as attendance reports, evaluations, and assisting the principal with logistical operations (Glanz). Glanz asserts that gender bias and sexual division of labor in schools are the underlying reasons for the elimination of the Special Supervisor position, customarily held by women. The expansion of managerial positions in the 1900’s and the belief that men were better suited for the prestigious and lucrative jobs in education, phased out the Special Supervisor and women from administration during this time period.

In the school community, the highest leadership position is that of Superintendent. The common path to this position is “teacher, secondary curriculum specialists, secondary assistant principal, secondary principal, associate superintendent, and then superintendent” (Marshall & Hooley, 2006, p. 10). Women move into administrative positions from backgrounds in curriculum and instruction more often than men and have spent more time as classroom teachers (Grogan, 2010). Women generally move into a leadership position within their own school district as an elementary principal, 52% nationally, more often than their male-counterparts (Jean-Marie & Martinez, 2007). More men are more likely to move into positions of leadership outside their own school district. Women represent 26% of secondary principals, which is the position that many of the Superintendents have held during their career trajectory. The position of elementary principal, in comparison to the secondary principal, appears to not provide the necessary district wide career links for advancement (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).
Assistant principals are extremely important to the operation of the school community and a necessary position for career advancement. Marshall & Hooley (2006) assert that the assistant principal is critical in educational administration due to a number of factors. First, the position of assistant principal is a frequent entry-level position for administrative careers. They believe that many people expect to advance in administration and the position of assistant principal provides the necessary skills needed for upward mobility and exposure to other supervisors that may assist them along that path. Secondly, the assistant principal maintains the structure and the cultural norms of the school. Marshall & Hooley contend that assistant principals are usually the administrator that handles the most difficult discipline problems of the students, and thus maintains control and order in the school. Thirdly, assistant principals deal with the fundamental problems of the educational environment. They explain some of these dilemmas to be, addressing student social issues outside the school environment, covering classes when teachers are absent, and dealing with angry parents.

The position of assistant principal is most often found at the secondary school level. Due to the traditionally smaller enrollment of students at the elementary level, if an assistant principal is on staff, there is usually only one. Secondary schools, based upon student enrollment, type of specialty, and population, could have from one to five assistant principals. Elementary schools, due to their usually smaller student enrollment may have one assistant principal position.

Marshall and Hooley (2006) assert that for women and minorities, equity in obtaining the position of assistant principal is critical to career advancement for these
individuals. These authors contend that the assistant principal position serves as a great catalyst for helping men to advance but is not the same for women. Gaertner (1980) discovered that women not as apt to achieve the positions of secondary assistant principalship or the principalship that lead directly to the highest administrative positions. She continues to assert that female teachers are present in elementary schools where there are fewer assistant principals. If women are not equally able to secure the position of assistant principal, the likelihood of upward mobility to the position of secondary principal is limited. Marshall and Hooley (2006) found that approximately 50% of the assistant principals advance to other administrative positions. These authors contend that when women have unequal access to the position, they have less opportunity to do the tasks that prepare them to advance, the position then becomes key to perpetuating inequality.

**State of Ohio**

Since this study is situated in Ohio a discussion of conditions in the state of Ohio is relevant. The circumstances of women in educational administration for the State of Ohio are consistent with national data regarding employment in this field. During the 2009-2010 academic years, The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) reported the employment of 1723 secondary school administrators. Among the 817 principals, the gender and racial make up was as follows: White males, 571 (69.8%); White females, 135 (16.5%); African American males, 54 (6.6%); African American females, 46 (5.6%); Other/not specified males, 9 (1.1%); and Other/not specified females 2 (.24%) (ODE, 2011).
Additional data from ODE (2011) indicates that females represented approximately 31% (n=281) of the total number of assistant principals (n= 906) in the State of Ohio. During 2009-2010, ODE reported the employment of 82 African American female assistant principals at the secondary level. This data reveals, that in Ohio, approximately 9% of all secondary school assistant principals are African American women.

Guthrie-Jordan (1990) conducted an early study that researched 52 Black school administrators in Ohio. This quantitative study dealt with the perceived factors that influenced professional accomplishments of men and women who held the positions of superintendent, assistant superintendent, and principal. This study also aimed to describe the Ohio Black administrator regarding specific demographic information.

Some of the conclusions drawn from Guthrie-Jordan’s 1990 study regarding Black school principals at this time are as follows: they are older than their White counterparts, serve in school districts with mostly Black student populations. In addition they and hold administrative positions in school buildings with primarily Black student bodies. The participants also felt that racial discrimination existed in hiring, promotion, and administrative practices. Women in this study perceived several factors that influenced their professional growth. Black females felt that they were perceived as not being able to handle the demands of the job that has been dominated by male administrators. These women also felt that sex discrimination is experienced in relationship to the duties they are assigned to perform.
Pirouznia’s (2006) study of Franklin County, Ohio, focused on barriers confronting female trajectories to the principalship. The study found that in spite of policies to protect women from discrimination, gender discrimination continues to be present in the workplace. A total of 92 women who were credentialed to be principals in the State of Ohio completed a 30-item questionnaire. Of those 92 women, six were selected for interviews to obtain in-depth information regarding the barriers facing women in educational administration in Franklin County. From the questionnaires and interviews, an analysis of barriers that women faced when attempting to secure positions of assistant principal or principal was articulated. These women identified internal barriers to be gender stereotyping, the preference of male administrators for male administrators, and male colleagues who felt threatened. These women also identified the external barriers to securing positions of assistant principal or principal. These barriers included, limited support from educators and administrators, lack of female role models, the need to take advanced graduate courses, networking, race and age.

Gregg’s (2007) research, *The female assistant principal: stepping stone or stumbling block to the secondary school principalship*, was conducted in Ohio with five women who were either assistant principals or had previously served in that capacity. Three of the study participants were of Caucasian decent and two were African American. The school districts where these women worked were identified as having high school enrollments ranging from 625-2000 students. These women were interviewed and surveyed to gain insight into the position of secondary school assistant principal.
The results of Gregg’s (2007) study had several implications for the present condition of women as assistant principals. These women felt they were not treated the same as their male counterparts by having different responsibilities, support, and promotion opportunities. Female assistant principals were excluded from important conversations and decision-making opportunities. The women in Gregg’s study also felt that mentors and support of others was crucial to their success in becoming a secondary school principal. These female assistant principals felt that not having mentors or support person made their transformation from classroom teachers into administration much longer. The participants believed that stereotypes existed regarding female administrators. The belief that the best fit is for women at the elementary level as principals and men should be present at secondary schools as principals prevailed.

Conclusion

Women began to dominate the teaching field in the late 1800’s when men moved from the classroom to the administrative office. In the early 1900’s women moved into administrative positions within the schoolhouse prior to being permitted to vote. They were able to reap some of the benefits of the Civil Rights Era during the 1960’s with the passage of varied legislation. Women also earned the opportunity for equal access to administrative positions with Title VII, which forbids employment discrimination based upon race and gender. Title IX made the public aware of gender discrimination in administrative positions at institutions that received federal funding. As noted, The Glass Ceiling Act took the legal ramifications a step further by monitoring hiring policies of women at the organizations that received government funding.
Although legislation was enacted to address the disparities that exist in educational leadership, the belief that men are better leaders still prevails. In 2007, Women represented 75% of the teachers nationally, but account for only 43% of all principals (Shakeshaft et al., 2007). The conditions of female representation at the secondary school principal position is even more startling where women account for 26% of the national total.

The traditional path of African American women into school leadership is unique when compared with all others due to their representation in two minority groups (Peters, 2012). After slavery ended, the battle to be formally educated began strongest in the southern states. African Americans were hired by local school districts as teachers and administrators to educate Black students. These educators were held in high esteem in their Black school and neighborhood community. Due to the 1954 court case Brown v. Board of Education, many Black teachers and administrators lost their jobs and were replaced by White teachers and administrators. Nationally among public school principals, African Americans make up 11% of the total (NCES, 2009).

Many authors assert the belief that African American women face a “double bind” in educational leadership. These women represent two minority groups that historically are not often found top leadership positions in education. Loder (2005) and Reed (2012) contend that race and gender intersect to have a major influence on job attainment and performance in the field of leadership for African American females. Critical Race Theory and Black Feminism suggest that race and gender should be a major component for analysis of African American leadership. Reed’s 2012 study concluded that even
with the laws that were enacted to benefit minorities and women, Black women secondary school principals continue to live with the challenges of race and gender.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter examines the methodological approach for this research study. As articulated in chapters one and two, this study explored the perceived barriers and supports that African American female assistant principals and principals experience in trying to obtain the position of secondary school principal during their careers. The study investigated the different experiences these women face daily in leadership positions that historically have been dominated by males.

This inquiry has several purposes. One purpose is to add to the limited literature regarding African American women leaders in education. An additional purpose was to explore the culture of urban school districts and schools while attempting to discern how this culture impacts leadership opportunities for African American females. Another purpose of is to provide an avenue for African American women to have a voice and to discuss educational leadership policy and procedures that directly affect their professional development and career advancement.

Several research questions were used to illicit data from the participants regarding their experiences. The first research question for this study asks, “What do African American females who hold the position of assistant principal and principal identify as barriers and supports to their career advancement into the principalship?” The second question for this study was “How do African American females believe race and gender have influenced their career advancement?”
Research Methods

To address the research questions, a qualitative methodology was used for this study. Gergen & Gergen (2000) contend that the domain of qualitative research offers the richest and most rewarding exploration available in social sciences. Qualitative studies seek to “share the world of others to find out what is going on, why people do what they do, and how they understand their worlds” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 5). Seidman (2013) contends, “individuals consciousness gives access to the most complicated social and educational issues, because social and educational issues are abstractions based on concrete experience of people” (p. 7). The worlds the participants share, according to Glesne (2006), are used to understand the social phenomena from those individuals involved. The researcher attempted to have participants of this study share conscious experiences as an African American female administrator.

Van Manen states “phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 104). Rich perspectives from the research participants were gathered using Seidman’s three-part interview process. The interviewee’s provided detailed viewpoints of their roles as assistant principal and how they built on these experiences to attain the position of principal. Van Manen also contends that the lived experiences must be retrospective of prior occurrences in one’s life. The perspectives provided by the interviewees reflected past situations of the their position as assistant principal or principal.

Through the use of interviews of participants, thick descriptions of the social world evolve and become valuable insights for the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).
An additional use of thick description, as noted by Denzin and Lincoln, allows an examination of the constraints of everyday life of the interviewee. Thick descriptions go far beyond bare reporting, which is viewed as thin description. Glesne (2006) contends that during qualitative interviewing, descriptions are sought that explains motives, intentions, and circumstances (p. 27). Patton (2002) posits thick, rich description takes the reader into the setting being described. Thick detailed descriptions of individual’s experiences make it possible for interpretation. As a result of thick description, this research project permitted the researcher to make extensive interpretations of participant’s experiences.

The goal of the qualitative researcher is to seek understanding and interpret how participants, in social settings, construct meaning within their lived experiences (Glesne, 2006). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) found qualitative interviews capture the individual’s point of view and permits the researcher to connect with the participant’s viewpoints through detailed observation and interviewing. Rubin & Rubin (1995) contend that “[q]ualitative interviewing and [qualitative research] is a way of finding out what others feel and think about their worlds. Sideman (2013) asserts, “at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). The researcher, through interviews, can understand an individual’s experience and reconstruct events.

