

2020

# The Perceptions of African American Females in Educational Leadership

Shonda Matia Harris-Muhammed  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Shonda Matia Harris-Muhammed

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2020

Abstract

Perceptions of African American Females in Educational Leadership

by

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MA, Walden University, 2005

BS, Norfolk State University, 1997

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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## Abstract

In a Southeast U.S. state, African American female school administrators had difficulty obtaining administrative roles within the local district. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of African American females in educational leadership roles and the challenges they faced in obtaining leadership positions. Delgado and Stefencic's Black feminist theory provided the conceptual framework for this study. Two research questions addressed African American female administrators' perceptions of their administrative roles, contributions, support of diversity, and experiences in obtaining leadership positions. Data were collected from semistructured interviews with 10 African American female administrators who had a minimum of 3 years of leadership experience. Emergent themes identified through open coding were checked for trustworthiness through member checking, detailed descriptions, and researcher reflection. The findings revealed that African American females who seek educational administrative positions face challenges but can strengthen their qualifications through engaging stakeholders and educational colleagues, using collaborative strategies, and making persistent efforts. A 3-day professional development project was created to assist African American female administrators in obtaining leadership roles. Findings may provide African American female administrative candidates with strategies and approaches for obtaining leadership positions.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this project study to my number one man, my best friend, my devoted and loving husband, Demetrius. I love you more than you will ever know. You stood with me lifting me up through every aspect of this journey. Unknowingly to Demetrius he cared for me during this challenging journey more than I can describe. The many sacrifices you made so that I can be successful on this journey while never complaining demonstrates not only the love you have for me but also the faith you have in our union. Thank you. I dedicate this project study also to my children, Anthony and Khadijah, for unselfishly sharing their mother with the world. God blessed me with two remarkable children who inspire me to do great things every day. Your love, your support, and your written words of encouragement over the years have meant so much to me, and I will cherish them forever. The completion of this project study is to inspire both of you to allow God to continue to use you in His best way! Thank you sincerely for supporting me while on this journey of becoming Dr. Shonda Matia Harris-Muhammed.

I dedicate this study to the memory of my grandparents, Deacon Harry and Deaconess Dorothy Harris, for the many sacrifices they made during their time on Earth to make sure that I experienced all that life could offer and always standing by me no matter what the situation or circumstance. To my aunt Gloria Yates, thank you for saving me from myself. I have always known you loved me unconditionally. I dedicate this study to my mother, Gladys Ann Wooden, who pushed me to fulfill my purpose and destiny in life and would always say to me no matter what, "I am proud of you baby girl." Finally, I dedicate this study to all the positive women who shaped me to be the woman

and leader I am today and to all the young women who submitted themselves to my mentorship over the years.

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To the One who is first in my life and home, my Savior, Deliverer, and Comforter, I humbly and graciously say THANK YOU for allowing me to complete this project study and earn my doctoral degree. Thank you for delivering me from cervical cancer, thank you for always providing for me and my family when I was unemployed, and thank you for seeing me over every mountain I had to climb. God, I thank you for walking with me through every storm and thank you for showing me that through even a total loss of a home due to a fire, you are still God. Saving my husband from a stroke, you are always God. All that I have gone through to complete this journey was necessary. Thank you for reminding me that even through illness, you are God. I am screaming thank you and I give you all the praise! I have cried many tears and have thrown many objects out of frustration and disappointment but God!

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **The Local Problem**

In a Southeast U.S. state, African American female school administrators have difficulty obtaining administrator roles within the local school district. African American females have been overlooked in the state to serve in educational leadership positions such as leading school districts as superintendents and serving as building administrators (Superintendent, personal communication, October 15, 2014). In another district in the state, a district director of instruction acknowledged the lack of diversity in public education that exists for African American females in leadership. According to a retired superintendent in the target state, 16 of the 22 school divisions in the region did not have African American females in educational leadership positions such as principal and superintendent (Retired State Superintendent, personal communication, November 11, 2015). The need for African American females in leadership positions in schools is necessary for African American female adolescents to make a connection with their racial and gender role models (Memduhoglu, 2016; Mongeau, 2017). Diversity in leadership is important in school settings and particularly for African American females (Miller, 2016).

### **Evidence of the Local Problem**

Gender and ethnic role models are important for students in the K-12 pipeline and through the college years (Domingue, 2015). The lack of African American females in principal leadership does not provide African American female students with the concrete vision of what is possible. By providing role models for students of color, aspiring

principals can realize themselves in these positions and understand that it is possible to serve as a principal regardless of perceptions about race and gender (Spicer, 2016). The absence and scarcity of gender- and female-matched role models fails to contribute positively to students' vision of the African American female students' future possibilities as African American female leaders (Domingue, 2015; Marczynski & Gates, 2013). Limited African American female leaders in leadership positions in the K-12 pipeline and university settings affects the African American female student to engage in ideations of leadership from the K-12 pipeline throughout higher education settings (Domingue, 2015; Marczynski & Gates, 2013). African American female adolescents identify with the gender and ethnicity of gender- and ethnicity-matched leaders who are teachers, administrators, and professors (Domingue, 2015; Marczynski & Gates, 2013).

In the study site district from 2014 to 2019, African American females occupied 3 to 9 of the 12 to 15 total administrator positions. African American female leaders represented 69% of the administrator positions during the 2014-15 school year and declined to 25% of the total administrator positions in 2018-19, as noted in Table 1. The number of African American female administrators decreased between the years 2014 and 2019 from 9 to 3. Table 1 reflects the representation from African American and White females and males in leadership positions in the target district.

Table 1

*2014-2019 Administrator Population for Study Site District*

Year	Total administrators by year	White male number and percentage of total	White female number and percentage of total	African American male number and percentage of total	African American female number and percentage of total
2018-2019	12	2/17%	5/42%	2/17%	3/25%
2017-2018	15	2/13%	4/27%	2/13%	7/47%
2016-2017	12	00/0%	1/1%	4/33%	7/58%
2015-2016	13	00/0%	00/0%	4/31%	9/69%
2014-2015	13	00/0%	00/0%	4/41%	9/69%

*Note.* Deputy Superintendent, Targeted School Division June 28, 2019.

The lack of diversity in school leadership is also reflected in a nearby district referred to as School District A. The data in Table 2 demonstrate that the lack of representation of African American females extended beyond the target district to School District A. From 2014 to 2019, the number of African American female administrators ranged from 5 to 6 of the total administrator population, which had a range of 12 to 13 in District A. Between 2014 and 2019, the number of African American female administrators has remained fairly consistent in School District A. However, the number of African American female administrators decreased by one during this span while the total number of administrators increased by one. These data reflect a reduction in the representation of African American female administrators in School District A.

Table 2

*School District A African American Female School Administrators by Number and Percentage for 2016-2019*

Year	Total administrators by year	Number of African American females	Percentage of African American female administrators
2018-2019	13	5	38%
2017-2018	13	6	46%
2016-2017	12	6	50%

*Note.* Director of Human Resources and Student Services School District A, March 2015.

Table 3 reflects the diversity of the student population in the target district. The problem addressed in the current study was that African American female school administrators have difficulty obtaining administrator roles in the local school district as demonstrated in Tables 1 and 2. The diversity of the study site school administrator population is not representative of the student demographics based on an analysis of student and school administrator demographics from 2016 to 2019, as noted in Tables 1 and 3.

Table 3

*Student Demographic Population 2016-2019 of Study Site District*

Ethnicity	Students by ethnicity		Percentage		Students by ethnicity		Percentage	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Year	2016-2017		2017-2018		2018-2019			
Total students	1128		1119		1075			
African American	934	83%	937	84%	889	83%		
White	116	10%	118	11%	123	11%		
Hispanic	18	2%	19	2%	22	2%		
American Indian	3	.002%	3	.002%	2	.001%		
Asian	11	1%	8		9	.008%		
Native Hawaiian	2	.001	1		1	.001%		
Other	44	4%	33	3%	29	3%		

*Note.* Retrieved from Department of Education in targeted state.

In a nearby district, the student demographics reflected a similar diverse population (see Table 4). The diversity of African American female administrators is not indicated in the district as indicated in Table 2. The female administrator population does not reflect the level of diversity in the student population. To meet the needs of all students, schools must have individuals from varying cultural perspectives (Allen, 2017). From 2017 to 2019, the diversity of the student population in the school systems west of the target district did not reflect the school leadership according to a group of parents,

advocates, and teachers (Parent Advocacy Organization, personal communication, November 12, 2017). Table 4 indicates that although 90-93% of the students in School District A were African American, the African American female administrator population ranged from 38% to 50% of the total administrator population from 2016 to 2019.

Table 4

*Student Demographic Population 2016-2019 of School District A*

Ethnicity	Students by ethnicity		Students by ethnicity		Students by ethnicity	
	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage
Year	2016-2017		2017-2018		2018-2019	
Total students	4275		4195		4196	
African American	3975	93%	3823	91%	3786	90%
White	99	.02%	104	.02%	115	.02%
Hispanic	198	.04%	210	.05%	233	.05%
American Indian	6	.001%	6	.001%	4	.00%
Other	59	.01%	52	.01%	58	.01%

*Note.* Retrieved from [hopewell.k12.va.us](http://hopewell.k12.va.us).

It is critical for African American females to hold administrator leadership positions in the PK-12 pipeline through college and beyond. The current study focused on the few African American females who are in leadership positions in the target district and other nearby districts. The phenomenon of African American female administrators having difficulty obtaining administrator roles is critical to understand as African American girls, teens, and college students develop their sense of selves and career

opportunities during the adolescent and college years. Therefore, it is important for these young African American females to experience African American female leaders to interrupt the effect of adverse stereotypes focused at African American females (Domingue, 2015).

### **Problem in the Larger Population**

Diversity in teaching and leadership is important for schools especially when the student population constitutes mostly students of color. It is imperative for African American students to be permitted to have African American teachers as role models in schools (Lambert, 2016). The United States is becoming more culturally diverse due to global population migrations, refugees, and internal demographic shifts (Ylimaki & Brunderman, 2019). Teachers and principals must be able to support diverse students' needs and backgrounds (Ylimaki & Brunderman, 2019). The nationwide student demographics are changing, and therefore it is essential to consider the consequential changes needed in public school leadership and staff.

By 2024, 56% of the student population nationwide is expected to be students of color (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). According to a Schools and Staffing Survey (USDOE, 2016), a "nationally representative survey represented of teachers and administrators" (p. 1) reflected that 82% of teachers in public school settings identified themselves as White. The survey administered by the USDOE indicated that 84% of the teachers and administrators identified themselves as White. The survey from 2000 to 2015 showed little change in the diversity of staff and administrators despite the changing nationwide student demographics.

A longitudinal review of the demographics of principals in K-12 public schools indicated that African Americans are generally not representative of the student populations whom they serve based on the data reported by the USDOE (2016). Table 5 shows the nationwide number and percentage of principals by ethnicity between 2007 and 2016. These data demonstrate that the number of African American principals ranged from 9,620 of 90,470 in 2011 to 9,550 of 90,410 between 2011 and 2016, or an average of 10.6% of the total national principal population. The number of White principals ranged from 73,160 of 90,470 in 2011 to 73,340 of 90,410 between 2011 and 2016, or an average of 88.9% to 77.8% of the total national principal population.



Table 5

*Nationwide Principal Demographic Population 2007-2016*

Ethnicity	Principals	Percentage	Principals	Percentage	Principals	Percentage
	by ethnicity		by ethnicity		by ethnicity	
Year	2015-16		2011-12		2007-08	
Total Principals	90,410		89,810		90,470	
African American	9,550	10.6%	9,110	10.1%	9,620	10.6%
White	70,340	77.8%	72,010	80.3%	73,160	80.9%
Hispanic	7,430	8.2 %	6,130	6.8%	5,870	6.5%
Asian	1,290	1.4%	820	.9%	570	.6%
Pacific Islander	#	.2%	‡	#	130	.1%
American Indian	650	.7%	650	.7%	620	.7%
Two or more races	980	1.1%	1,010	1.1%	490	.5%

Note. [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17\\_212.08.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_212.08.asp) IES National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

Unlike professional African American men and White females, whose identities intersect in at least one fundamental way with the majority of White male leaders, African American females end up feeling excluded in ways that are impossible to remedy on their own (McGirt, 2017). In the development of educational leadership, schools can no longer focus on formulating a male-dominated team but must create a diverse group

within the schools (Chuang, 2013). To promote African American female educational leaders, transformational leadership is needed (Klenke, 2017) to break the glass ceiling.

Elliott (2014) shared that diverse student populations can create challenges for teachers and administrators as they strive to meet the needs of different students. Elliott emphasized the value of diverse school administrator teams who are equipped to deal with varying student needs. The USDOE (2016) has noted the importance of racial diversity and how it is beneficial to providing positive role models, influencing academic outcomes, and closing the achievement gap.

Gaining emotional support through the presence of female African American role models strengthens the development of positive thoughts of well-being for African American female students (Zirkel, 2002). In a longitudinal study, English, Lambert, and Ialongo (2014) found a link between female and male African American adolescents' experiences of discrimination and depression. The experience of racism leads to "physical, psychological, and social difficulties" (English et al., 2014, p. 1190). Furthermore, the findings indicated that the depressive symptoms are stronger for African American females than for African American males (English et al., 2014). Other researchers established links between positive mental health and school achievement (Parchment, Jones, Del-Villar, Small, & McKay, 2016). Findings suggested that diverse administrative leadership that represents the students served may support the development of a positive sense of self, thereby avoiding the depressive cycles that African American female and male students are prone to (Parchment et al., 2016).

The lack of diversity in K-12 public institutions is also a concern that has permeated higher educational leadership. Table 6 demonstrates the lack of African American females in higher education. In 2015, a total of 1.6 million faculty were employed at degree-granting postsecondary institutions. Table 6 indicates African American females in academic positions at postsecondary institutions in 2015 nationwide.

Table 6

*2015 Nationwide Ethnic and Gender Faculty Demographics at Postsecondary Institutions*

Sex and race	Faculty at postsecondary institutions (%)
White male	42
White female	35
African American male	5
African American female	4
Minority male and female (not including African American male and female)	14

*Note.* Adapted from National Center for Education Statistics, 2016.

Diversity in educational leadership is a problem in the study site district and nationwide. Students of color need diverse role models, and student populations that include high percentages of minority students benefit from being served in schools that include role models of the same gender and color. The rationale for studying this issue is discussed in detail in the next section.

## **Rationale**

Diversity in leadership is valued and regarded as a critical component in most institutions that support social change, such as school systems, universities, nonprofit organizations, government organizations, and private corporations (Robinson, 2010). The rationale for the current study was exploring the perceptions and challenges of African American females who serve in public school educational leadership positions to address the gap in practice regarding the presence and sustainability of African American females in education administrator leadership roles. Tables 1 and 2 reflect the number of African American female administrators in the study site district and School District A. In the study site district, the number of African American female administrators declined between the years 2014 and 2019 from 9 of 13 administrators to 3 of 12 administrators. The percentage of African American female administrators between 2014 and 2019 decreased from 69% to 25% in the target district. A less severe decline was observed in School District A between 2016 and 2019. Although the number of African American female administrators declined from 6 to 5, the total number of administrators increased from 12 to 13. These data do not reflect as severe a change in the representation of African American females in administrator leadership positions but may represent a possible stagnation in hiring additional African American female administrators to serve in leadership positions. Moreover, the administrator demographics in these districts are not reflective of the student demographics.

It is important to have gender and ethnic role models for African American female students. Data in Tables 3 and 4 show that the percentage of African American

students remained at approximately 83% of the total student population in the study site district, and ranged from 90% to 93% of the total student population between 2016 and 2019. According to the percentage of African American students in both districts, the percentage of African American administrators was not representative of the student populations between 2016 and 2019.

Leaders of state organizations have noted the discrepancies in representation of African American females in administrator leadership roles. The president of a female leadership organization in the target state noted at the 2018 annual conference that becoming an African American female administrator goes beyond the notion of breaking the glass ceiling to include crushing the concrete chunk by chunk (Organization Leader, personal communication, March 15, 2018). The analogy indicated that the force needed to break through the barricade created by invisible social systems required exponential strength and tenacity from African American females. A former educational community outreach director for a higher education institution noted at the elementary principals conference in the target state in 2017 that African American females must continue to obtain higher goals and degrees to be considered for leadership positions (personal communication, November 8, 2017). This African American female leader, who served as the only African American female leader of the higher education institution, reported that she strongly believed that the school division leaders have overlooked the powerful and skilled leadership of African American females and what they could bring to the field of education (personal communication, November 8, 2017). The former higher education outreach director also noted that African American females have the knowledge, skills,

and stamina to lead. All African American females need is the opportunity to serve. According to an African American Cook & Glass, 2015, it is suitable for African American males and females to challenge stereotypical ideas about gender roles in society. As the educational system has remained in a status quo position, the result has been that African American females have been challenged to obtain leadership positions, which also has influenced the opportunities for African American males to embrace, mentor, and support African American females in leadership positions (Cook & Glass, 2015). Additional efforts, degrees, and persistence are required by African American females to establish the presence of African American females in administrator leadership roles.

Learning how African American females view their leadership may provide innovative ways to support these leaders and gain a new view of leadership. Families have relied on African American females to be the heads of households, and now this population is also considered for leadership roles outside the home context (Rampell, 2013). Four in 10 American households with children 18 years of age and younger now include a woman as a breadwinner in their household (Pew Research Center, 2015). These data represent a shift in overall family dynamics. It has become more acceptable for African American females to join the workforce (Rolen & Toosi, 2018). Consequently, it has become suitable for school district leadership and families to have African American females to serve as educational leaders.

Achievement of African American females and males has been influenced by matched gender and race role models. In a quantitative study in a public middle school

setting, Zirkel (2002) found that students who were race and gender matched with role models were “significantly and consistently predictive of a greater investment in achievement concerns” (p. 371). The race- and gender-matched role models provided the students with a clear vision of possible directions the students could take. Wiggins and Watson-Vandiver (2017) observed that successful high-minority, high-achieving schools have been found to possess highly qualified teachers and diverse education reflected in campus staff and curricula. The purpose of the current qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of African American females in administrator educational leadership positions and the challenges they faced in obtaining leadership positions in local school districts.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms were used in the study:

*Challenges:* Challenges are considered a limited opportunity but accomplish the task (Ely & Rhode, 2010).

*Diversity:* Diversity refers to the range of identifies that exist in a group of people that represents a broad range of ideas that are inclusive and equitable for as many ideas as possible (National Education Association, 2008).

*Educational leadership:* Educational leadership refers to the oversight and direction of an entire school and school district. The focus is on the principal leader, central office leader, superintendent leader, and teacher leader (Garner, 2004).

*Empowerment:* Empowerment refers to the development of positive self-esteem, an increased sense of control of one’s life and career, and the ability to stand up for one’s

rights, whether it be equal salaries, equal promotions, or equal justice. For this study, empowerment referred to the female participants' abilities to effectively organize, plan, and act to achieve their goals (see Deruy, 2013).

*External barriers:* External barriers include sex-role stereotyping. These barriers include patterns of employment discrimination, such as promotion and advancement, and lack of a mentor, role models, and sponsors (Shakeshaft, 1989a).

*Gender:* Gender refers to “learned beliefs and the way which meaning, and evaluations are associated with sex by members of a culture” (see Garner, 2004).

*Internal barriers:* Internal barriers are the thoughts and feeling affected by females (Johnson, 2005).

*Leadership:* Leadership is the ability to guide, direct, or influence people (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

*Leadership orientation:* Leadership orientation refers to a leader's utilization of one or more of four leadership frameworks (Boleman & Deal, 1991).

*Mentor:* Mentor refers to a person who assists a new employee or member navigating the formal and informal paths of the organization in a one-to-one relationship (Cohen, 1995). A mentor not only coaches but a mentor also takes “an abiding intense interest in the person, as well as in the talent of the person” (see Martin, 2006).

*Role commitment:* Role commitment refers to an educational leader who serves the school community, stakeholders, school district, and families (Gillet & Vandenberghe, 2014).



*Role conflict:* Role conflict refers to conflict that occurs because of expectations for individuals to play incompatible roles (Msila, 2017).