In this study, the lived experiences of African American female school administrators were examined. This inquiry of African American female school administrators explores the views of family, teaching, administration, employment, and
education that is deep-seated in these women and that directly impacts their perceptions and realities. The inquiry attempted to gain information regarding their views of the position of assistant principal and obtaining the position of high school secondary principal. The lived experiences that shape the studied African American women’s educational perspectives, actions, and potentially their career advancement were articulated in this study.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

As discussed previously, this research uses the theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Theory and combines the experiences of underrepresented individuals in scholarly literature. According to Rubin & Rubin (1995), the critical feminist researcher strongly considers the issues of dominance and submission and the impact on women. Olesen (2000) asserts that “qualitative feminist research in its many variants, whether or not self-consciously defined as feminist, centers and makes problematic women’s diverse situations as well as the institutions that frame those situations” (p. 216). Qualitative Feminist studies can present new ideas generated in the research regarding oppressive situations for women (Olesen).

Qualitative inquiry from the Critical Race Theory standpoint posits that racism is a part of American life (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The practice of story telling is a key component in CRT because it attempts to interject minority cultural viewpoints into mainstream society. For the African American researcher, CRT provides the researcher a chance to interact differently with the research. The key feature of storytelling and counter-storytelling permits individuals to ‘name one’s own reality.’ Ladson-Billings
(1998) asserts that naming one’s own reality serves many purposes in qualitative research. First, naming one’s own reality demonstrates how political and moral analysis has been traditionally conducted in scholarship. Secondly, naming one’s reality preserves marginalized groups in American society. And lastly, naming one’s own reality with stories can affect the oppressor by self-examination of their individual actions towards the marginalized group. Storytelling in qualitative research provides an approach for communicating the same phenomenon using varied approaches (Ladson-Billings).

By conducting interviews with a critical Black feminist perspective, it humanizes the interviewee and gives a focus and voice to those who have had little or no societal voice (hooks, 1989; Rubin & Rubin (2004). Gergen & Gergen (2000) contend that researching particular groups brings to the surface, situated knowledge. The sharing of similar situations creates productive relationships and commonality for the group members. These relationships empower those individuals and contribute to situated knowledge of these groups while diminishing alternative realities (p. 1032). Seidman (2013) echoes this sentiment with the suggestion that stories from “phenomenological interviewing applied to a sample of participants who all experience similar structural ad social conditions gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants” (p. 59).

This study can also be viewed in the context of life history research. In life history research, the interviewer conducts a series of interviews to collect data in an attempt to create a narrative of life experiences that relate to a particular culture (Glesne, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2004). This type of research examines people’s life history or how
people experience and understand life circumstances over a span of time (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Tierney (2000) advances that the documentation of life history involves a cultural act (p. 539). Life histories review and analyze the cultural experiences within the context of the participant’s individual setting and these interpretations facilitate reflection by the participants as they articulate biographical accounts of their journeys (Glesne, 2006). As such, the culture of the school district and school building, and the place of African American female school administrators in these organizations may impact the life history of the women in the study.

Research Design

As established earlier in this chapter, the primary mode for collecting data was the use of interviews. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview structure. Semi-structured interviews consist of numerous sit-downs of at least 45 minutes in length in which the interviewer works to glean both informative and reflective responses from each participant using guiding interview questions.

This interview approach permitted the researcher to gather in-depth content from the subjects regarding their personal experiences as secondary school administrators. These lived experiences shape African American women’s educational outlooks, leadership, reactions to their situations, and their career advancement opportunities and perspectives.

The researcher used interviews to gather detailed information from the participants. Participants for the study were interviewed a total of three times for a time period not exceeding 90 minutes. Seidman (2013) suggests that during this interview the
“participants are being asked to reconstruct their experience, put it in the context of their lives, and reflect on its meaning, anything shorter than 90 minutes…seems too short” (p. 24). Conducting interviews this way “gives unity to each interview” and they have a “chronological beginning, middle, and end” (p. 24). A total of three participants from each of the three selected cities and school districts were interviewed to meet the criteria for participation.

**Site Selection**

School districts that are members of the Big Eight urban school systems in Ohio were considered as settings for the research due to their large African American student enrollment and numbers of African American educational leaders. The school districts that make up the Big Eight urban districts in Ohio are Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, and Youngstown. These school districts have a combined total student enrollment of more than 200,000 urban students (ODE, 2014). Three school districts were selected from this group for the purposes of this study. These districts were identified due to their number of total African American female administrators, large student populations, and geographic locations within the State of Ohio. These sites also tended to have a higher concentration of the underrepresented African American female administrators. One may conclude that their increased representation in these districts may be all or in part because African American females are representative of the primary caregivers within said school communities.
Sampling Size and Study Participants

The participants for this study were a total of nine African American females with leadership experience in an urban secondary school that includes, grades 7-12. These females were presently assistant principals, principals, or had experience at the position of principal. The researcher selected participants from school districts in the Big Eight, as mentioned earlier. The subjects solicited for participation were African American females who have been Assistant Principals for three to five years. For those African American females who currently held the position of secondary school principal, they needed to have a minimum of three total years of experience as an assistant principal prior to advancing to the position of principal. A small sample of participants yielded detailed descriptions of their individual leadership experiences. Patton (2002) contends that small samples in qualitative research results in significant “findings [of] (1) high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case,… and (2) important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity” (p. 235).

Participants for the research were selected from the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) database of public school administrators that were credentialed during the 2009-2010 academic school year. This list provided by ODE, includes public school administrators by name, gender, school district, grade level, position, race, and school name. ODE does not provide a public list of school administrators disaggregated by race, gender, and school system. Therefore, the school administrator database was sorted by the researcher based upon school district, race, elementary or secondary position, assistant principal or principal, and finally by sex.
After sorting the list of public school administrator the researcher sent emails, letters, and made phone calls to gather general information regarding possible participants for the study. If a Black female name appeared on the 2009-2010 state administrator list, the assumption was made that those women would have the necessary years of experience, three to five years, required for inclusion in the 2014 study. The district and school location information retrieved from the database was also used to contact possible participants. After the initial grouping of possible participants and three school districts was achieved, a letter and/or phone contact was made by the researcher to solicit participation in the study.

**Data Collection/Interview Procedure**

The researcher employed qualitative interview techniques to gain information regarding the perceived barriers and supports that existed for African American female administrators obtaining the position of secondary high school principal. Sideman (2013) suggests, “interviewing is most consistent with people’s ability to make meaning through language. It confirms the importance of the individual without denigrating the possibility of community and collaboration” (Sideman, p. 13).

The researcher conducted three separate interviews with each participant. According to Sideman (2013), the in-depth phenomenological interview leads to exploring the meanings of peoples’ experiences. Phenomenology inquiry starts with general questions, then ask participants to describe their knowledge, opinions, perceptions and feelings as detailed descriptions (Roberts, 2010). Phenomenology research (Patton, 2002) strives to gain an in-depth understanding or meaning of the
everyday experiences of the interviewee. Patton posits that one is unable to reflect on the lived experiences while simultaneously living through those experiences. As a consequence the participants are asked to consider how they put together what they experience in order to make sense of the world and in developing worldviews (Patton).

Patton (2002) asserts that there are two implications of phenomenology research using qualitative interviewing.

The first implication is that what is important to know is what people experience and how they interpret the world. The second implication is methodological. The only way for us to really know what another person experiences is to experience the phenomenon as directly as possible for ourselves. This leads to the importance of participant observation and in-depth interviewing (Patton, p. 106).

The knowledge of a persons lived experiences that is acquired during three separate interviews with the participants, is known as “The Three- Interview Series” (Sideman, 2013). The first interview asks the interviewee to focus on their life history. This interview establishes the context of the participants’ experience. Context is achieved by the participant to tell as much as possible about the topic at this point in their life history. The interviewee is asked to recount past events relating to the questions. The second interview requests the participant to recall the specifics of those experiences and communicate those to the interviewer. This is an attempt by the researcher to gather concrete details and have the participant reconstruct those lived experiences in narrative form. The second interview enables the participants to recount specifics of their experiences within the context that they occur in. The third and final interview requests
the interviewees to reflect on what those experiences mean. The meaning refers to the intellectual and emotional linkages connecting the interviewees’ work and life. Making meaning of their experiences requires looking at the interactions of situations in their past lives and their relationships in the present day circumstances. The researcher attempts to have the interviewee draw the connections from their lived experiences to the subject matter (Sideman, 2013).

As discussed, the interviewer attempted to keep the length for all three interviews close to 90 minutes each. The researcher made every effort to space the interviews from two to five days apart. Sideman (2013) recommends that the researcher use the time between the three interviews to check compatibility between participant responses and to identify areas for clarity etc. Sideman also suggests that this spacing allows the participants to “mull over” the preceding interview and make connections between the two. These frequent interviews also allow for the development of a positive and trusting relationship between the participants and the interviewer.

An open structure for the interview process puts the researcher in the position to understand and document the perspectives organically without questions identified in advance. The researcher’s responsibility is to cultivate the context to enable people to provide their authentic perspectives about the world (Patton, 2002). Keeping the open structure during the interviews allowed the participants to speak freely and in-depth regarding their administrative situations and experiences. The interview guide was utilized (specific questions) with possible probing questions that to aided the researcher with gathering information and data collection from participants.
Interview protocols were linked to research questions and selected theoretical frameworks to gain understandings of connections between leadership and potential barriers to career advancement for women. These connections were appropriately designed to flesh out participant perspectives on career pathways, supports, barriers, and the impact of race and gender on participant journeys to the principalship.

Data Analysis

The data generated from qualitative research is enormous (Glesne, 2006; Patton, 2002; Sideman 2012). The participants share a lot of details, emotions, and situations when retelling their stories and experiences during the three in-depth interviews. The analysis of the participant interviews was accomplished utilizing a Holistic perspective. Patton (2002) defines this approach as “the whole phenomenon under study is understood as a complex system that is more than the sum of its parts; focus on complex interdependencies and system dynamics that cannot meaningfully be reduced to a few discrete variables and linear, cause-effect relationships” (p.41).

The researcher gained permission from the participants to record the interview sessions. Seidman (2013) suggests that the participant’s thoughts become embodied in their words, and by preserving those words researchers have original data. The researcher is then able to refer back to the original recordings to check for accuracy of their transcription and interpretation if necessary (Seidman, 2013). Once the interview was completed, the sessions were transcribed by a professional transcriber for an agreed upon time and cost. The researcher listened to the recording sessions multiple times and
checked the transcription of the interview to ensure accurate recording of the participant’s responses.

During the interview process, the researcher made note of the nonverbal signals from the respondents. Nonverbal cues such as laughter, coughs, and pauses while speaking may affect the analysis of responses (Seidman, 2013; Patton, 2002). In a field notebook the researcher made note of any nonverbal cues made by the respondents. If significant nonverbal behavior was observed during the interviews, the researcher probed the interviewee for the meaning of those behaviors.

The researcher investigated the common themes that surfaced from each of the participants. These themes were based on the responses of the participants and directly related to the research questions for this study. These themes and responses were noted and coded during the review process.

**Coding Data**

Glesne (2006) believes that data analysis can be done simultaneously while collecting data. The researcher with the aid of field notebook performed this simultaneous focus. The field notebook contained two important subtopics, the interview notes and reflexive Journal. The use of the interview notes allowed the researcher an area to record date, location, time and any thoughts that may have impacted the interview process. The reflexive journal permits the researcher to record their assumptions about, interactions with, and feelings towards research participants (Glesne, 2006).