*Role models:* Role models refer to individuals whom people choose to imitate and aspire to be. Role models inspire others to be the best they can be and covet roles or positions in an organization (Harrison & Killion, 2007).

### **Significance of the Study**

The problem addressed in this study was that African American women are underrepresented in educational leadership due to barriers they face. Pruitt (2015) explained that to investigate the perceptions of African American females in leadership and the barriers and challenges they face while serving as educational leaders, attention should be directed to the present difficulties related to an individual's work responsibility within the leadership position. Mainah and Perkins (2015) indicated "that a majority of women in academic leadership positions, especially women of color, have experienced exclusion, condescension, isolation, dismissal, communication challenges, lack of validation or appreciation, and failure to receive due credit" (p. 7). African American females' experiences do not present in the annals of educational leadership. The lack of inclusion of African American female leaders extends to the university level in higher education, affecting the experiences of Black female college students (Bartman, 2015). The Digest of Education Statistics report (as cited in Bartman, 2015) indicated that African Americans make up 9% of U.S. college and university faculty. African American females represent only 4% of this total (Bartman, 2015). The lack of African American

female administrators has continued to be a problem in the state in which the current study was conducted.

In the target state, African American females have not had the same opportunities as their counterparts to obtain educational leadership positions. It is imperative that the experiences, perspectives, and voices of African American females in leadership roles, particularly educational leadership, are studied to bring some balance to the field (Griffin & Tackie, 2016). A former Assistant Superintendent of Personnel and Student Services stated when African American females interviewed for leadership positions in school divisions in Virginia, a panel of 10-15 individuals including teachers, members of the local parent-teacher council, local advocates, clergy, and business leaders was gathered to conduct the interview (personal communication, 2020). However, when men interviewed for leadership positions, they were often interviewed by a three-to-five-member panel (Former Administrator in Target State, April 12, 2015). In 2011 in a local school district in the target state, a principal's job at a local middle school was vacant. Several African American females applied for the position; however, no African American females received an interview even though their credentials exceeded the requirements (Former School Administrator in Target State, December 14, 2011). Two of those African American females who applied for the principal position held doctoral degrees in education since 2011. The male candidate did not hold a doctoral degree at the time of interview and selection. The male candidate was selected for the position (Human Resources Specialist in Target State, December 14, 2011). The concern in this scenario is that the African American females possessed the credentials for the posted principal

position but were not contacted for an interview and were not treated in the same manner as the males who applied for the principal vacancy (Former Administrator in Target State, December 14, 2011). Studying the phenomenon of the lack of diversity in educational leadership matters to African American females aspiring to serve as educational leaders. The lack of representation of African American females in leadership is impedes African American females' ability to positively influence the communities in which they serve.

A review of the research on African American females in K-12 educational leadership revealed gender challenges, pay gap challenges, racial bias, and an absence of promotion to be elevated in leadership positions in 2016 in the target state (Muhammad, 2018). Shapiro and Balingit (2017) conducted a study in a county in the target state and the findings reflected complaints reported by several African American females who had applied for educational administrator leadership positions but were not selected. In addition, Shapiro and Balingit concluded that African American applicants were less likely than their White counterparts to receive an employment offer in a northern school division in the target state. Based on the demographics of the administrators in that region, Shapiro and Balingit found that African American applicants had more educational and professional educational experience than White candidates. Shapiro and Balingit's findings indicated that racial bias against African American females and males was prevalent in the district's hiring process in the target state. Racial bias and hiring practices have also influenced the lack of diversity in educational leadership.

The population of educational administrators in the target state is not diverse and does not represent the student populations served. As African American females have positioned themselves to obtain leadership positions, they have often been isolated due to the lack of diversity and support (Jean-Marie, 2013). In the current study, the focus was on African American female administrators' difficulty obtaining administrator roles within the local district.

Researchers have found when students of color have adults who mentor and support them and who share commonalities such as gender and ethnicity, students' academic performance is strengthened (Kaziboni & Uys, 2015). These students are able to develop achievement goals and feelings of self-efficacy by viewing race- and gender-matched role models (Zirkel, 2002). The opportunity of having role models matched in both gender and ethnicity helps to override African American female students' feelings of discrimination, which, if left unchecked, have been shown to quash students' development and vision for their lives (Zirkel, 2002). Zirkel (2002) found that student learning and perceptions of opportunities are supported by students of color seeing models resembling themselves in favorable positions.

The results of the current study may provide deeper insight into the challenges African American females face in serving as educational leaders and the contributions they make to support diversity, and may provide more information to understand the lack of diversity of African American females in administrator roles in the target state. A better understanding of this phenomenon may provide information needed to support changes in the representation of African American females in administrator positions,

thereby creating the opportunity for a more diverse presence of administrators in the target district. This study may benefit the local educational institution and community by exploring the perceptions of African American females regarding educational leadership opportunities and contributions to diversity that may provide local leaders with information to examine the problem and consider alternative plans of action to remedy the problem. As the American minority population grows, there is a need to attract more minority faculty and school administrators to ensure students have role models to whom they can relate and share experiences. An improved understanding of the experiences and challenges African American female educational administrators have faced may raise awareness and promote social change through professional development that may address the problem.

### **Research Questions**

The problem explored in this study was that African American female school administrators have difficulty obtaining administrator roles within the local school district. To study this problem, I designed two research questions related to the identified problem and purpose to better understand the phenomenon occurring in the study site district and in the larger population. The data from this study were intended to reveal the African American female experiences related to challenges they faced as administrators in leadership positions and how they perceived serving in the administrator role in the public-school setting. The research questions (RQs) were designed to address the purpose of the study:

RQ1: How do African American female administrators view the ways they contribute and support diversity within their role as an educational leader?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of African American females in educational leadership about the challenges they face in obtaining leadership positions?

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study involved external barriers that African American females face in their path to leadership roles, conscious and unconscious patterns of behavior, and beliefs within individuals related to ethnicity and gender. The problem of the lack of diversity in administrator positions in the target district was examined using a conceptual framework that supported insights into the phenomenon being studied and interpretation of the data obtained from participants. The problem aligned with the purpose of the study, which was to examine the perceptions of African American females in educational leadership and the challenges they face in obtaining leadership positions. The conceptual framework for this study was pivotal in discerning the problem, purpose, and analysis of results. Critical race theory (CRT) laid the foundation for Black feminist theory (BFT; Delgado & Stefenic, 2012), which provided the framework for the study.

**Critical race theory and black feminist theory.** I used BFT as the conceptual framework through which I examined the phenomenon of the lack of diversity in leadership as evidenced by the absence of proportional representation of African American females in administrator positions in the local district. CRT supported the

interpretation of the problem and purpose of this study; however, the framework did not contain all of the elements that were contained in BFT. CRT focuses on five components: “(a) meritocracy, (b) objectivity, (c) neutrality, and (d) historicism” (Joseph, Viesca, & Bianco, 2016, p. 9). The experience of people of color is focused on in CRT regarding these five areas. The assumption behind CRT is that this lens supports the examination of the relationships between these components and one’s experiences that could contribute to freeing up the notions of oppression and power imbalances between races (Joseph et al., 2016). However, in CRT the unique experiences of African American women are not considered as contrasted with BFT, which incorporates the historical experience of Black women into the conceptual framework.

**Black feminist theory.** BFT was selected as the conceptual framework for this study because it integrates the experiences African American female descendants because most were in positions of oppression having been brought to the United States as slaves (James, Foster, & Guy-Sheftall, 2009). The historical lived experience of African American females involves the factors of ethnicity, gender, and interactions of those attributes. The configuration of these attributes resulted in formation of BFT (Crenshaw, 1991). Considering all of these factors supports a deeper understanding of the lived experience of African American females. Crenshaw (1991) proffered that to grasp the difficulty of women of color, one must examine the juncture of gender and ethnicity. Crenshaw emphasized that these identities must be analyzed in an integrated manner to comprehend BFT and to apply it to problems encountered by females of color.

In this study, I explored the perceived challenges of African American females in administrator roles and their perceived contributions to diversity in their administrator roles. The conceptual framework involved examining the external barriers that African American females face in their path to leadership roles. BFT provided the lens to interpret the data obtained from participants in this study.

### **Black Feminist Theory**

BFT is a conceptual framework that includes six qualities that are closely linked to the purpose of the current study, which was to examine the perceptions of African American females in administrator educational leadership positions and the challenges they face in obtaining leadership positions in local school divisions. The six qualities of BFT include (a) BFT is a response to the oppressive system African American females have experienced and it serves as an activist response to the convergence of gender, ethnicity, and dominance; (b) BFT represents the connection between thoughts and experiences, and holds that not all Black women have the same experience, or that there is a consensus on value of diverse experience; (c) historical oppression of Black women may serve as a trigger for activism; (d) African American female intellectuals contribute varying levels of information related to BFT, and their interpretation of experiences provides depth of meaning for Black women regarding the framework of oppression, which is joined by a work ethic in which Black women push through challenging experiences although the reinforcement is minimal and which promotes empowerment; (e) BFT is a fluid conceptual framework that may be effected by varying conditions and experiences in society, and therefore the framework may be adjusted accordingly; and (f)



BFT is a conduit for social justice and bringing all humans together (Joseph et al., 2016). African American female administrators' perceptions of their challenges in the institution of education relates to BFT as they serve to inform stakeholders regarding perceived racism, and social injustice. The institution of education is a political entity, and teachers and administrators are potential agents of change within public school institutions (Joseph et al., 2016). The findings from the current study may provide data for consideration by leaders in the target district, which could affect hiring practices and support promotion of African American females to administrator positions. This potential outcome provided the rationale for BFT as the conceptual framework for the study.

African American females are the grass roots leaders challenging the United States to embrace equality and social justice (National Women's History Museum, 2016). Little has changed in higher education for African American females. African American females face multiple barriers when entering college because of (a) little experience in community and public affairs; (b) internalized, traditional gender-bound beliefs about females' roles; and (c) adoption of self-defeating perspectives (Veltman & Piper, 2014). R. D. Davis and Maldonado (2015) suggested that BFT supports the position that academic settings provide marginal positions for African American females. Academic and professional settings that provide marginal positions for African American females continue to demonstrate a pattern of silencing those women and causing them to feel invisible. This theory explains the outsider-within status in which Black females remain as outsiders; even though they have been in contexts in which the dominant group has assembled, they have no voice and are invisible. Because no cultural or personal fit exists

between the dominant group and the experiences of African American females, no sense of belonging occurs (Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Ideas that focus on the lived experiences through everyday actions and behaviors are identified as standpoint theory, originated by Bennis (2015). Bennis (2015) noted that “leaders, whatever their field, are made up as much of their experiences as their skills, like everyone else. Unlike everyone else, they use their experiences rather than be used by it” (p. 64). African American females have lived encounters grounded in gender, race, and class. The connecting of gender, race, and class is the basic premise of BFT and served as the conceptual framework for the current study. According to Collins (as cited in Howard-Hamilton, 2003), the Black feminist thought framework, distinguished from BFT, is composed of three themes:

- (a) it is shaped and produced by the experiences Black females have encountered in their lives, (b) there are intersections of experiences between and among Black females, and (c) although there are commonalities, between Black females there are multiple contexts to be revealed and explored. (p. 21)

The Black feminist thought framework contributed to the need for BFT.

As educational administrators, African American females are often forced to defend their roles as instructional leaders, constantly protecting themselves against gender discrimination often observed in the workplace, adjusting to the lack of support while balancing their roles as wives and mothers (Short, 2015). In a Hayman (2017) study, African American faculty were marginalized when they either in private or in public embraced themselves and their beliefs regarding racial identities. Concurrently,

White colleagues have continued to hold the expectations that they are somehow different from African American females and other minorities. This behavior prevents African American females and other minority females from becoming part of the cohort.

Inequalities and stereotypes continue to exist and create roadblocks for African American females to gain economic and educational parity in this society (Pew Research Center, 2013). Peters (2012) explained African American females in school reform have often been overlooked for administrative positions, because of the effect gender has on females in school leadership. Gender is not the only factor that has influenced the experiences of African American female administrators.

Short (2015), stated African American females administrators are often forced to defend their roles as instructional leaders, protecting themselves against gender discrimination in the workplace, and adjusting to the lack of support from the district level while balancing their roles as wives and mothers. The conceptual framework supports the many reasons for the lack of diversity of African American females in administrator roles, as when African American females are perceived as competent, they have also been perceived as too strong and overpowering by both men and females (Short, 2015). The disadvantages African American females have faced by other individuals' lack of understanding of African American females' strengths and leadership abilities has sometimes resulted in negative perceptions towards African American females making it challenging to build trusting relationships for African American females in administrator roles. Therefore, understanding the BFT is central to understanding the phenomenon examined in this study.

### **Review of the Broader Problem**

The review of the literature identified for this study included a comprehensive research process beginning with online library search methods. Key words used in this search for literature included diversity, African American female administrators, leadership, gender role models, BFT, critical race theory, sex bias, discrimination, representation, history African American females, African American female leaders, legislation, and equality. Among the journal, databases searched, those that produced the most applicable results were SAGE, JSTOR, EBSCO, Wiley, and Elsevier. The peer-reviewed feature was selected, to ensure that the literature searched would meet required criteria to promote a status of the literature regarding elements related to the problem studied.

I reviewed literature containing empirical research in the relevant areas, which appeared in a wide range of publications, such as *Psychology of Females*, *Childhood Education*, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *Journal of Social Work Education*, *International Journal of Clinical Leadership*, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, *Advancing Females in Leadership Journal*, *Journal of Correctional Education*, and *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. I identified articles through searches conducted through Walden University's library database of journals, Google Scholar with a preference for peer-reviewed journals, and through internet search engines such as Google. Additionally, once identifying critical authors, I examined their research for other pertinent studies, and similarly viewed alternative literature referenced by those authors. I selected journals, some themed issues, for additional, related studies. Even

though the number of female's administrators, particularly African American female's administrators, continues to lag that of men, females must move beyond advocating and mentoring aspiring leaders and begin to more overtly create school places where all groups of people are valued and nurtured (Beckwith, Carter, & Peters, 2016).

### **Historical Overview of African American Females in Educational Leadership**

This literature review includes a historic overview of the perception of African American females in educational leadership. The literature review also includes a framework of African American females in administrator positions within the public-school environment. In this literature review, I describe the challengers and successful strategies for overcoming those barriers, for African American females in leadership. My perusal of the literature dispensed research findings on attributes identified as necessary to overcome existing challenges in educational leadership for African American females. The review of literature is separated into 14 sections: (a) Conceptual framework, (b) Review of the broader problem, (c) Historical overview of African American females in education leadership (d) Additional discrimination theories contributing to the phenomenon, (e) Historical Influences Contributing to the Lack of Diversity of African American Female Administrators, (f) African American female positioning and credentialing related to educational leadership, (g)

African American female leaders and pay structures, (h) African American female leadership attributes, (i) Sex Bias and sex discrimination, (j) Role commitment and role conflict, (k) External factors, (l) Diversity in education administrator leadership, (m) Implications, and (n) Summary.

### **Discrimination Theories Contributing to the Phenomenon Studied**

There are many theorists who can provide a lens from which to study the phenomenon of the lack of diversity of African American females in administrator leadership positions in public school systems. To focus this study, I selected Black feminism theory (BFT) as the primary conceptual framework to support the deeper understanding of the problem being studied. Other theorists have noted that racial and gender differences hinder females and minorities and are responsible for differential treatment in leadership (Guilder, 1986; Herminia, 1993; Van Maanen, 1990). Therefore, different individuals are expected to assimilate their behaviors and practices to the ethics and roles of the leaders of the dominant race who are considered privileged. Most gains by females' administrators in the early part of the century were lost after the 1930s due in part to the century-old pattern of male dominance (Guilder, 1986). Other discrimination theories support one's deeper understanding of contributing factors to the lack of African American females in administrator positions from a different viewpoint.

Research regarding awareness of gender differences, role conflicts, and sex biases is an essential first step to moving females, especially African American females, forward in leadership positions. According to Van Maanen (1990), many theorists have explained why gender and racial differences exist within the leadership. Herminia (1993) characterized these theories into three general categories: (a) how theories postulating differences in people affect diversity, (b) how discrimination practices affect diversity, and (c) how systemic institutional barriers and attitudes affect diversity. Consequently, few African American females hold administrator leadership positions in K-12 public

institutions. The discrimination theories provide additional insights into the problem targeted in this study. Black feminism theory is the conceptual framework which most closely aligns with the phenomenon being studied regarding the scarcity of African American females in administrator roles in K-12 systems.

### **Historical Influences Contributing to the Lack of Diversity of African American Female Administrators**

The literature on the topic of African American females in educational leadership goes as far back as the 1900s and perpetuates the same theme to achieve administrative positions (Dunbar, 2015). Chin (2011) suggested African American female's leaders who work in male-dominated workforces can be perceived as weak and more intimidated by their male constituents, just because men sometimes view African American females as emotional decision makers. Chin (2011) also suggested that this lack of equity serves as a barrier that causes stress and challenges for African American female's leaders and specific experiences of African American females who are subjected to an erroneous norm that compares their leadership abilities, skills, emotional balance, and instructional roles to their White male counterparts. Fike (2016) reiterated that historically, females overshadowed the domain of education as teachers.

Historically, female principals have been underrepresented in educational leadership. Despite the predictions, men have retained the leadership roles of education in the United States (Superville, 2017). While females continue to form the bulk of the teaching force, men continue to dominate and serve in administrative leadership roles (Loewus, 2017). Men are most likely to be found in positions with more power, pay, and

prestige (Tomlinson, 2013). The proportion of female's principals' remains much smaller than the portion of females' teachers at all levels, even at the elementary school level where the percentage of female principals is the highest (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). As noted in Table 5, the percentage of African American principals and White principals has remained fairly consistent from 2007 to 2016 with African American principals counting for approximately 10% of the nationwide population of principals and White principals accounting for approximately 90% of the total principal population (IES >National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)- Digest of Education Statistics, 2017). One of the first female superintendents predicted in 1909 that the number females and African American females would begin to rise in the next 100 years.

The shift in increasing African American female administrators did not occur as predicted. In 1909, Chicago's first female superintendent, Ella Flagg Young prophesied that females would soon be in control of the U.S. education system (Smith & Osborn, 2007). At that time, females' superintendents comprised 10% of the superintendent workforce and led in mostly rural districts (Blount, 1998). Eagly (2007) suggested that gender role expectations can lead to negative consequences in terms of a leader's effectiveness to influence people. Female leaders have managed to accomplish their leadership identity in educational leadership despite the lack of hope and vision of females in administrative positions, specifically African American females. The concept of African American females leading in administrative positions has taken more than 100 years to gain the stature of acceptance and leadership that did not exist for African American females (Husa, Lamsa, & Vahala, 2010). Despite Young's prediction, the



status quo has made small shifts in representing African American females in administrator positions (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

African American females have served as educational leaders since the commencement of the 19th century (Coleman, 2012). In 1964, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act barred discrimination in employment based on race, color, national origin, religion, and sex (Iagasa & Miller, 1998). In the 1990s, females were predicted to move to positions at the top of organizations (Grogan & Smith, 1998). Although there have been more African American females entering the teaching profession globally, their presence has been noticeably scarce in higher-ranking educational leadership roles in varying countries (Shah, & Shah, 2012). To change public school institutions, the dominant ideas of racial ability and views of multi-cultural and linguistically different students need to be examined in light of their influence on how these institutions function to serve students. The lack of diversity in administrator teams continues to uphold the same ideological actions of ethnic dominance (Miller, 2019). The reworking of how administrators work with all students is needed and African American females have been noted to be critical partners to support this needed transformative shift

Since the 1900s, most female teachers have primarily held positions on the elementary school level (Paton, 2013). The only administrative positions that have shown possibilities in gains for females, including African American females, is that of the elementary principal and assistant principal; however, even in this position, the number of African American females administrators are far behind the percentage of men on the elementary level (Burton & Weiner, 2016). Representation of African American females

in the position of school district superintendent positions has not changed significantly due to several factors.