Utilizing the field notebook assisted in the coding of each participant and interview. Seidman (2013) defines coding as “[t]he process of noting what is interesting,
labeling it, and putting [data] into the appropriate files” (p. 127). Glesne (2006) suggests taking the like-minded pieces together in data clumps and creating the organizational framework of the research. These like-minded pieces or appropriate files will be the major codes with dedicated numbers; that identify a concept, a central idea, or a section in the final research project (p. 153).

During the coding process, all nine participant were assigned a number and pseudonym used for identification and confidentiality. The different themes that evolved from the interviews; career trajectory, attainment of first administrative position, gender, and race were color coded, labeled, and categorized, based upon each of the respondents. Diagrams and chart paper were used by the researcher to aid in the grouping of similar responses by the participants in the identified areas. Through this organizational process, the sub codes were developed to speak directly to the research questions.

**Trustworthiness/Credibility of the data**

Triangulation of research was used in this study to address the need for trustworthiness of the research. Patton (2002) suggests that the use of triangulation can assist in documenting the accuracy of the responses of the participants. Triangulation will also help to insure credibility of the research. Triangulation was achieved through the use of multiple sources in multiple settings (Glesne, 2006). Patton (2002) contends that triangulation can be the process whereby a researcher can use a number of perspectives to strengthen the analysis (p. 248). The purpose of triangulation relates to the different kinds of data and references efforts to ensure their credibility to the research (Glesne). In carrying out this study, the researcher conducted interviews with individuals in urban
school districts and endeavored to achieve varied perspectives on the experiences of African American administrators. Utilizing multiple voices during the analysis of interviews assisted with connecting the themes and concepts and thus, ensuring the validity of the research.

Having the participants respond to the same questions and topics aided the researcher in the analysis of the common themes and experiences that surfaced from the interviews. Including multiple voices lends itself to many variations of a particular theme. Seidman (2013) contends, “by interviewing a number of participants, we can connect their experiences and check the comments of one participant against those of others… The goal of the [qualitative interview] process is to understand and make meaning of their experiences (Seidman, p. 27).

The researcher worked to achieve accuracy by triangulating the common themes that the participants shared during their interviews. The participants had the freedom to review the written transcription of their interview to ensure the accuracy of their communicated experiences and responses. Participants were sent the final transcription and asked to email or call the researcher with any concerns regarding their recorded responses to the questions. This is also known as member checking. Trustworthiness of the research is enhanced when the interviewee transcripts, interpretations of thoughts and drafts of the final report are shared with participants for accuracy (Glesne, 2006).

Efforts to accomplish research trustworthiness were achieved by analyzing information while collecting data or interviewing as noted earlier (Glesne, 2006; Patton, 2002). As the participants were interviewed in their respective settings, the researcher
examined the responses to potentially “create explanations, pose hypotheses, developed theories and link stories to other stories” (p. 147).

The final way that the researcher ensured creditability of the study was by reflection. Patton (2002) suggests that reflexivity “is a way of emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, political/cultural consciousness, and ownership of one’s perspective” (p. 64). Reflexivity requires the interviewee to be conscious of the origins of one’s own voice (Patton, 2002). The researcher shares some the same characteristics as the participants: administrative experiences, female, and African American. Glesne (2006) views reflection as clarification of researcher bias. The researcher must be cognizant of the shared experiences as to not project them onto the contributions of the interviewees.

**Limitations**

Limitations refer to the particular features of the study that negatively affect the researchers ability to generalize (Roberts, 2010). One of the limitations of this study is the sample size used to gather information. There are over a hundred minority administrators in the state of Ohio, so it is possible that information and themes were excluded with solely focusing on nine females of African American decent. This may have affected the ability to generalize the findings at the national level.

Another limitation of this study is using large school districts in one Midwestern state as opposed to various cities in different states. Further, findings in another state might yield different results due to dissimilar contexts of career trajectories of African American female administrators.
An additional limitation could be related to the fact that this study examines the experiences of African American women in urban contexts but findings might be different in suburban or rural school districts.

**Delimitations**

A delimitation of the study is that the State of Ohio was chosen to conduct the research. The assumption in this choice was that Ohio is representative of other mid-western states. Most Midwestern states share similar educational issues that factor into student achievement and staffing. These states face many issues relating to high stakes testing, poverty, race issues, equity, and state mandates.

Ohio was used as a study location because the researcher was educated in the urban school system. The researcher attended undergraduate and graduate schools in Ohio and felt as though the state was a good starting point for researching the barriers that African American females face while in educational leadership positions.

An additional delimitation of the study was choosing to concentrate data collection in three urban school districts. This sample enabled the researcher to focus on experiences of school leaders in urban communities. This process may impact the transferability of data to suburban and rural locations. Further research would be necessary to apply findings to suburban and rural as well urban districts.

This research methodology provides a roadmap for identifying the perspectives of nine urban African American female assistant principals and principals on their trajectory into the position of high school principalship. The three-interview process promotes in-depth inquiry into their lived experiences and helps to capture the full essence of the
encounters that these women have as they ascend through school administration. The interview process is designed to uncover the rich descriptions of the perceived barriers these women face to the high principalship.
Chapter Four: Results

Semi-structured interviews were used with nine female African American secondary school administrators from three urban school districts in Ohio to address the research question of what are the perceived enablers and barriers that exist in obtaining the position of high school principal. The participants were solicited from a list of school administrators in the state of Ohio provided by the Ohio Department of Education. Various methods were used to contact and solicit possible participants: letters, emails, phone calls, referrals, and suggested participants from other administrators that did not fit the criteria.

Following the guidelines of Sideman’s (2013) “Three-Interview Series” technique, the researcher conducted three semi-structured interviews with the participants. These interviews lasted from 45-90 minutes and were conducted in participant’s offices, homes, schools, and libraries. Two of the interviews were completed using video conferencing, recording only the audio version of the responses. At the conclusion of the recorded interviews, their individual responses to the questions were transcribed and later coded. During coding the researcher outlined the profiles of each participant and noted commonalities and themes found among their experiences from the perspective of an African American female urban school administrator.

The following profiles include brief background and demographic information on the study participants. These nine women identified their perceived various obstacles, barriers, and issues that, in some capacity, were influential in their career positions as high school principal or assistant principals. These profiles also include the individuals
“own reality” of key salient experiences that have shaped their perspectives on leadership and career trajectory. After the profile summaries, this discussion will include an elaboration of participant perspectives on the based on the research questions (i.e. barriers, supports, race, and gender).

Table 1

Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Assistant</th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total Years in Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>America</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candi</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denese</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evon</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misty</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rene</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

America

America is 49-year-old and was a teacher for 16 years, assistant principal for three years, and a high school principal for five years. She describes herself as intelligent, patient, and realistic. America has been an educator for 26 years and currently serves as a supervisor of high school principals. She grew up playing teacher with her siblings and always wanted to be an educator.
America contends that leadership and the job of principal are key components to student success. She asserts that being an African American female in urban education can be challenging.

When I became a principal, I had to just ‘lean in’ as the woman from Facebook says. I didn’t have any experience when I became a principal and being an assistant principal taught me nothing about being a principal. You think, when you’re in an assistant principal position, when I become a principal I’m going to do ABC differently. I had to be heard when I first came in as a principal. It was like I was a nonperson and I don’t think it had anything to do with color. I was a woman and they would just go on with the meeting. As a female principal you weren’t even a part of it. Leadership requires you to be a leader; it does not need your biases (America, 2014).

America feels one issue African American women face in leadership is the lack of an established support base to learn the paradigms of upper management. She asserts “there are unwritten rules that will make or break you. And once you are in educational leadership, nobody’s willing to share when we come in. Black males miss them all the time. Black women will sit back and watch and stagnate themselves to be careful. But you never grow.” She states that Black women sometimes are “just happy to be sitting at the table.”

America, when training her previous assistant principals, wanted him/her to be successful in leadership. One of the ways she assisted them in leadership was learning the rules and regulations of the game of principalship. She states, “I used to say to my
assistant principals, you don’t have to play the game, but you have to know it. Blacks will teach you how to be submissive. How to get along. Stay under the radar, as they would say. I want to teach you the rules and regulations, and how to be successful.”

Candi

Candi is a 41-year-old single parent that describes herself as hardworking, passionate, and intelligent. She has spent her 19 years of educational experience in district one. Candi always wanted to be an educator and was involved in teaching organizations as a high school student. She is currently a high school principal and spent ten years in other leadership positions prior to becoming an assistant principal.

Candi asserts that every administrator she has worked in the past she has gained some knowledge and this information has helped in frame the principal she is today. She suggests:

A leader is a person that can get others or transforms others to their vision and get them to do what it is that they think is better. Also as a leader you’re the person that makes a person want to be a better teacher, a better teaching assistant, or whatever it is to improve their job performance to make sure that they are at the level that you, as a leader, expect them to be. So to me, a leader is a person who kind of not only tells others what to do, but the way they should do things. It comes naturally for people who want to follow and follow under their vision (Candi, 2014).

Candi felt that the perception in her district was that a good high school principal “has to be a strong gym teacher type in order to get the job done, and that stereotype still
exists today, unfortunately.” This stereotype puts women in the position of having to be on the defense when supervised by male administrators. “If you are a female in this district, then you have to ‘fight’ in many areas within this system because of the stereotype.”

One example Candi suggests is connected to her fight as a female administrator was negotiating her salary as a principal. She felt the belief is that men should make more money than women. Candi believes that her administration will not come right out and directly communicate that belief, but she feels it daily. “I had to fight so hard for a salary that I earned and deserved. When you have other people that make that same salary, but you work harder, and your numbers are better, I take issue with that. I’m told that has nothing to do with it. But oh it does, I felt like that was said to me because it was another man and I was talking to a man. How can performances not matter?” She continues to explain she makes less money than the male principals in her district, but she is expected to perform the same job duties.

Another example Candi gives as the “fight” women have to endure centers on change. She describes her experiences attempting to get policies changed for her school building. She had to prove that the change needed to occur with documentation, parent surveys, and agreement from teachers. Candi states “her male colleague was able to change the same policy without jumping through the same hoops.” She feels “the procedure should be the same for the same policy.”
Denese

Denese is a 48-year-old married mother of four. She describes herself as patient, responsible, and trustworthy. Denese has completed 14 years in education and has worked in two of the districts in this study as an assistant principal. She began her career as an elementary teacher and transitioned to an assistant principal at the urging of her building principal. She is currently an assistant principal pursuing a high school principalship position.

Denese has worked in several school districts and with many leaders during her career. She defines leadership as:

A leader would be someone who has good character, someone who is consistent, fair, good interpersonal skills, honest, sincere. Just a person that leads by example. Someone who can work with people and move people is very important to leadership. If you can move people from where they are to make them feel somewhat uncomfortable but bring about the same change (Denese, 2014).

Denese has recently interviewed in several districts for the position of high school principal. She contends one of the issues that African American women experience during the hiring process is prejudice based on physical appearances. These prejudices appear to center around size, attractiveness, color, and stature. She believes that her hairstyle has played a negative role in her interview process. Because Denese wears a short haircut, she believes assumptions are made regarding her sexuality. She states “even though I’ve been married almost 25 years, have grandkids, and am dressed up, they assume I might be gay because of my haircut. I get the interview, but all they’re doing is
looking at someone’s outside appearance and making judgments because of that.” She believes that in general, districts and schools have a certain physical picture of what they are looking for in a high school principal and “that’s who they hire even though they might interview other people that don’t fit that picture.”