Female leaders who have managed to accomplish their identity in educational leadership since the 1900s have managed to develop the necessary skills to lead (Dunn, Gerlach, & Hyle, 2014). Brunner (2012) stated that African American females who serve as educational leaders must move to the next level in their advocacy and mentoring for African American females. Brunner (2012) discussed that African American females, who have risen to the top of the educational field by becoming an educational administrator, must maintain a mentoring and nurturing relationship while in the uppermost leadership positions. Hague and Okpala (2017) studied females in education, as they are earning more advanced degrees than their male counterparts, despite minimal progress in the workplace. Credentials of African American females may also be influencing the hiring practices of public-school leadership staff.

### **African American Female Positioning and Credentialing Related to Educational Leadership**

Females have not gained leadership positions such as the superintendent or assistant superintendent due to a lack of positioning and credentialing for those females (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015). Females and males receive doctorates at similar rates. Although females and males receive doctorates at similar rates, superintendent credentials are obtained by 10% of females in doctoral programs while simultaneously obtaining their doctoral degree (Matthews, 1992). Simon (2012) suggested that African American female leaders have a larger scale of demands as leaders compared to African

American males. African American females work to live up to the ongoing demands of performing as educational leaders without having the need of diversity and support being met.

The lack of diversity in leadership of females and African American females has been noted in other executive positions as well as in educational leadership. Females remain to be underrepresented at every level in corporate America (Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015). Data show that African American females make up less than .5% of all civil service leaders such as sheriffs and police chiefs (Davis, Lombardo, Woods, Koper, & Hawkins, 2014). Shakeshaft (1989a) addressed the underrepresentation of African American females in school leadership, which has been a leading inspiration for female educational examiners studying the phenomenon of African American in school administration and other areas of leadership. This was inspirational as Shakeshaft (1989a) was one of the first researchers to address the lack of African American females in administrator roles. The rise of female teachers has been noted, and the rise of African American female teachers has been observed as a shift in the educational field.

According to Shakeshaft (1989b), this prevailing attitude and movement of men into school administration during the 1960s kept the number of female's administrators, including African American females' administrators, at a minimum throughout the 1980s (Shakeshaft, C, 1989b). During the past 100 years of females in school administration in America, males have dominated the administrator structures in public systems while females have served as the teachers and staff (Pruitt, 2015). Historical records showed that female administrators never had a golden age, only empty promises (Shakeshaft,

1989b). In the 1980s, the percentage of females in school leadership was lower than the percentage of females in school leadership in 1905 (Pew Research Center, 2013).

### **African American Female Leaders and Pay Structures**

Shepherd (2017) shared African American females are placed into higher-level leadership positions, such as the lead teacher, which is often a position with little power, few resources, and with an unclear direction for upward mobility (Shepherd, 2017). Diverse representation, discrimination, and equal pay are important factors which contribute to the problem (Brown, 2017).

Historically, equal pay for females and males has been an ongoing problem in society which legislators have tried to address through the passage of legislation. Fifty years after the original passage of the Equal Pay Act, with the Obama administration's revised version of the law known as the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, and updated regulations, doors began to open for unprecedented access to jobs and leadership positions for females and minorities in all trades under the protection of the law (Elmer, 2015). An observed increase in African American female's presence in the workforce and leadership positions was observed following the passage of the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act (Elmer). Despite challenges faced over the years, females in management and administration were perceived to increase in both numbers and competencies (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). While this was not noted as specific to African American females, it was noted to increase overall for females. The perceptions of African American female leaders, regardless of the position and title, have demonstrated many levels of discrimination in the history of African American females.

Beckwith et al. (2016), conducted an exploratory study on the status of African American women in executive leadership positions worldwide and in the United States. In their findings, they reported that nationwide, “4% of the executive positions are filled by females and for African American females this percentage is significantly less (p.121).” Based on their review of the literature, it was reported that African American women noted racism as a barrier to obtaining an executive position and at times, once the executive position was obtained, the challenges experienced increased as they sought to maintain their position(s).

### **African American Female Leadership Attributes**

African American female leaders have been found to reflect favorable attributes for leading. Shakeshaft, a female research expert, noted that African American females are trying to re-conceptualize the meaning of leadership within the world of African American females. Gilligan (1982) indicated positive differences emerging from female leadership styles which have been observed in educational systems. Female leaders repeatedly ask for input from teachers, stakeholders, parents, and community leaders. African American females are not focused on progressing their own ideas rather they would prefer to promote the soundest ideas forward (Bailey, 2014; Grogan & Smith, 1998). Gilligan (1982) shared that scholarship on female leaders in any field indicated that females lead differently from men and these differences can be intentionally implemented in educational systems with positive results.

Researchers conducted a study using eight focus groups and 44 African American females from the Mid-Atlantic area of the U.S. The goal of the study was to identify a

common framework for convergence of Black females' key roles, responsibilities, and perceived oppression by examining the attributes used to describe the many aspects of the Black female. In a thematic analysis conducted by Abrams, Maxwell, Pope and Belgrave (2014), the findings introduced "Strong Black Woman" attributes which included a Black female who: "(a) embodies and displays multiple forms of strength; (b) possesses self/ethnic pride despite Intersectional Oppression; (c) embraces being every woman, and; (d) anchors herself by Religion/Spirituality" (p.1). African American females' attributes improve the positivity of leadership teams and strengthen the diversity of the team as well as role models for African American adolescent females.

Building positive working relationships with diverse individuals is a crucial factor in educational leadership (Tatum, 2007). To hire and retain African American females in administrator positions, it is critical that researchers delve into the phenomenon of the scarcity of African American female administrators in educational leadership. Studies about African American females in leadership the sense of urgency to hire and retain African American females in school leadership (Brown, 2005). Historically, females and African Americans were underrepresented within leadership positions (Shakeshaft, 1999). Achievements of African American females in educational leadership have not been acknowledged or valued (Reed & Evans, 2008). Not only has undervaluing the role of the African American female administrator been an issue, but the cultural mores and institutional practices have contributed to the barriers experienced by African American females.

The glass ceiling analogy has been one which researchers have used to describe the barriers females and African American females face to shatter the barrier that has existed for African American females to hold administrative positions in the K-12 public school systems. The cultural expectations of society have created the glass ceiling which is meant to represent to any the common challenge in reaching higher levels of leadership within institutional structures (Ragins, 1998). Ragins (1998) noted because of the Civil Rights legislation, organizational and cultural changes were slow and did not occur as quickly as expected. Examiners discussed the challenges African American females face in educational leadership and how those challenges may cause asymmetries in the role of instructional leader, which can sometimes have a downward spiral effect on the staff, students, and the community at large (Ragins, 1998).

### **Sex Bias and Sex Discrimination**

During the 1950s, with the consolidation of school districts nationwide, fewer African American females held administrative positions, as females of all races were encouraged to remain at home (Brown, 2004). African American females have entered educational leadership roles, at an increasing rate compared to the last decade, particularly on the elementary and middle school levels (Hess et al., 2015; Pande & Ford, 2011). Based on the national data regarding the demographics of principals over the last decade reflected in Table 5, the increasing leadership roles noted by Pande and Ford (2011) have focused on assistant principals, department chair leadership roles. However, according to Frank (2015) despite having the experience, the training, the degrees, and the talent, females have continued to be overlooked for promotions on the secondary

level and the district level of educational leadership and were paid lower salaries than their male counterparts. African American teachers tussle with the true meaning of a school community and lack a birds-eye view of the unfinished and longstanding advocacy to effect change in educational leadership for African American females, specifically institutionalized sexism and racism in holding African American females from leadership opportunities (Grogan & Smith, 1998). Grogan and Smith (1998) stated that intergenerational perspectives lack an understanding of the energy expended to promote gender and racial equity in educational leadership roles. Generations of younger African American females may not have the historical perspective and understanding of the need to advocate for gender and racial equity.

Researchers have identified obstacles and made suggestions to help African American females assert their rights and aspire (Shakeshaft, 1989b). Americans widely believe that males tend to be in positions of authority and prestige, although it has been maintained that males and females both serve as effective leaders (Pew Research Center, 2015). There is little data, however, on why African American females remain underrepresented in these leadership positions (Pew Research Center, 2015). However, many school system leaders have not accepted or acknowledged discriminatory employment practices. Nonetheless, African American females who have been chosen for leadership have soared into their roles with patience, class, and integrity, which are essential traits of a leader (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2013). African American females in educational administrator positions in the United States and internationally can provide diverse perspectives on educational change that is needed.



The African American female perspective is vital to support diversity in administrative leadership teams thereby facilitating social justice through gender equity, and decision-making in school.

### **Role Commitment and Role Conflict**

School system leaders have attempted to implement various diversity and training initiatives to comply with Civil Rights policy and legislation. Despite the provision of some diversity professional development, organizational obstacles such as the shortage of time for collaboration, frequency of the training opportunities, conflict in organizational priorities, tensions between varied ethnic groups, and racial injustices (Jean-Marie, 2013), which continue to impede the progress of African American females in educational leadership. Before 1970, according to Wilkinson and Pickett (2010), information on school administrators was not disaggregated by ethnicity; therefore, any data collected detailed only the experiences of White females or collectively the progress of African American females along with females in general. As leadership data on school administrators has become more commonplace, the study of specific phenomenon regarding African American female leadership have emerged on research agendas. Data have been disaggregated nationally to the principal levels but not to other levels of leadership therefore the breadth of the diversity is not quantified nationally (Brown, 2017).

Females researchers have tried to not only identify gender conflicts in school leadership, role conflicts, and leadership styles, but also to discover the significant motivations in African American females' acquisition of leadership roles that allows

these females to remain in the positions. Arvey, Zhang, Avolio, and Krueger (2007), Hernandez, Eberly, Avolio, and Johnson (2011) conducted a qualitative meta-analysis of leadership literature and noted two guiding concepts of leadership theory in the last century: the locus and mechanism of leadership. Leaders must consider how to develop other leaders, a team or department and/or an entire school district. In considering how to support the change process of individuals and entire districts, leaders must also consider the locus of the power or influence. By using the dimensions of locus and mechanism, one could create change processes designed to be navigated by the leaders or administrators (see Hernandez et al., 2011). Using this this framework, one could perhaps accelerate change by placing the locus of control with a diverse leadership team including African American females.

The 1950s and 1960s showed a resurgence of the predispositions towards females that deterred their progression into leadership positions (Matthews, 1992). However, a gap exists in the literature regarding African American females obtaining administrative positions. For example, Marbley, Wong, Santos-Hatchett, Pratt, and Jaddo (2011) suggested that females in leadership positions in a branch of the military, a police safety setting, or in higher academia might be judged more harshly because leadership is sometimes defined as possessing the attributes of highly masculine qualities. The problem for African American females in taking on leadership roles is that those roles are stereotypically male qualities and male parts.

It imagined that a preponderance of females in the school system caused the system to become too much of a woman's world and that the school would have multiple

deleterious effects on generations of male students (Sexton, 1965). In her 1973 written work, *Schools are Emasculating Our Boys*, Sexton (1965) started an opposition to females' teachers and administrators. During this period, males received draft exemptions from the Vietnam War if they entered teaching. Support rallied during this time to encourage men to join the teaching field, and for the school administration to overcome the handicaps believed to have been placed on young boys at the hands of their female teachers and administrators (Sexton, 1965). The common belief during this time was that a man could take charge more quickly and efficiently than a woman and that he could establish better contact with children, particularly boys while maintaining strong discipline (Sexton, 1965; Shakeshaft, 1989b).

Morrison, White, and Van Velsor (1987) coined the famous term *glass ceiling*, which these examiners invented, often described females in leadership positions, and suggested that females as a group, despite earning placements for top jobs, often find a glass ceiling between them and their goals. The metaphor continues to imply a transparent barrier that continues to hold females from rising to certain levels in leadership positions (Morrison et al., 1987).

### **External Factors**

Generally, African American females have not been urged to pursue, nor provided adequate support such as mentoring for leadership positions. External factors can be but are not limited to, gender-role stereotyping, discrimination, absence of specialized preparation, lack of mentors, absence of adequate gender and or same sex role models, and the dynamic of family responsibility (Shakeshaft, 1989a). "It has revealed the ceiling

that keeps females out of upper management positions and has shown us that this ceiling is glass if one is White, but concrete if one is a woman of color” (Skria & Young, 2011, p. 1). Although perceived barriers have been identified, African American females, have achieved positions in educational leadership while inhabiting the barriers as they climb the ladder.

Morrison et al. (1987) further stated that unspoken rules do not allow African American females into the leadership club and the “good ole boy network” because of their gender status. This step of discrimination based on gender and race prevents many African American females from obtaining leadership positions. Nonetheless, females, including African American females, are increasingly taking on leadership positions, and remaining in those positions (Alexander-Lee, 2014). African American females continue to struggle with obtaining leadership positions (Alexander-Lee, 2014) even though they have obtained leadership positions. One finding that surfaced during the affirmative action policy is that discrimination against minorities and White females is the primary roadblock to their advancement into educational leadership. (Williams, Kilanski, & Muller, 2014). Exceptional African American females are reminded that they may be “pretty for a black girl,” but are not leadership material (Jones & Norwood, 2017).

Although females, including African American females, are starting to access the arena of leadership, a significant discrepancy continues to exist between the actual progress made by African American females in entering administrator positions and the perceived progress made by these females. Lowe (2011) suggested that more African American females join the ranks of effective and respected leaders regardless of the

barriers they faced such as judgements related to their decision-making and ability to effect change in the educational arena. These questions are essential to consider if females are to retain their leadership positions. Educational examiners need to discuss issues that pertain to the specific work environment in which a female leader is evaluated. Objective evaluation of African American females is important due to the history undergirding BFT. The perceptions towards females and leadership has continued to be a problem in contexts beyond the public education.

According to Hughes (2011), experts have found that men are viewed more positively than females to fill of leadership roles. Nationwide, only 33 females hold the position of Sheriff or Chief of Police in 3,067 counties and cities in the United States (Balsamo, 2017). Lowe (2011) explored the role of gender, collaborative leadership, and balance regarding several African American females in ministry. An unfounded myth in American culture, is the idea that White and minority females are prevalent in leadership positions. Females may compose roughly 50% of the U.S. population, but African American females continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions including ministry positions (Lowe, 2011). Representation of African American females in other contexts beyond K-12 public systems has been a problem. African American females share these representation issues with other females as well.

African American females share some common problems that White females have in terms of obtaining leadership roles. Many of the same issues that affect White females in educational administrator roles also affect African American females in administrator roles (Yoder, 2001). However, integrating African American issues and feminist issues

regarding leadership may also occur because of shared characteristics of females and minorities (Wakefield, 2017). On a much wider scale historical research on African American females in educational leadership has provided a better perspective of how the perception of African American females in leadership has shaped the mindset of obstacles formed as African American females eagerly strengthen their abilities to lead.

Negative attitudes toward African American females have created obstacles in obtaining and maintaining administrator leadership roles (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013). African American females have also faced a hiring bias, as many local school boards across the nation maintain this responsibility, and have been largely comprised of White middle-age Protestant men (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009) thus the hiring bias lowered salaries for African American females in leadership. Suarez-McCrink (2002) illustrated this meeting point for diversity and feminist theory and stated that an African American woman must walk between two worlds. The two worlds include the participant in two cultures, one framed, but that is the stereotypical traditions of the White dominant culture, and the original ethnicity of African American females is part of an all-encompassing ethos.

African American females in leadership face challenges as leaders and attention should be directed to an African American woman in the workplace and what it means to be a professional woman of color. Suarez-McCrink (2002) and Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) suggested that African American females must work through gender, racial, and cultural barriers. In addition to these challenges, African American females worked through, Higgins and Kram (2001) suggested other primary obstacles to the progression

of minority leaders. The other obstacles included a scarcity of role models, omission from systems of consultation and exchange, typecasting of capabilities and position, the absence of meaningful support, difficult assignments lacking proper guidance, and finally the obligation to respective individual and family duties.

### **Diversity in Education Administrator Leadership**

Diversity in educational leadership exists outside the central region and is also prevalent throughout the state and nation as a national concern. Pruitt (2015) proffered that public education is missing a link, African American females in leadership. In 2016, in the target state, African American females were identified to lead seven school districts as superintendents out of 134 districts (Loewus, 2017). Gender equality is not just a local issue for African American females; it is also a national issue for African American females in public education. Current researchers on African American females demonstrate that more diversity in the labor force has improved workplace results in and student learning of all demographic experiences (Cook, 2015; Loewus, 2017; Potter, 2013). When district leaders apply policies that create diversity in schools and communities the outcomes form an atmosphere of positive outcomes in school for students (Memduhoglu, 2016). Ethnic and socioeconomic variance is advantageous to communities by helping to create a culture of acceptance of individuals from different backgrounds (Potter, 2013). Memduhoglu (2016) conducted a qualitative study with teachers and administrators in a high school who reported workplace diversity contributed positively to the school environment by encouraging problem-solving, and alternative solutions. Diversity in the administrators and teachers was viewed as a natural

phenomenon and needed for one's growth and organizational development regarding diverse perceptions (Memduhoglu, 2016). The findings were that diversity is one of the factors that help community leaders with decision-making and has served to realize better results for students across the nation (Wells, Fox, & Cordova-Cobo, 2016). While some administrators and teachers from homogeneous environments have reported concerns related to diversity of staff in school settings regarding conflict, favoritism, and teamwork, it is likely influenced by the adaptations that must be made in diverse organizations (Lau Chin & Trimble, 2014).

Administrators have been charged with managing the differences of school culture so that it is clear to the students and to the community that administrators understand the various groups and cultural attributes thus enabling them to understand the differences of students and create appropriate strategies for working with diverse student populations (Bauman, 2017; Okcu, 2014). School administrators have the critical role of blending the ethnic representation of the leadership team and merging it to support the organizational goals of the campus local school system (Okcu, 2014). In order to implement efficacious education and training activities, educators have been tasked with educating and developing the strategies to overcome these differences in order to knit the culture of the school into unified appreciation and respect for all individuals. The education workforce needs more educational staff of color which could be influenced by focusing on preparation programs for educators and completion patterns for individuals entering the teacher and administrator programs (USDOE, 2016). School personnel have adopted inclusive management approaches and demonstrated understanding of the value



of diversity and inclusive policies thereby signaling the community that leaders care about learning from student differences, of color and ethnicity, resulting in the academic and individual developmental growth of students (Güleş, 2012). Robinson, Shakeshaft, Grogan, and Sherman-Newcomb (2017) noted that although research on female leaders has increased in number, specific studies of African American females in school leadership are still rare and the experiences of African American females as school leaders have not received enough scholarly research. Although racial profiling of principals and the percentage of African American female principals are changing, scant research exists documenting the understanding of female administrators. The implications of this study are critical in the societal focus on celebrating and including diverse representation of administrators of African American females in administrator roles.

### **Implications**

A study on the perceptions of African American females in educational leadership has offered relevant resources for mentoring and professional development and serves as a starting point for African American females in leadership and those who desire to serve in educational leadership. This project study focused on the perception's African American females regarding challenges in administrator leadership roles and their contributions to diversity as administrators on leadership teams. Besides the project that emerged from this study, this research could assist the governing bodies of school districts and current school leaders who wish to create a favorable climate for African American females who want to serve as district leaders.

This study has provided an understanding of the conditions of African American females in educational administrator positions. African American females in leadership face many barriers and challenges in becoming leaders and retaining leadership positions for a variety of reasons (Blau & Kahn, 2016). Understanding the experiences of African American females in educational leadership who have been successful at overcoming the systemic and professional obstacles to leadership provides leaders in the local district with information to gain insight into how to strengthen the diversity in leadership, specifically increasing the representation of African American females in administrator positions.

The information learned from African American female administrators highlighted in Section 2 of this study formed the basis for a 3-day professional development seminar to expand the mentoring experiences for African American females in the target district and other districts in the target state that wish to foster African American females leadership. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) proffered the importance to understand why African American females are facing the barriers and challenges in educational leadership in order to consider policies that can be designed to promote African American females to become novice leaders in education. Beckwith et al. (2016) stated even though the number of female administrators, particularly African American female administrators, continued to lag behind that of men, females must move beyond advocating and mentoring aspiring leaders and begin to create school places where all groups of people are appreciated, mentored, and welcomed in leadership. This study has provided qualitative data to support social change in the local district.