**Evon**

Evon is a 42-year-old divorced administrator that describes herself as supportive, funny, and dedicated. She has been an educator for 15 years in several school districts. Evon is an engineer by trade, but went into education due to a family illness that moved her back to Ohio. She started her career as a substitute teacher and has been a high school principal, assistant superintendent, and teacher in the charter school setting. Evon is currently in her third year as an assistant principal.

Evon credits her work in the charter and public school with assisting in developing her ideology of a leadership. These distinct differences in public education have formed her beliefs of school leadership. Evon states:

A leader is someone that has a great communication. Communication is a big key as far as being an administrator you can’t be everywhere watching everybody because you have things to do on your own. So unless you tell me to give you something and you have a deadline, I can’t know what you’re doing by the date. Principals have to be able to communicate, translate, and get teachers to perform (Evon, 2014).

Evon feels that a major barrier that exists for her progression to the high school principalship in district one is her association with the charter school environment. She
left district one for a position of high school principal and after two years was promoted to assistant superintendent. She believes that charter schools promote individuals based upon ability and needs, and therefore, women are evaluated mostly on job performance. She contends, “These big districts rely heavily on who you know and your gender.”

Evon, currently an assistant principal, asserts that the major cause of her not being a high school principal is due to her leaving district one initially. She believes that even though she has held the position of high school principal and Assistant Superintendent, these experiences in the charter school environment have negatively impacted her possibilities for promotion. She contends that those individuals in the positions to promote her to high school principal do not value the training/experience she gained from the charter school setting.

Lisa

Lisa is a 36-year-old divorcee with one child. She describes herself as hardworking, resilient, and loyal. Lisa has been an educator for 11 years from district three. She has worked in the public and private school setting and has been an assistant principal for four years. Lisa became a teacher because her experiences as an urban student were “so bad that I knew I could do a better job than the teachers I had while in school.”

Lisa has worked with several principals and has strong beliefs concerning what a leader should do and what makes a good school leader.

A leader is someone who has a vision, values, and morals and is true to all three of those things. Simultaneously unwavering and their vision doesn’t even have to
really align with mine. There’s something about a passionate true leader that will set everybody else on fire and I know this is cliché but I really do believe that great leaders are born and not made (Lisa, 2014).

Lisa feels that the treatment of female administrators by parents and teachers is different as it relates to personal issues. She discusses how male parents have made sexual comments and advances towards her in professional settings. These type of sexual comments and suggestions, she asserts that if she were male, those types of behaviors from parents might occur, but not as frequent. Lisa felt staff members were more affectionate with her compared to the male assistant principals she has worked with in the past. She states “you just don’t see them touching or being affectionate with male administrators. They definitely make comments about how I smell, my hair, my makeup, and my mood.”

Lisa states that one issue she deals with in her progression to the high school principalship and most urban leaders are the mandates from the state. The principals she should be receiving training from are overwhelmed, thus leaving her feeling as though she hasn’t learned enough to be a high school principal. Lisa states “No one really every trains you. Doctors, lawyers, and even tradespeople are “trained” in some sort of residency or apprenticeship before they are permitted to “practice.” She states, “this framework has not existed for me in my experience with the field of education in general. Other agendas seem to take precedence over cultivating leadership abilities in others. I’m in my fourth year as an assistant principal, and I feel like they (former principals she worked for) are all busy being a boss.”
Lynn

Lynn is a 43-year-old single parent and has two children. She describes herself as loyal, fair, and intelligent. Lynn has been an educator for 17 years in two school districts and currently works in the special education department as a supervisor. She was an assistant principal for three years and a high school principal for four years. She decided after graduating from college with a business degree that she wanted to pursue a career in education. After teaching for eight years and feeling that her colleagues were not preparing students for the “real world” she became an assistant principal.

Lynn asserts that leadership is “ever changing.” She feels that leaders should learn to be flexible and defines an urban school differently.

Leadership is having the courage to do what’s right for all students, staff, and the school community as a whole. As a principal, you have to walk a fine line with students, teachers, and parents. You have to make decisions during your tenure that are student-centered and you have to have the courage to lead with integrity. Sometimes principals have to check the boxes and be compliant, but when it’s all said and done, these students are our future. Courage and leadership have to go hand in hand (Lynn, 2014).

Lynn feels that the perception in urban schools is that a male should be a principal at a high school. She has had experiences as a principal with board members, city officials, and teachers where they have openly communicated a male should hold her position. These individuals speak negatively of women in leadership and positively of men in the same position. Lynn believes the unspoken belief in her district is “women
can do the planning and prep, but men need to do the discipline to instill fear in the students and staff so they act accordingly.”

One of the examples Lynn discusses concerning women being the planners dealt with women being the master scheduler in high school buildings. She said that female assistant principals did all the building schedules in her current district and the male administrator handled athletic items or issues. When Lynn mentioned her observation to her male supervisor, he responded jokingly “you know women are the brains of this organization.”

Misty

Misty is a 44-year-old divorcee with one child. She describes herself as loyal, intelligent, and creative. Misty entered the field of education because, as a junior in college, she had not declared a major area of study. An African American female university administrator suggested that she investigate education as a possible career choice. She is currently a Director of Educational Services and has worked in her current district for 20 years. Misty began her educational career as a high school teacher and spent six years working in various administrative leadership positions before becoming an assistant principal. She was an assistant principal for five years both in an elementary and high school. She was a high school principal for two years before taking her current position.

Misty has worked with five different superintendents and many principals in her school district. She has formed a solid definition of leadership and behaviors of leaders. She contends:
A leader is confident, a leader is a communicator, and a leader is understanding of peoples capacity, and realistic enough to know, given time growth can occur. A principal is a celebrity superstar without the celebrity pay. A principal is an instructional leader in the building and has to set the climate of the building. So they’re like the thermometer, they are the main communicator for that whole community where the school sits; they are the representative, the social worker (Misty, 2014).

Misty felt that teachers and administrators have positive perceptions regarding male administrators. In her district, many of the male administrators she was supervised by or worked with were former coaches and led their schools with an authoritative mentality. From her perspective as a teacher, she states, “I just felt like there was more respect given to male administrators and you didn’t ask many questions. We didn’t question their authority.” She didn’t feel that women administrators are given that respect and have to earn it everyday as a principal.

Misty explains that, in her experience, most teachers have different perceptions of female and male administrators. Women administrators are viewed as being emotional, not decisive or strong enough for high school leadership. She felt that “those preconceived notions get in the way of the judgments and decisions that you make because they are always doubting you or saying she did that because you made her mad, so she’s getting back at you. Women administrators are always riding the fence, whereas male administrators can say and do the same thing and not be perceived as being bitchy.”
Misty feels that there were several issues that she encountered as a high school assistant principal and principal that were directly related to her gender. One issue she faced relating to her gender was athletics. She describes how important and time-consuming athletics were in her school district. As a principal or assistant principal, the expectation was that all administrators supervised the athletes and all athletic activities. Male administrators or teachers would not include her in discussions regarding athletics, making the assumption that, most women did not have the knowledge of sports.

Rene

Rene is a 47-year-old mother of two and who is currently a principal at a secondary school in district two. She describes herself as authentic, thorough, and sincere. Rene has worked in two different school districts and was a teacher for six years before becoming an administrator. She held several other leadership positions prior to becoming an assistant principal. She was working in the trucking industry and grew “tired of the racism” and pursued a teaching degree because her friends appeared to enjoy careers in education.

Rene defines a leadership as “I think authentic leadership is a person who has a clear path, a focused precision, and vision.”

Rene contends that females in positions of leadership have to work twice as hard as men in similar positions. She believes women are working harder in their administrative positions and teachers respect men solely because they are men. She states, “Even the bad males still garner the respect that most females have to work so hard to get.” Rene believes that the automatic respect that men receive translates into
power. This power is felt and seen with staff, colleagues, and supervisors. She feels that “women do not get that same kind of genuineness of power that men don’t work at; it’s automatic.

One of the issues that Rene feels is prominent in her district is the principal promotion policy. She believes it because problematic for aspiring administrators because there is no “legitimate system of promotion. Some people may have said something that pissed someone off, and they use that to manipulate your career.” She states, “after the promotions are announced, everyone sits around and wonders how this or that person got the job.”

Reflecting on her progression to the principalship, Rene asserts that her district has “put” her in leadership positions for various reasons. She feels like her career has been different opportunities and conversations with supervisors about those advancements. Rene states, “I was not intending on leaving the classroom, but because of some other conversation, they made the decision to promote me an assistant principal position. I never applied.” After being an assistant principal, the principal at her building was taking another job. She contacted the supervisor regarding the replacement and as result of that conversation was promoted to a principal in another building. Rene states, “I don’t go in seeking a promotion, but come out with one. I haven’t really even interviewed officially, they are always conversations about other things that results in a new job for me.”
Susan

Susan is a 44-year-old married mother of five and is in her first year as a principal. She describes herself as passionate, intelligent, and determined. Susan was a teacher for 11 years and assistant principal for five years in a previous school district. She recently left when she was promoted to her current position in another school district.

Susan communicates that she learned most of her beliefs and skills regarding leadership from the principal she served with as an assistant. She states:

I think in the age of accountability, you have to be an instructional leader. But you can’t throw out the management piece. You have to be able to manage the building. You have people out there that are real book smart but are not managing the building, just talking to staff. To be a leader, you have to be someone who is instructionally sound. You have to be date driven. Look at data and individualize instruction. The same way a classroom teacher would. You have to know your staff, know what they can and cannot do. You have to have the balls to do the job. You’ve got to be able to have those difficult conversations. If it still doesn’t work, write them up, fire them, do what you have to do. I think a leader in the 21st century has to do all these things (Susan, 2014).

Susan spent two years in a suburban district as an assistant principal before becoming a principal. This district had one other African American male assistant principal at the high school level and very few teachers of color. When discussing her experiences in that district, she details how the stereotypes of African Americans are rampant. “As an African American principal, if you’re not all about the stereotypes, then
you have to work hard to demystify the stereotypes. So anything that you do or say, you’re being judged on it and you don’t know what exactly what to say. That’s a lot of pressure.”

Another issue Susan faced being an African American assistant principal in a predominately White school district was a lack of respect by students and parents. While in that district, she felt as though she got racism from both sides. “The African American students would say you’re favoring the White kids because you don’t give them days. Or the White students would say your just picking on me because I’m White. So no matter what kid you’re dealing with they use those racial comments, pull that card on both races.” Susan says that the felt like the parents “didn’t want to talk to you about anything. And when you told them things, they were not satisfied with that; they needed to go talk to him (the White principal).”

In the context of the participant profiles, the following section provides an overview of the specific findings that addresses the interview questions. This segment highlights participant perspectives regarding the topics of assistant principal positions and preparation for the position of high school principal, obtaining the first administrative position, barriers to the high school principalship, support systems to the high school principalship, and race and gender issues related to the secondary principalship.

**Assistant Principal Position**

All nine women interviewed in this study have held or presently hold the position of assistant principal at the high school level. They were asked several questions
regarding their job duties, responsibilities, and preparation for the position of high school principal.

Lynn and Susan felt that they gained the most valuable experience from the position of assistant principal. They believed that their experiences as an assistant principal prepared them for the position of high school principal. Susan states “I learned so much as an assistant principal from my first principal that I worked with for several years. I felt as though I could run my own building after two years. The next principal I worked for, I knew more than he did about many things.”