The implications for positive social change in this study include the potential to (a) enhance equal opportunities for African American females in educational leadership, (b) provide school districts with information that may validate the need of building capacity for African American female leaders, and (c) implement mentoring for African American females to afford them equal opportunity to achieve educational leadership positions. Results of this study may lead to positive social change for African American females seeking to advance their careers in public education. African American females in leadership positions may contribute to society based on their lived experiences. On-the-job mentoring may strengthen the opportunities of African American females to be considered for executive level roles (Khosrovani & Ward, 2011).

### **Summary**

African American females in leadership face challenges and attention should be directed to an African American woman in the workplace and the implications for professional women of color. Suarez-McCrink (2002) and Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) suggested that African American females must work through gender, racial, and cultural barriers. In addition to these challenges, Higgins and Kram (2001) suggested other primary obstacles to the advancement of minority leaders. Using the lens of Black feminist theory (BFT), the phenomenon of the lack of diversity of African American females in administrators' positions was explored in the local district. The history of the African American female leader, discrimination theories and the role of diversity in the educational field were reviewed.

In Section 1, I introduced the problem statement and justification for the need to increase research regarding the lack of African American females in educational administrator positions. This section identified factors and barriers that impede career advancement, retention, the need for mentoring, role conflict, role commitment, and gender inequality. I discussed the conceptual framework of the research study and rationalized the qualitative methodology and phenomenological research design. I defined the terms I used in the research and elaborated on the assumptions, limitations, and delimitation of specific to this research study. Finally, I highlighted the significance of the research study. Section 2 provides a map for the readers regarding the research design chosen for this project study, the participants who participated in this study highlighted their experiences during the interviews.

In Section 2, methodology was proposed to gain awareness of the challenges African American face as educational leaders. Section 3, the professional development plan was formulated for the participants in the study and other African American women in educational leadership capacities. Section 4 describes my growth during the project study, my personal and professional reflections and how I will implement this project study into educational practice.

## Section 2: The Methodology

The problem addressed in this study was that African American female school administrators have difficulty obtaining administrative roles in the local district. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of African American females in educational leadership and the challenges they face in obtaining leadership positions. The study was guided by two RQs:

RQ1: How do African American female administrators view the ways they contribute and support diversity within their role as an educational leader?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of African American females in educational leadership about the challenges they face in obtaining leadership positions?

Section 1 included a description of the problem in both the local setting and the larger educational context. Section 2 outlines the methodology and research design for this project study. This study design included in-depth interviews with 10 African American women who have worked to obtain educational leadership roles in local school divisions.

### **Qualitative Research Design and Approach**

This study was conducted with a basic qualitative approach focusing on the worldview of its participants. Ravitch and Carl (2016) indicated that qualitative research is a systematic way that “people, see, view, approach, and experience the world and make meaning of their experiences as well as specific phenomena in it” (p. 7). Stake (2010) stated that there are multiple ways to think qualitatively, such as interpretive and experiential, based on situational and personal studies. Stake further stated that the

purpose of basic qualitative research is to obtain in-depth, environmental descriptions, and the integrity of the research must be preserved. Qualitative findings are subjective, and multiple perspectives can be presented. Through increased understanding of the challenges to advancement of African American females in educational leadership, school districts may improve support for African American women to obtain leadership positions in public schools.

The research design derived from the problem and research questions to understand the perceptions of African American females in educational leadership and the challenges they face in obtaining leadership positions. Qualitative studies provide an opportunity to avoid the use of closed ended questions and focus on numbers while replacing those methods with an inductive, open-ended process that has a stronger individual focus (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Qualitative research can be personal because multiple perceptions can be explored to understand the commonalities of participants' experiences while addressing the diversity of situational experiences (Stake, 2010). Qualitative research can also be personal because the participants often share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences of their lives.

### **Justification of Research Design**

Researchers with a background in qualitative design address the questions that emphasize the lived experiences of the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Qualitative researchers in education seek to learn and comprehend from others their phenomenon, their process, and their perspective (Merriam, 2009). Subjective research is often referred to as phenomenological research because it focuses on lived experiences of individuals

while serving as the purpose of qualitative design (Aspers, 2019). Myers (1997) described qualitative methods as instruments utilized in recognizing and explaining the experiences of people. Consideration was not given to a quantitative approach because the current study needed textual data to understand the views and experiences of the participants (see Creswell, 2017).

The basic qualitative design has been used in social science research for several years (Kumar, 2013). Merriam (2009) noted that a basic qualitative design can be used when the aim of the study is to accomplish one of three things: to discover a phenomenon, to understand a phenomenon, or to understand the process or the perspectives of the people involved in the phenomenon. In the current basic qualitative study, the goal was to understand the process or perspectives of the lived experiences of African American females in educational leadership roles (see Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). When researchers examine participants' experiences as they were subjectively lived, new meanings can be developed to inform how participants understand that lived experience (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2017).

Ethnography was not selected because it was determined that it would be less effective than a basic qualitative design. Ethnography would be suitable to use while seeking to increase the understanding of a culture. With ethnography, data are generated through an extended period of immersive study and habitation within a given culture (Van Maanen, 1990). Ethnography necessitates extensive field research and consists of direct observation of the subjects relevant to the study (Moustakas, 1994). In-depth immersion was not possible for the current study because the purpose was to examine the

perceptions of African American females in administrator educational leadership positions and the challenges, they face in obtaining leadership positions in local school divisions. Therefore, ethnographic research was not an appropriate choice.

The grounded theory design would also have been less effective than the basic qualitative design. Grounded theory is a suitable design to discover the elements underlying a phenomenon and to develop a theory grounded in the data (Creswell, 2009). Grounded theory necessitates several phases of data collection and the continual refinement and interrelating of categorized information (Creswell & Miller, 2002). The theory is formed to allow researchers to understand and describe the nature of the experiences of interest to the study based on investigation of the elements and their connections (Moustakas, 1994). Because the purpose of the current study was not to develop a theory, the grounded theory design was not considered appropriate.

Consideration was given to a qualitative case study design; however, it was determined that it would be less effective than a basic qualitative design (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The case study design requires researchers to collect data through more than one means and investigate a bounded system or case (Crowe et al., 2011). This design is appropriate when the researcher wants to conduct an in-depth exploration of a topic, process, or area of interest through the study of one or more cases sharing a common tie, such as activity or time (Creswell, 2014). A case study was not an appropriate choice for the current study because I did not collect data through multiple channels (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). When I reviewed the types of qualitative designs, the basic design allowed the most flexibility and ensured that the voices of the participants would remain at the



center of the study (see Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The flexibility of the basic qualitative design aligned with my study because the problem and purpose did not require a cultural or other methodological approach.

### **Participants**

I conducted this study in two regions of the targeted state. The participants were chosen from six different school divisions in Grades K-12 and central office positions in the targeted state. I identified participants through concept sampling, a form of purposeful sampling in which I chose participants who were employed in the region of the study (see Creswell, 2012) and met specific criteria. Participants were selected for their ability to provide specific information relating to the research questions (see Moser & Korstjans, 2018). Purposeful sampling is used in studies to select participants when the purpose is to identify those best aligned with the study's goals (Merriam, 2009). Patton (2002) described purposeful sampling as a popular technique used in qualitative research to identify and select rich data when the resources are limited. This process of purposeful sampling involves identifying and selecting participants who are knowledgeable and who have experience with a phenomenon (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

### **Participant Selection Criteria**

In the targeted state, there are eight regions that form the school divisions. The African American women I chose were from Regions three and eight, they all achieved their master's degrees in education, and four obtained their doctoral degrees. All participants were classroom teachers, teacher leaders, department heads or content specialists prior to entering administration.

The sample included African American women who had a minimum of 3 years leadership experience as superintendents, principals, directors, content specialist or lead teachers. I chose a minimum of 3 years as a criterion because the targeted leadership positions require at least 3 years of teaching experience prior to serving as a building or district leader (Department of Education Targeted state, 2016). It was determined that 3 years would be appropriate because participants would have adequate experience in leadership roles to speak knowledgeably about their experiences.

### **Justification of Number of Participants**

I selected the 10 participants for their ability to provide specific information relating to the research questions. Sandelowski (1996) recommended that qualitative sample sizes are large enough to allow the unfolding of a “new and richly textured understanding” of the phenomenon under study, but small enough so that the “deep, case-oriented analysis” of qualitative data is not precluded (Sandelowski, 1996, p. 183). According to Yin (2015), a sample size of 10 participants is sufficient information and data saturation.

In qualitative research, considerations of sample size centers on the concept of saturation (Saunders et al., 2018). Sample sizes in qualitative studies should be suitably large enough to achieve saturation. Saturation is realized when the incorporation of additional participant data no longer offers any unique perspectives (Saunders et al., 2018). As a result, sample sizes must be substantial enough to elicit experiences that encapsulate all or most of the spectrum of perceptions. Creswell (2002) supported a sample size of five to 25. There are cases, however, where it is not always easy to decide

what the actual number of participants should be (Barkhuizen, 2014). In alignment with these suggestions, I reviewed data from 10 African American women because they responded to the request to participate within the timeline given to respond. Creswell (2012) indicated including 10 women fell within the appropriate range to participate in a qualitative research study.

### **Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants**

The 10 participants were selected from a database of women leaders from the targeted state Department of Education database (Targeted State Department of Education, 2020). I gained access to the database through the public webpage of the targeted state did a search under the state's list of school divisions to retrieve information about African American women in leadership positions and searched the public site for memos and meetings to seek information that contained new superintendents in any school division in the targeted state. Next, I visited the websites of school divisions that had female superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, assistant principals, and other educational leadership positions and verified if any of their administrators were female and African American.

### **Establishment of Researcher-Participant Relationship**

To confirm the list, I contacted each school division to make sure the 10 participants I selected were currently employed. Once I identified the list of 10 participants, I contacted them via email to invite them to participate in the study and confirm their participation via email by asking each participant to confirm their participation. The 10 participants were selected because they met the criteria, they agreed

to serve as participants, and they were available during the times I scheduled interviews. I never served as a supervisor to any of the participants.