Several of the respondents contend that their experiences in the position of assistant principal did not prepare them for the position of high school principal. Lisa, who is currently an assistant principal, states, “I’ve worked as an assistant principal under two different principals and I do not feel that I am ready to be an high school principal, not now.” America stated, “The position of assistant principal taught me nothing about being a principal.”

The remaining five study participants (Candi, Denese, Evon, Misty, Rene) credit the other leadership positions they held and their assistant principal positions as both an integral part in preparing them for the position of high school principal. For example, Candi suggested that,

For me, it has been a combination of my experiences as an assistant principal and my support position to the high schools. When you’re an assistant you’re not the head, so it’s an opportunity to make mistakes and learn. You have to do all the
jobs the principal doesn’t want to do. It’s a learning opportunity. It’s a necessary
topportunity for the job of principal (Candi, 2014).

Other study participants echoed Candi’s perspective regarding the role of the assistant
principal.

**Obtaining the First Administrative Position**

The following section addresses various views of the study participants regarding
the road to obtaining their first administrative position. The participants were asked
about their hiring process and conditions that may have affected the success of the
interview and the obtainment of the position of assistant principal or principal. The
responses of the participants have been organized into the categories of sorority
membership and whether the affiliation assisted with their hiring as principals, whether or
not they had a normal hiring process, the type of hiring process they experienced, and if
they knew the appointing individuals or individuals on the interview panel.
Table 2

Overview of Hiring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sorority Membership</th>
<th>Affiliation assisted with hiring as principal</th>
<th>Normal hiring process</th>
<th>Type of hiring process assistant/principal position</th>
<th>Knew persons on Interview Panel or appointing person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>America</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candi</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Panel Interview</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denese</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Panel Interview</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evon</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Panel Interview</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Panel Interview</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Panel Interview</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misty</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Panel Interview</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rene</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2 Member Interview</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fraternity and sorority membership is large part of the African American community and college culture. Professional connections and lifetime friendships have evolved from those individuals that decided to join these associations during undergraduate or graduate school. Affiliation with sororities for these participants was addressed in question 9 of the interview process. Respondents were also asked if they believed that their membership assisted in the hiring process of their current or previous administrative position. Six of the nine women were members of sororities; however, they did not feel as their membership aided them in being hired to their administrative position.

America, Candi, and Evon assert that their sorority affiliation did assist with gaining entry into the teaching field in various ways. America states “I think it helped in
my professional career because when I entered into an arena where I had no networking, that was always a network for me. So once someone said ‘oh that’s a soror’ another member would say do you need anything.” Candi believes that her sorority membership assisted by allowing her information regarding teaching vacancies. “My soror’s that were already teaching told me about the positions open in their schools and districts, so I was able to apply for specific positions, even before there was an official opening.” Evon felt that her sorority was very instrumental in her hiring process to be a teacher. She was a substitute teacher and had worked with “sisters” and needed letters of recommendation for her teaching position. “They were actually on the (interview) committee at the time, so it was like these people already know me so I gotta make sure I look good and do a damn good job at the interview.”

As indicated in Table 2, most of the participants characterized their interview for the position of principal or assistant principal, as being conducted in a normal/standard process. The interview process was identified as: a resume or application presented to the human resources department, being scheduled for an interview, and participating in a panel interview. This interview panel generally consisted of central office personnel, principals, a community or board member, and a representative from the human resources department in that school district. Most of the participants reported that this panel consisted of at least four members.

Interview participants who are current or previous high school principals (America, Candi, Lynn, Misty) made a distinction between their hiring for the position of principal and assistant principal. They reported that when being hired for the assistant
principal position, it was a panel interview and the human resources department did the actual hiring. For example, Lynn states:

We were accepted into the assistant principal pool and were told we were going to be placed as assistant principals, but we were not told what school. I think they waited around to see who was leaving the district or being moved to other buildings by the superintendent. I think is very unprofessional to have someone just waiting to be placed and it seems your larger districts tend to do those types of things to AP’s, just stick them somewhere because it’s an opening (Lynn, 2014).

The participants reported prior to accepting the position of principal, they had to have a meeting with either the deputy superintendent or superintendent in their district. These meetings were usually informal and brief. Susan says, “The actual interview process was normal, however, the final interview for my position of principal consisted of the exiting principal and the superintendent. That was a little strange, in my opinion.”

Only two participants, American and Rene, described their hiring process as abnormal. Both of these ladies reported that they were appointed to their positions of principal. America states, “When reflecting back on my principal career, I realized that until recently, I had never interviewed for an administrative position.” Rene describes having meetings with her supervisors regarding other administrative issues, and “when I left their office, I would either walk out with a new promotion, or I would get a phone call saying I had been promoted to another position.”
Four of the study participants (Candi, Denese, Evon, Misty) communicated that they were former colleagues of people on their interview panel or knew them personally. The two participants (America and Rene) who were appointed to the position of principal said that they knew their appointees because those who appointed them were their immediate supervisors.

There were three study participants (Lisa, Lynn, and Susan) that reported they did not know anyone on the interview panel for the position of principal or assistant principal in their current district. These women were interviewing in a new school district for a principal or assistant principal and had not formally worked in the district at which they were interviewing for those positions.

**Barriers to the High School Principalship**

One of the research questions that guided the interviews with the nine African American secondary school administrators was “what are the perceived barriers to obtaining the position of secondary school principal?” The study participants were asked specifically what were the barriers to their past and present leadership positions. All of the respondents felt that race or gender, or a combination of both seemed to negatively influence their accession to the position of secondary principal. The findings surrounding the impact of race and gender will be presented in depth later in this chapter.

The study participants were asked what additional barriers, other than race and gender, had an impact on their administrative career either as principal or assistant principal.
America, an educator for over 26 years, identified one of the barriers as a psychological barrier that African Americans have within themselves. She asserts, “I think the barriers are, as African Americans, we come into leadership and we want to just be a part of everything and I think we make ourselves small.” She continues to reference Marianne Williamson’s poem- Our Deepest Fear, regarding playing small in administration.

I’ve never been able to play small but I’ve gone into arenas where I’ve seen African American principals play small so as not to make Whites feel uncomfortable. The higher I get, the more I see African Americans play small so people are not uncomfortable, but you can’t contribute when you play small and I’ve never played small (America, 2014).

America contends that another barrier for her as an administrator was not having knowledge of the unwritten policies and procedures of a school district. She says, “The barriers for me were just not knowing. When I came in, I had to go on my own merit. So my work had to speak for me, whereas, some folks who know folks just got promoted.” America believes the unwritten rule she suffered from was not going into administration when she was asked to by a supervisor. The unwritten rule being, “when they ask, or make the suggestion, you’ve got to do it, it’s really not a question.”

Candi, who has been in education for 19 years in the same school district, felt a barrier for her has been the school community.

The biggest barrier I think is, unfortunately, we are a small community. We’re an urban district but a small knit community when it comes to word-of-mouth. And
ideally when folks think of the high school principal, they still have that male thought in their mind. I think stereotypes still exist, unfortunately (Candi, 2014). She continues to declare that people doing the hiring all know each other and tend to share the same thoughts regarding males as better leaders. “They already have it in their minds that they want a male to occupy that seat, so there it is.”

Denese who was an assistant principal in two school districts in this study, felt one barrier for her obtaining the position of high school principal is lack of opportunities. She feels that she has the experience, knowledge, and skill set, and given the opportunity she could do the job. Denese discusses assistant principals that have skipped steps on their way to the secondary principalship, and as a result, do not understand the business of education. She states “How are these people, who don’t have the experiences, going ahead of these people that do? Most of the time it’s political, it’s who owes whom favors or somebody don’t like you. If they don’t like you, you don’t move.”

Evon, who has had the most administrative positions in this study, identifies leaving her present district earlier in her career as a barrier for her. She left her current district to pursue an administrative position at a charter school and then returned after several years. Evon states, “When I left the district, I felt like I kind of stunted my growth within this district, as far as promotions to the principalship. So I had to come back and reprove what I’ve done outside the district.”

Another barrier Evon noted was that she did not actively seek the high school principal position. She was encouraged to apply for the position of high school principal when one became available in her district, but she did not tell her supervisor she wanted
the job nor did she submit a letter of interest. She assumed that she would be selected based upon her job performance. Evon feels that when she re-entered her district from a charter school she should have told the superintendent that she wanted to be a high school principal, since she had principal experience. “I didn’t ask the questions. That’s something I want to do differently this year. When I have a question, I’m going to ask. When I’m thinking something, I’m going to say it, instead of just letting it sit and fester.”

One of the barriers to the principalship Lisa discussed was her age. She states, “I always get comments about how young I am to be an administrator. And I think that has been a barrier because the teachers and other principals do not believe that I can do the job.”

Lynn asserts that the behavior of current African American women in administration can pose barriers to others seeking the principalship. Lynn states “women in higher management do not seem to be supportive of the younger administrators going up the pipeline. They give no encouragement of others trying to follow in their footsteps.” Further, Lynn contends that the main reason she left her former school district was:

I didn’t want to be one of those principals that stayed as an assistant for the rest of my career. We had Black women at the top (in previous district), and if you didn’t suck up, you were stuck. If they you stayed in your place, you were fine. If you didn’t, oh man. As African American women, we need to nurture younger principals along and be supportive not destructive. If you see me doing something wrong, pull me aside and tell me (Lynn, 2014).
Misty felt that one of the barriers she has dealt with in obtaining the position of secondary principalship were people being promoted to the position who from her view did not deserve it or earn it. She believes when this occurs, it damages the entire process and puts the credibility of the candidate selection in question. “You have people, especially women, who work so hard and then see someone who is not qualified get a building. It takes the wind out of your sails. Makes you question a lot of things. It makes the whole profession look bad.”

Rene feels that in her current district a lack of support for those interested in leadership positions is a barrier to the principal position. Due to this lack of support, she feels trust between principals and their supervisors is hard to establish. “I just know that there’s a lack of support and a lack of trust. People would depend on another person to try and help them without them trying to destroy them or their character.” Rene contends that trust is a key element when supervising people in a school environment. Further, Rene states, “I think my teachers know I have their back. As my boss, I need to know you have my back and without that type of support in this district, we don’t have a lot of trust right now.”

Rene, similar to Misty, felt that a clear promotion policy has been a barrier in obtaining the secondary principalship in her district. She discusses how she has been given promotions, but some of her colleagues have not been as fortunate. Misty contends: Not having an established promotion policy results in a lot of good people out there that need to be considered for positions. Promotions should not be because of who they know or who they didn’t piss off. You don’t go into this saying I
want to be an assistant principal for the rest of my career. I don’t think anybody goes in saying that. You never know what the correct, exact, criterion is for being a principal (Rene, 2014).

Susan vocalized that community perception was a barrier for her in obtaining the secondary principalship. She describes interviews that she had in nearby suburban districts that resulted in her not being offered the position.

Once people sit down and have a conversation with you, they know you know the language, you can talk the talk. If they look at your track record they know you can do the job. But being an African American female in suburbia, even people that want to give you the job, they think ‘how is this going to go over with the community’ and that’s been a big barrier. After those interviews, I didn’t have any desire to go out into suburban school districts (Susan, 2014).

In addition to their discussions regarding barriers to the principalship, the participants advanced their views regarding support networks to the position secondary principal. The following section provides highlights their perspectives.

**Support Systems to the Secondary Principalship**

The nine participants of the study were asked to identify what support systems or assistance was available for African American women seeking the position of secondary assistant principal or principal. They were asked how these supports assisted them in obtaining their position and how this might have influenced their administrative career.

Participants Lisa and Rene both responded that they did not have any support systems in the districts they were teachers or administrators. These women both assert
that if there had been a support network or established system in place, some of their negative experiences with administrative tasks would have resulted in a different outcome. Rene comments,

It needs to be an authentic type of support that says okay your school had this population and these are the stresses that come with this particular group of kids. Don’t just give me people that have no idea of the stresses that come with being a principal in any school. Don’t send me a White male to be my mentor and be supportive and you don’t have a clue of what my stresses are (Rene, 2014).

Study participants Denese and Susan contend that the only professional supports they have had in their administrative careers came from one person. For Denese, the person who was supportive in her career was a principal she worked with as a teacher. She recalls, “She brought me the form for the leadership academy and said ‘I know I’m going to kick myself for this, but here, I’m recommending you’ she just gave me the form and that’s what did it.” Susan cites the principal she worked with as an assistant as her support for modeling the urban principalship. “I think the time I spent with Dr. XXX was invaluable. She documented what she did. Everything. I learned things from her I wouldn’t have gotten anywhere else. Instructional things that I wouldn’t have gotten anywhere else in the district as an assistant.”

Participants Candi and Misty both credit several African American women as being supportive during their administrative careers. Candi states,

So for me, I always try to look at people. I value everybody that I ever worked with in leadership and what I can learn from this person to help me grow to be
better. I have always picked up the phone and inquired about how to handle a  
situation or issue. So, it’s a combination from Dr. XXX to Mrs. XXX. Most of  
my supports have been other African American female principals or teachers  
along my career path (Candi, 2014).  
Misty recalls her first principal and the support she gave her during her classroom visits  
or evaluations. She thinks this support was invaluable for a young teacher.  

My first Black female principal, she was very supportive when I was a teacher  
and often when I was an assistant principal. She pretty much gave me the  
guidelines of what to do, what not to do, how to be professional, so I appreciated  
that. She knew her stuff and she was very transparent. Some administrators, you  
don’t know where you stand. You know one day they’re this way and one day  
they are that way. But with Dr. XXX, you knew (Misty, 2014).  

America, Evon, and Lynn felt that their support base or system came after they  
obtained the position of assistant principal or principal. Evon felt that support for her  
“came after I was a part of an actual administrative team. We would talk about students,  
teachers, etc. I could run things by them and seek their input.” She continues to discuss  
how that support system disappeared the next year when that team members left the  
district for other employment. Lynn states:  

My support came from other assistant principals, once I was a part of that level of  
administration. But when I become a principal, it was competitive between the  
different high schools, so I really didn’t have that support from anyone. We
worked for the same district, but I couldn’t have my school outdone by one of theirs (Lynn, 2014).

America felt that there was not a support base for her as an assistant principal; therefore when she became a principal, she started one. She and other African American female principals met on a regular basis to have “good sisterly conversations.” America states,

As a Black woman, I had nobody. You don’t have a support base and that’s why I was always free to help any African American do anything, but especially women. Because you have to have somebody to ask the questions and not feel like if I ask you a question, you think I’m incompetent. You’ve got to have somebody that can say ‘this is the ABC, I’m not sure what I can do’ (America, 2014).

In addition to these various perspectives on gender the research participants also provided their views on the impact of race on their positions on secondary principal. A discussion regarding the topic of race follows.

**Race and the Secondary Principalship**

One of the guiding themes for this research was the effect of race in the secondary principalship position. All the participants were asked several guiding questions regarding race and their experiences as African Americans in educational environments, job attainment, and challenges they faced in these positions.
All nine participants were asked if race played a factor in their hiring process for the position of assistant principal. All respondents felt that in the hiring process for the position of assistant principal, race was not a factor.

Three of the respondents (Candi, Lynn, Rene) did feel as though their overall experiences as African American administrators were different than their White counterparts, but could not offer any concrete examples where race had been a factor in their administrative positions. Lynn’s description of race differences was:

It’s just a feeling you get when you know it’s about your race. You can’t really put your finger on it, they don’t come out and say it, but you feel it in the air and in your soul. You leave a meeting thinking would this situation even be an issue if I weren’t Black? I guess you almost have to be African American to understand (Lynn, 2014).

Respondents Denese and Evon both felt that race was a factor during the promotion process for high school principal positions in their current districts. Denese describes the placement of high school principals at schools as:

You can’t just put her there because of her race. It’s a predominately Black school and it’s a different mentality of the kid and parent. That community is used to having an African American principal there. You can’t put an African American at XXX because they have never had an African American principal there. It will probably always be a White principal at XXX too. They keep the racial balance with administrators at schools (Denese, 2014).
Evon asserts that racial placement of principals exists in her school district. It is never openly communicated but is a known criterion for principals on certain sections of town. She states

I just didn’t get picked because I’m Black. I heard that they would probably never have a Black person at this school because it’s on the XXX side of XXX. Just like they would probably only have a White person as principal on the XXX side of XXX. I really do believe that because I’m Black, I would not have an opportunity to be a principal on this side of town, so I will have to move to another side of town to be a high school principal (Evon, 2014).

America felt that race was an issue in the area of perceptions of African Americans with some of her teaching faculty. She states, “I think the barriers come from the White side of how they see us. Their expectations that they have of being an African American in education are a part of the barriers to educating students.” She believes these teachers’ feelings are inherent and it is her responsibility as a school administrator to give them a different experience than what they may have learned from their parents. America states, “Those kinds of feelings are innate and I need to give you a better experience. You would be a different teacher and person had you had better experiences with your parents.”

Lisa believes race was a factor in her position of assistant principal related to assumptions White teachers made regarding her abilities. She states,

The assumption is that I am not qualified to be an assistant principal. Having the same qualifications as the White assistant principal does not matter when you
handle corrective measures with a teacher. Once, I had a male teacher write a 5-page single spaced letter to my principal complaining about me when I asked him to do the same things that the White assistant principal did. He did not write a letter concerning her (Lisa, 2014).

Misty felt that the racial barriers for her during the principalship were with other Africans Americans that she supervised. She contends that she had a lot of things in common with the people she managed. “Culturally, it makes my job easier and more difficult in the same way. So it’s easier to connect but it’s harder to be respected.” She believes that White administrators get respect from African Americans they supervise but they do not automatically culturally connect with those they supervise. Misty contends, They (White supervisors) get more respect because they are not on their home turf. It’s just societal expectations of the other races and as African Americans we tend to doubt each other. So that’s a historically racial yield that we have to deal with so you always feel like you have to prove yourself more and more with your own people. And being a female, it’s a double strike. But being a White male administrator, you may not be able to relate culturally to the environment but you will be respected quicker by those that you manage, usually through experience (Misty, 2014).

Susan contends that race has been a barrier to the principalship. She believes that the hiring practices of school districts are:

I think as an African American female you have two strikes against you because you’re female and you’re Black. So I think you have to work 10 times as hard.
White females and Black females are the last ones to get the job. The Black females, even in an urban district where the kids look like you, are the last ones to get the jobs (Susan, 2014).

The respondents also answered several questions relating to race and its impact in the school environment and how it effected their leadership positions.

**Gender Issues and the Secondary Principalship**

All of the female participants in this research felt that gender posed a barrier in their career advancement to the secondary principalship in one form or another. These women’s experiences with gender were evident from the beginning of their teaching careers and continued during their administrative tenures in all school districts where they held positions.

America felt that as a principal with “one of the most racially balanced schools in the district” gender most often played a factor when dealing with the community. She describes how male parents wanted to deal with her assistant who was a White male. “We would get a White salesman that would come in the office. My assistant and me would be standing there, and the salesman would address my assistant. I would be in my suit and he could be in a polo shirt and khakis, and they would swear he was the principal.” She asserts that the male parents would often want to deal with her male assistants for discipline issues.

America suggested that gender was an issue for her male colleagues. The male high school principals did not want to include her in the conversations or acknowledge her input. She had to impose her will and comments during those discussions with other
male high school principals. In her monthly district principals meetings, when the
discussions concerned athletics, “The women were treated as non persons. I really had to
lean in and make comments, so I could be heard and acknowledged. The other female
high school principals rarely commented on athletics, but I leaned in and took part.

Candi asserts that gender was a barrier obtaining her current position of high
school principal.

There were several high school principal positions available in the district. I
wasn’t even considered a contender until outside candidates turned the jobs down.
It was like an afterthought, even though I had been a high school administrator for
a long time. I knew high school and they had never said I didn’t know my job. If
I had been a man, I would have been a high school principal long ago.

Unfortunately, the stereotype of the strong gym teacher being the perfect high
school principal still exists (Candi, 2014).

Candi also contends that gender has been a barrier during her career attempting to
have current policies and procedures changed within her school. She feels like she has to
“fight more. A man asks for something and it is okay, I feel like I have to fight and give
reasons.”

Denese observed that gender has been a barrier for her career advancement to the
principalship in two different districts. She feels that the teachers and other female
administrators desire to have men in the position as principal. She states, “Gender has
hindered my career advancement. Not just with regards to teachers, but it can be even
from female administrators who’ve gotten their opportunities. They believe that there should be males in certain buildings.”

Evon also feels that her district considers gender when promoting people to the position of principal to certain high school buildings. She states, “Certain buildings, you know there will never be a woman as principal there, and certain buildings that you will not see a Black principal either.”

Lisa felt that gender issues were most prevalent in her current school district. She asserts that comments are made regarding her being a single parent by her district supervisor and others.

In this district there’s been a lot of reference to my child. I didn’t have a kid in my first position but to me it comes up a little too often. I think it’s less about people genuinely caring about my situation and more of ‘is she going to be a burden to whatever building she’s in because she’s a single parent with a small child.’ I’ve never heard this much conversation with the male assistant principal that has more kids than me (Lisa, 2014).

Lisa also contends that her gender played a role in how she was treated by students and parents. She believes the gender issues were not as prevalent, but did exist in her previous district while she was an assistant principal. “There were parents that didn’t want to speak to me because I was a female administrator. They wanted to talk to the dean who was actually in a lower ranking position than me. But they wanted to talk to him because he was a man.”
Lynn felt that gender was a big factor as a high school principal when dealing with the community and their perception of a principal. She explains that she dealt with gender perceptions her entire time as a principal at that school.

For me, gender was huge as a principal. The community members and teachers would discuss the previous principal, who was male, like he did so much for the school. They talked like he was this great leader. How could he be great with test scores, attendance rates, and graduation rates that were horrible? The school was one of lowest performing high school in the district. I guess he was good at things that didn’t matter or weren’t measured. They wanted to talk to me about why the teachers aren’t happy with all the mandates, not how the students are now outperforming many of the other high schools in the district on those same mandated tests (Lynn, 2014).

Candi, Misty, Rene, and Susan felt that gender was a barrier when dealing with building staff members. They all contend that males receive respect from their staffs due to the fact that they are male. Misty states, “they (men) get that respect just by walking in the door, and you can see it in the nonverbal communication that comes from the staff.” Rene states, “even the bad males seem to still garner the respect that most females would have to work so damn hard to just to try to get a piece of that power, to have the respect that they deserve.” Susan contends that “sometimes keep you out of the discipline issues. I think because they feel women cannot handle the ‘fights’ that occur at a high school. So they tell the male assistants first.”
Misty also feels that her security staff treats women principals differently and that is an issue of respecting her position of principal.

Security resource officers treat female administrators different than males. They give you a compliment you know they wouldn’t give a male. They give you a song and dance about wanting to be off work on Friday. And the song and dance starts with a compliment that border on ‘after hours talk.’ The entire discussion you know they would never have with a male administrator. That flirtatious stuff that they give you because they don’t think you have the capacity to lead people and you get that through their conversation (Misty, 2014).

Susan contends that, as a female, her gender has been a barrier communicating with male administrators. She states,

I feel like as an African American female very rarely are you from somewhere. And that whole benefit of the ‘good ole boys club’ your not a part of it. Even when you know people, you don’t have that same connection as an African American female. You’re not really from anywhere. The bonds are not there. As a female, there are so many stereotypes as far as what you can do, so many hurdles. As an African American female, for years I wanted to leave XXX but when I looked at my surrounding area, I thought they are not going to hire an African American female (Susan, 2014).

All of the female participates in this research found gender to be a barrier for the position of high school principal. These barriers were manifested in various ways throughout their progression as school leaders.
Summary

The African American female participants of this study identified various supports and barriers to the position of high school principalship. These women indicated that there were no formal established support systems in place for assistant principals or principals in their school districts. However, the majority of the respondents had other African American female administrators that supported or encouraged them on their ascendency to the principalship.

The women in this study identified various other perceived barriers that existed for them outside of race and gender. All the study participants identified race and gender as barriers to the high school principalship. Race was a factor in promotions of African American females in schools where the most of the students were White. If the majority of the student population was African American, gender was a barrier to the principalship. The respondents also identified gender to be a barrier in the areas of hiring, respect, and staff and community perceptions.

Conclusion

Nine African American female assistant principals and principals in Ohio identified many barriers to the positions of high school principal. They identified race and gender to be major barriers in educational leadership. The study participants identified gender to be the most prevalent barrier for African American females aspiring to the position of high school principal.
Chapter 5: Findings, Discussion, Recommendations

Introduction

In this chapter I will provide a discussion regarding the findings of African American female administrators reported in the previous chapter. I will build on the findings of my research to elaborate on previous research that centers on race and gender and its impact on the high school principalship. This section will give an overview of the emerging themes from my research and will include the connections between the theories, literature, data and perceived barriers for African American females and their ascent to the principalship.

Data in the educational field reveals that females represent over 76% of the total teaching population in the United States but make up only 52% of all school principals (NCES, 2012). The national total of high school principals during the 2011-2012 school year was reported to be 18,390. Of this number, approximately 5535 (30.1 %) were women and 1618 (8.8%) were Black or African American (NCES, 2012). The national center of educational statistics does not report principal data in the combined areas of African American female high school principals or assistant principals. This research was conducted as a result of the underrepresentation of African American female principals among the total population of high school principals in the United States.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF) were utilized as key beliefs regarding African American women and their access to the high school principalship. Combining these two theories to analyze women’s leadership experiences and using their voices shape the present state of school leadership is necessary for
change. Pratt-Clarke (2012) suggests that when women of color share their experiences within and on a platform, this information sharing subjects them to racism. These various themes will be discussed in light of my research questions that guided this study. My research questions were 1) What do African American females who hold the position of assistant principal and principal identify as barriers and supports to their career advancement into the principalship, 2) How do African American females believe race and gender have influenced their career advancement.

The components I will examine are the barriers, supports, race, and gender issues that African American female assistant principals and principals in Ohio face when pursuing the position of high school principal. I will discuss and examine these issues in the context of obtaining the first administrative position, the position of assistant principal, support systems, barriers, race, and gender.

**Findings and Discussion**

African American women who hold the position of assistant principal and principal interviewed in this study experienced many barriers in their ascent to the position of high school principal. Race and gender issues were the most identified barriers to the principalship for these women with gender being the more prevalent barrier. Previous research in this area supports the findings of race and gender barriers for women in leadership (Alston, 2012; Eagley & Carli, 2007; Gregg, 2007; Yukl, 2006). The results of this study reinforce the research conducted by Guthrie-Jordan (1990) in the state of Ohio. Her research found that even after the passage of affirmative action legislation and passage of Title IX, stereotypes of African Americans and women still
existed in the educational field of leadership. The female administrators in her study felt that common perceptions of them in educational leadership as Black women was that they could not handle the demands of the high school principalship. The results of my study would indicate that twenty-five years later, women are still perceived as not being capable of managing the job of high school principal. This belief is held teaching staffs, community members, and by those who are in positions to promote and encourage them in the pursuit of the position.

The female participates in this research felt that gender was the prominent obstacle to overcome while dealing with the duality of being African American and female in positions of leadership. The results of this study also reinforce the research conducted by Pirouznia (2006) in Franklin County, Ohio. In 2006 he found that gender discrimination still exists for women in public school administration.
The trajectory of obtaining the position of principal is different for women versus men. Women in this study spent an average of eight years as teachers and an average of four years in the supervisory position prior to being promoted to the assistant principal position. Theorists believe that women and men have comparable leadership paths; however, the trajectory of women leading to high school principalship reveals that women serve more years in other leadership positions before becoming principals than men (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Ortiz, 1982).

**Obtaining the First Administrative Position**

Longevity and consistency in a single school district have an impact on being hired to the position of principal. The results of this study reveal that the women that remained in the same district as an assistant principal spent fewer years as an assistant
before being promoted to the position of high school principal. Several of the interviewees viewed leaving a school district prior to being promoted to the position of principal as detrimental to career advancement. Evon stated, “When I left this district and went to XXX, I stunted my growth here for leadership opportunities.” These women felt it was a shorter path to the position of principal if they remained in the same district as an assistant principal. Jean-Marie & Martinez (2007) suggest that nationally women take on leadership positions in their own school district as elementary school principals 52% of the time but that men are more likely to advance to leadership positions outside their own district. Sandberg (2013) reports that in the business arena “when female managers are promoted, they are more likely to do so internally instead of switching to a different company” (p. 61). Thus men are more likely to pursue advanced administrative opportunities outside of their school district and be rewarded with a promotion for doing so. Women on the other hand, will be promoted faster if they remain in their school district and wait for a position to become available.

A significant number of the study participants, six of the total nine, were members of a sorority. Historically Black sororities have traditionally been utilized for bonding and networking between members, and performing social services within the Black community. The respondents felt that their sorority connections assisted in their careers for securing positions as teachers. Evon recalls “At the start of my teaching career, the XXX’s at the school would take me under their wing and look out for me.” Respondents discussed not feeling isolated and alone when beginning a new teaching position because of the networking done on their behalf within the organization. However, these women
did not feel as though their membership affiliation assisted them when being hired to the position of assistant principal or principal. They communicated that after having obtained leadership positions, their sorority connections have had a positive impact on their networking and connections with other principals that are associated with sororities and fraternities. All the participants of this study felt membership within a sorority is beneficial to the career advancement of African American females in leadership due to the large number of women in the field of education. Sorority or other educational organization affiliation is helpful to the career advancement of African American females.

**Position of Assistant Principal**

**Table 4**

**Trajectory of Leadership**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th>Step 3</th>
<th>Step 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Asst. Principal</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Supervisor of Principals</td>
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<td>Asst. Principal</td>
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<td>Asst. Principal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Asst. Principal</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Previous research conducted by Glantz (2004), Marshall & Hooley (2006) and Gregg (2007) identified the position of assistant principal as crucial to obtaining the position of high school principal. All except one participant in this study were assistant principals prior to moving into the position of high school principal. The position of assistant principal is a necessity for females who want to be high school principals. This study and the aforementioned studies would support the stipulation that most women must hold the position of assistant principal in their career path to the high school principalship.

The results of this study indicate that women are promoted to the position of assistant principal when they have a proven knowledge of curriculum and instruction and/or other coaching experience. Five of the women in this study also served in other leadership capacities, within their school districts, prior to being promoted to the position of assistant principal. These other leadership positions were all in the area of providing support services to schools within their district (curriculum coach, cluster leader, support services officer, department head). Two of the women were athletic coaches prior to becoming high school assistant principals. Grogan (2010) affirms that women often move into administrative positions from backgrounds in curriculum and instruction. Misty, a participant from this study found that additional experience in curriculum and instruction was beneficial for her in her preparation to becoming an assistant principal and later a high school principal.

Being an administrator is a lonely job, you don’t have a fan club. Being in a central office position before becoming an assistant principal gave me a deep
knowledge of what really goes on in a building from a different perspective. It also allowed me to establish connections in central office that I was then able to use when I went back into a building (Misty, 2014).

**Support Systems to the High School Principalship**

All the participants in the study stated that there were no established support systems or programs functioning in their respective districts for school leaders or African American females. Additionally, none of the school districts of the studied participants openly recruited, encouraged, or supported African American women within the school district in their pursuit of principal positions. Several participants indicated that their school districts had an established training program for aspiring administrators. However, these programs were not seen as a way for school districts to work trainees as principals without paying them the administrative salary.

I had to spend two years in the training program just to become an assistant principal when I already had the necessary credentials. Not all school district do that, so maybe I should’ve left then and went somewhere else because I was doing the same work as the assistant without the pay increase (Susan, 2014).

These training programs varied in length from one year to up to three years. Once obtaining the position of assistant principal these programs were viewed as being supportive in the daily duties of leadership. In research conducted by Gregg (2007) and Pirouznia (2006) both claim that an established successful support system is a crucial component for entering into the field of the principalship.
The majority of the participants in this study identified receiving their encouragement and support from one African American female. These support persons usually encouraged them to leave the teaching field and actively pursue the position of assistant principal. These individuals were either their supervisors during their teaching career or their building principals. They did not view these women as mentors, but rather individuals who were effective principals. Candi said, “Mrs. XXX was the best assistant principal I’ve known. I learned a lot from her when I was a teacher.”

Two of the participants in this study communicated that once they obtained the position of high school principal, they initiated, participated in informal support groups. These groups were formed solely to support African American females in leadership positions within their school districts.

We’d meet for happy hour and just have good sisterly conversations and just release. We would just sit around and have good educated analytical talk about what we’re doing and how we can do it better. How we can help and what tools do you have that can help me (America, 2014)

These informal groups met regularly, attended social functions together and actively recruited new members. These meetings served as social networking opportunities and informal support systems for African American females.

The information gathered in this study reveals that African American women need to develop formal and informal support systems. The reliance upon institutions or facilities for leadership support has not been found to be successful. Female administrators should not rely on school systems or any other public facility to assist with
Race Barriers to the Secondary Principalship

One of the identified major barriers to the principalship for these women who participated in this study was race. All of the participants were cognizant of race being a barrier with teaching staff and the perception of their leadership abilities. Several respondents discussed feeling that they had to work harder than their White counterparts in the same position. “I think as an African American female you have two strikes against you because you’re female and you’re Black. So I think you have to work 10 times as hard to combat some of the perceptions” (Susan, 2014). Several participants felt that White staff covertly challenged the validity of their information bus masked it with inquisitive questioning. Lynn asserts “I had to give them the same data, in various forms with several sources to be before it was deemed creditable.” This research echo’s Gregg’s (2007) sentiments identified in Chapter one that states there are greater job performance expectations on female educational leaders who are assistant principals.

Other study participants indicated relationship building with White staff members was difficult due to serving a predominately African American student population. Several of the women felt that White staff members made excuses for students’ lack of academic success and therefore had lower student expectations. Lynn stated “In my career I’ve heard one too many White female teachers make reference to the students as coming from a single parent home and how they feel sorry for them because they are probably searching for a father figure.” These expectations created an environment that
hindered student growth and overall teacher moral. Teacher expectations created a school climate where pity allows for low achievement and the students ultimately suffer long-term damage.

The women in this study advance that race are an issue for them in alternative contexts such as those outside of their urban school system. The other area that race was indicated as being a barrier for African American women was outside of their urban school system. The women in this study did not view leaving an urban school district to seek employment in a suburban school system as a viable option for promotional opportunities.

They felt that their interactions with rural and suburban administrators or teachers had not been positive experience in the past and therefore, and would not entertain the idea of leaving an urban district. The participants expressed concerns of combating racism on a larger scale in suburban environments. This would mean that as suburban and rural student populations become more diverse, these districts have not inviting environment to African American female administrators for employment opportunities.

The results of this study indicate that in urban education, unlike in Guthrie-Jordan’s (1992), race is not as prominent of an issue for these women. Race is not as crucial because the demographics of the urban high school in Ohio have changed. The population in public or charter high schools reveals that in most urban areas, Black students represent the majority of the student enrollment.

Race, with these participants was not as immense a factor as when Guthrie-Jordan did her research approximately 25 years ago. One explanation for this is due to the
growth in the number of African American administrators serving in school districts where Black students are now the dominant population. The prevailing belief is that your administrative teams should be reflective of the student population being educated in the school district. However, in suburban districts race was considered to be an enormous factor in administrative advancement. Respondents Susan and Renee felt that their previous positions in suburban school districts were fueled with racism. This belief is manifested in many of the study participants’ unwillingness to leave their urban school districts to pursue leadership positions in suburban and rural districts.

**Gender Barriers to the High School Principalship**

The results of this study imply that gender is a perceived barrier to the position of high school principalship. All the women interviewed felt their gender issues were prevalent in all areas and at all levels of educational leadership. Yukl (2006) also advanced that gender bias presents itself in the beliefs that men have greater competency for leadership roles.

This philosophical belief that men are more qualified for leadership positions is represented in this study when the respondents acknowledge community perception and attitudes that exist regarding male leadership. For example, both Lynn and Candi have vivid descriptions of gender bias. Candi commented that the perception in her district was that an effective high school principal was a visibly “a strong gym teacher type male.” This stereotype of what high school principals should “look like” is also found in research conducted by Coleman (2003) and Sanchez & Thornton (2010). These authors suggest that effective leadership traits are not generally associated with female
administrators. The characteristics associated with females continue to be associated with emotions. Misty recalls staff members discussing a female principal she worked for saying “I really want a male administrator because female administrators one minute they are this way and another minute they are this way. Depends on how they feel that day.”

The perception of the big, strong, male principal confirms the research conducted by Eagley & Carli (2007) where they identify various leadership traits associated to men and women. Lynn noted that from past experiences board members and city officials seem to push and advocate for male administrators in her district.

We know that they actively seek African American males to be an assistant principals and principals in this district. They (board members) believe that men should have several of the high school leadership the position simply because they want our endangered African American male students to have role models (Lynn, 2014).

The gender-biased treatment of females in leadership was evident in the area of respect. The women in this study felt that respect that was given to the male administrator solely because they were men. They believed that this garnered respect was not performance based or earned from staff. The issue of respect not given to women was also found in Wrushen & Sherman’s (2008) study of African American women secondary principals. These women contend that they worked years earning respect of their staff but for their male counterparts “it (respect) was a sure bet.” (p. 463). The research participant, Candi, describes a similar experience when she suggested, “My
custodian, at a former school, verbally challenged some of the requests I made. He talked in a disrespectful condescending tone to me that he did not do to the previous male principal. But that didn’t last long.”

Gender issues presented various challenges for the women in the study. The issues they deal with regarding gender began at the initial hiring process for an assistant principal position. These gender biases continue to rear its head in the daily operations of educational leadership for these women navigating the obstacles to the high school principalship.

**Additional Identified Barriers to the High School Principalship**

The women in the study identified race and gender as the major barriers to obtaining the high school principalship. Several of these barriers were also found in Pirouznia’s (2006) study of principal credentialed females in Ohio. Pirouznia not only found race and gender but also discussed hindrances to the principalship to be lack of support, age, and stereotyping. The women who participated in this research also experienced other barriers during their administrative careers that in one way or another influenced their success in the positions of assistant principal and/or principal. Other barriers to the secondary principalship identified in this study were, 1) community/board members perception 2) no clear promotion policy 3) age 4) leaving district 5) teaching staff 6) not asking for the promotion 7) themselves 8) no encouragement from those African American women currently in the position of assistant principal or principal.
These perceived barriers for African American women in educational leadership have been echoed in the research of many. Moore (2009) asserts that women pay a “cost” to occupy the positions normally filled by White men.

**Recommendations**

“To achieve equitable support and access for women and minorities, the informal recruitment and support processes must be changed so the professional culture of school administration is more enticing and supportive” (Marshall & Hooley 2006, p. 19). School districts and human resource departments would be well served to establish a support structure to encourage more African American female teachers to pursue the position of assistant principal. If these organizations focus on recruiting, retention, and promoting African American females in leadership positions, African American candidates will ultimately feel more welcome and supported by the school organization.

Suburban school districts should actively recruit African American females who have experience to join their diverse population that is representative of the world students live in. These school districts should conduct professional development activities that directly relate to diversity training, cultural awareness and race relations to change the existing culture. Presently, school districts have affirmative action requirements that suggest hiring and promotional policies. Further, many school districts are encouraged to strive to achieve diversity within the ranks of administration.

African American females who were or are presently assistant principals and principals should be supportive and encouraging of other African American female teachers regarding leadership positions within their perspective school districts. America
and Lisa who felt they had little support in the position of assistant principal echo this in their interviews. To this end, individuals who have already climbed the career ladder to become principals can help to further motivate potential leaders.

Persons responsible for hiring and conducting evaluations should be required to participate in professional development, attend conferences, or participate in trainings that address gender bias. These experiences will strengthen their understanding of what African American women face in leadership positions from many of the people they serve in their school community.

Recommendations for educational administration programs include requiring school leadership students to take coursework that address women and minorities in the school environment. This will help to prepare educational leaders have a better understanding of the issues faced by minority students and staffs in school systems. It will also help to create individuals who are more supportive.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

Additional research surrounding the position of assistant principal is critical because most secondary school principals and superintendents have assistant principal experience. As noted earlier in research by Gregg (2007), Glanz (2004) and Marshall & Hooley (2006) the assistant principal is a significant leadership position in the trajectory to the principalship. This position is key because it is a training ground for all the duties and responsibilities of the high school principal. The amount of literature that directly speaks to obtaining this position or the job itself however is scarce. Glantz, (2004) reports that 45% of all assistant principals go on to become principal however, he did not
examine race or gender in his study. Further research is needed to consider the implications of race and gender on the career progression of women and African Americans from the position of assistant principal to principal.

Additional qualitative and quantitative research should be conducted and would benefit the field of educational administration regarding women in educational leadership positions at all levels. An analysis of the shared experiences and perceived barriers that effect women acquiring higher positions of leadership is key to addressing the problems of equity regarding access to leadership roles and dismantling the glass ceiling.

A comparative study of White females and African American females in the position of high school principal would also be enlightening. Both of these groups of women face challenges in obtaining and maintaining the position of principal. Investigating the similarities and differences that these women face would be useful to the field of educational practice and policy development. An inquiry regarding the experiences of the varied populations might also assist individuals aspiring to become high school principals about what to expect as they advance to these posts.

Research that investigates the beliefs and perceptions of school board members and influential community members would shed light on women in educational leadership positions. These members are stakeholders in school environments and are key players in the local climate and conditions of a school system. The prevailing beliefs and influence of stakeholders in local schools districts do impact decisions that are made by human resources departments and Superintendents when leadership positions become available.
Additionally, research of college and university educational leadership programs is recommended. These institutions educate all teachers and administrators; therefore, a closer examination of how race and gender are addressed at this interval is significant to combating race and gender discrimination at the ground level.

Summary and Conclusion

Nine African American female assistant principals and principals in Ohio were interviewed on multiple occasions to gather information regarding their perceived barriers and supports to obtaining the position of high school principal. This research was conducted utilizing a thematic approach through a Black feminist critical race lens of inquiry. The results of this study indicate that African American women face many barriers in the educational leadership arena. These women deal with various barriers to the high school principalship with little to no professional support systems to combat the issues they face.

The most dominating barriers African American females seeking the high school principalship face continue to be associated with race and gender. Several previous studies conducted (Alston 2012, Guthrie, 1990; Pirouznia, 2006; Smith, 2008) address the double jeopardy that historically continues to plague women of color in leadership positions. Even with the legislative remedies, research, mentoring programs, and state mandates; Ohio school districts have not rectified the treatment and inequities that exist for African American women in leadership positions in public school districts. It has been 25 years since Guthrie-Jordan (1990) conducted her study in Ohio on the perceived barriers that exist for African American administrators, one difference should be noted;
race is not as critical an issue for women in urban school districts. Race is still a prevalent factor for women in leadership, but it appears to not be a large factor in the hiring process, at the assistant principal and principal level, when leading schools with large numbers of minority students.

The women in this study did see gender as the number one barrier to obtaining the position of high school principal. The perception that men are better leaders is the prevailing philosophy that impedes capable, qualified deserving African American women from holding key positions of leadership in school systems. This belief system continues to inhibit growth within school systems and is not supported with any valid research. This sexism that has withstood the test of time is not hidden and rears its head in the day-to-day operations of a school building.

Howard- Hamilton (2003) asserts, “the survival of Black women is contingent on their ability to find a place to describe their experiences among persons like themselves” (p. 25). The nine women who were participates in this study and shared their experiences and stories continue to forge ahead in positions of leadership even with all the barriers they face in their school districts and buildings.
References


Appendix: Interview Questions

Interview 1

1. Please tell me about your educational experience as a student in high school.
2. What are three words that describe you?
3. How do you think others you?
4. How do you want others to see you?
5. What life experiences informed your decision to work in the educational field?
6. How did you become interested in the field of education?
7. Please discuss your teaching experiences.
8. Please tell me about your experiences with assistant principals/principals as a teacher.

Interview 2

10. What does a leader/principal do?
11. What does the position of principal mean to you?
12. Please tell me why you choose to enter into the field of secondary school administration.
13. Describe for me the hiring process for the position of assistant principal/principal in your school district?
14. Was race a factor in your hiring process for assistant principal?
15. Was this hiring process similar or different from what you would consider the traditional process? If so, how?
16. What procedures did the school district put in place for training of assistant principals?
17. Are you a member of any professional organizations? If yes, how did your affiliation with this organization help you acquire your leadership position?
18. What support systems or support person did you have during your ascendance to your present position?
19. What procedures or processes were available to you for additional training or professional development once you became a assistant principal/principal within your district?
Interview 3

20. Please discuss some of the issues you encountered in administration that you feel were directly related to gender.

21. Please describe of the challenges you have faced as an African American assistant principal/principal.

22. Do you feel your experiences as an African American female assistant principal/principal are different from the experience of White assistant principals/principal? How?

23. Do you feel your experiences as an African American female administrator are different from the African American male administrator? How?

24. How do you think your background has helped or hindered you becoming a high school principal/assistant principal?

25. What has helped or hindered you in your administrative career? How?

26. What are some barriers you have encountered as you pursued the principalship?

27. Are there any administrative experiences that you feel had a direct impact on your career success?

28. If you had the opportunity to repave your pathway to the principalship, what changes would you make and why?