### **Protection of Participants' Rights**

When collecting data from participants, the examiner should establish guidelines and protocols of confidentiality to protect all participants (Sil & Das, 2017). I adapted the Walden University Informed Consent Form and presented it to participants to review. This form detailed the reason for the study, the nature of the questions, and my participation as the analyst. Additionally, participants were informed that they may decline to answer any question or stop their participation at any time, and they were encouraged to ask questions. The data were not shared with other individuals and pseudonyms were used to promote confidentiality. Upon signing the authorization form and consent form document, each participant received an alphanumeric filing code to ensure confidentiality. Walden University's approval number for this study is 02- 20-20-0018325 and it expires February 19, 2021.

To provide the research participants the opportunity to openly contribute to the interviews a relationship was established with each participant to ensure cooperation in a professional manner during the interviews (Sivell, 2019). Using semistructured interviews, the participants were positioned to share their experiences and beliefs, which was dependent on the relationships developed with the researcher. To ensure a comfortable foundation was established to build a trusting environment to interview the participants, I prepared protocols that met ethical codes of conduct for the research according to Walden University standards. Additional agreements relating to

comprehensibility of the relationship, while at the same time focusing on answering the research questions, were established at the beginning, and reinforced throughout interviews (Yin, 2019). The focus on the participants' needs generated behaviors in the research approach that facilitated a trusting relationship for the action researcher to address the research questions.

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative studies rely heavily on data collection and interpretive analysis that lead to a deep understanding of the phenomenon (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). My purpose for the interviews was to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations of individuals regarding the phenomenon. Semistructured interviews were chosen because semistructured interviews can explore the views, experiences, beliefs, and motivations of individuals (Merriam & Bass, 2009). Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences (Merriam, 2009).

Face to face and Zoom Conference semistructured interviews provided the primary source of data. Ten interviews were conducted, five in-person and five with Zoom. Each confidential interview lasted approximately 40 minutes. Five were recorded via the Zoom software while the other 5 were audio-recorded, with 3 different devices: my personal laptop, a Sony tape recorder, and an Olympus tape recorder. I transcribed the data, a total of 162 pages of transcripts.

The interview questions (see Appendix C) included follow-up questions to ensure full responses and the ability to explore new avenues throughout the process (Creswell, 2012). For example, the first research question asked the participants how they viewed

the ways they contributed to and supported diversity within their roles as educational leaders. The depth of the interview protocol ensured that each research question would have enough data to help answer the question (Yin, 2013). The interviews took place in locations chosen by the participant where the participant could enjoy confidentiality and focus on providing accurate and complete responses to the questions (Creswell, 2014). The setting was critical for the participant to be at ease and relaxed during the interviews. All individual interviews followed protocols as described by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). The interview protocol included the procedural for interviewing (a script followed prior to the interview), interview questions, and procedures after the interview for closure of the process.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher comes from the emic perspective by direct involvement, collaboration, and interaction with the research participants. Qualitative researchers can be viewed as their own data collection tools (Ravitch and Carl, 2020). Ultimately, the role of the qualitative researcher to immerse him-or herself directly in the study and collect the data he or she needs. The researcher is involved in active participation (Terrell, 2016). As a matter of protocol, I emailed each participant their interview and their transcription and asked them to contact me if they had any questions about the transcription and interview. Following the interview, the procedural steps included categorizing the collected data for analysis and clarification.

My role as the researcher was to schedule the interviews, ensure that each participant had received and reviewed the IRB consent form, interview each participant,

remain attentive, and analyze the data that were collected (Fink, 2000). I scheduled the interviews via email and followed up with a phone call and another email to confirm the date and the time for the first five participants, confirmed the Zoom time for participants six through ten, and conducted the interviews (Creswell, 2012). After the interviews were conducted for each participant, I transcribed the interviews and emailed the participants their audio recorded interview and their transcript (Yin, 2013) and followed up through email asking if they had any questions about their interview or transcript to let me know by email and we could schedule a phone conference. The ten participants were satisfied with their interviews and transcripts at which point the coding and identifying the themes began. I authenticated all data in this manner before looking for patterns and meanings that clarify the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). Interview data was sufficient to reveal the perceptions of individuals to address each research question (Walsh, 2012).

I was working in a dual role as the Assistant Principal and Curriculum Specialist for a school division in the targeted state during the participant interviews. I did not supervise or worked with any of the 10 participants. My current role as an Assistant Principal did not affect the data collection. I focused on open-ended questions so any bias was minimized. I read all data a minimum of three times to ensure the accuracy before looking for patterns and meanings that clarify the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). Interview data were sufficient to reveal the perceptions of individuals to address each research question (Walsh, 2012).

## **Data Analysis**

Analysis of the data was completed after all interviews were conducted. During this process, the data were reviewed, and the interview questions (see Appendix C) allowed for probing and follow up questions as themes and patterns in the data emerged. I became familiar with the data by reading the transcripts at least three times. I then organized the data that were generated in a meaningful and systematic way (Braun & Clarke, 2014). At this time, I examined the codes and discovered codes that attached together to form a theme. For example, I had several codes that related to empowerment and community engagement that formed into a theme. Using a topological approach, themes emerged. I developed a Venn Diagram and developed it into a chart produced in a word document, using the categories that emerged from the participants interviews to determine the categories (Merriam, 2009). I reviewed the transcripts at a minimum of three times, reread the data and then proceeded to code the data.

### **Phase 1: Coding Procedures**

I organized the data by assigning a code to each meaningful statement, and assigning categories, subthemes, and major themes under each code. I used a color-coded system to organize the phrases, statements, and key points from each interview (Creswell, 2014). The statements were written in the Venn Diagram. I carefully searched for patterns and themes in the data and discovered places where the data was similar (Saldana, 2016). This is important in the coding process to discover enough data points to form a subtheme (Miles & Huberman, 2014). When the data could not be sized into the original structure, additional categories were created (Saldana, 2016). When an additional



category was created, I reviewed the other data points to look for patterns and themes and then realigned the data to include any new categories (Miles & Huberman, 2014).

After all data were analyzed, coded, and initial themes were developed I reviewed each transcript to look for anything that I may have missed. Then I reviewed all the data as it was displayed in the Venn Diagram and the word document and I was able to consolidate the initial number of themes by eliminating any themes that overlapped or were redundant (Creswell, 2012). I developed the data into succinct themes and organized them into a table displaying the themes and codes in each category (Saldana, 2016).

## **Phase 2: Evidence of Quality of the Data**

The interview protocol provided the framework for the collection of the data that was used for this project study. When conducting basic qualitative research, it is worth mentioning that facts collected, and conclusions inferred from those facts have a strong sense of credibility and trustworthiness (Merriam, 2009). Maxwell (2005) discussed the importance of the quality of data collected when conducting a basic qualitative design. The quality of data can be assumed if the participants are forthright in responding to the questions posed. Because data produced in the qualitative study involved the lived experiences of participants, Maxwell (1996) prefers the term quality, as it implies that a basic qualitative design can have necessary rigor while still preserving the individual's responses (Patton, 2011).

### **Phase 3: Protocols to Ensure Data Quality**

After the interviews were completed, I listened carefully to each tape multiple times. The first time was to compare the tapes to the transcriptions for accuracy. The second time was to listen for key words, phrases, or categories of participants' responses. The third time was to listen for information I may have missed. The protocol I used to assure data quality was two recording devices and my personal laptop to record each interview (Yin, 2018).

To conduct a member check, I also sent a copy of the findings to each participant to the email preferred by the participant, and followed-up through email to confirm receipt of the document and audio recording (Gibson and Brown, 2011). If participants provided any written clarifications, I added those in my notes and updated findings. Once the data were coded and I began to write the narrative, I highlighted the most pertinent statements made by the participants to serve as evidence to the narrative. The quotes provided descriptions of the information shared by the participants. I minimized the influence of personal bias by using the established protocols of member checking (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I acknowledged any personal bias through this process.

This process was established to assure that any personal bias was not inserted into the narrative. To mitigate the possible influence of bias that surfaced during the writing of the results, member checks were conducted. This process aided in the validity of the story and minimized bias in the narrative.

Individuals can develop biases based on their personal experiences and background knowledge. To minimize my personal bias, I reflected on my own practice

and conducted member checking (Galdas, 2017). Reflecting on my practice allowed me to consider my own experiences as an African American female assistant principal. Thinking about my own experience allowed me to set my bias aside and listen clearly and objectively to the experiences that the participants in the study discussed. Reflecting on any biases I may have and acknowledging them allowed me to maintain an open mind and consider the various backgrounds and experiences that the participants brought to the study. Recognizing and understanding your biases while conducting interviews permitted me to follow my protocols very closely while interviewing the participants (Galdas, 2017). This is necessary for to build trustworthiness and integrity during the data collection.

From this experience, I deepened in my understanding of the local problem by seeing the problem through the eyes of other African American females. Further, a member checking was conducted according to the recommendations of Creswell (2009). This process allowed me to clarify any misunderstandings that I had developed, as well as clarify the information that was provided by the participant. Conducting member checking, reviewing the information with my committee, coupled the practice of reflecting, allowed me to minimize any personal bias.

#### **Phase 4: Procedure for Addressing Discrepant Cases**

While performing data analysis, I found that some of the participants in the study had similar experiences that fell inside of the patterns that were emerging as I was coding the data from the interviews and developing themes. Merriam (2009) indicated that should be carefully examined for evidence of any discrepancies. Several of the interview

questions (see Appendix C) that I asked yielded data from participants that were consistent with data reported by the other participants in the study. These data did fit the pattern that had emerged from the interview data with the other participants. The similarities in the data applied to both research questions. These similarities in the data were reported and discussed in the narrative so that the readers were able to evaluate the experiences others have had with this phenomenon, weigh the evidence, and draw a conclusion for themselves (see Wolcott, 1990). I dealt with the possibility of a discrepant case by a more careful examination of how the participants manifested their responses during the interviews (Hackett, 2015).

### **Data Analysis Results**

Data were generated from the interview protocol and gathered through a semistructured interview process. All participants signed a release form and provided consent to be interviewed using an audio recorder for the semistructured interviews. The semistructured interviews were conducted after hours in the participant offices, conference rooms in their schools, central offices, or designated areas that were appropriate for interviews or Zoom conferences. Upon the completion of all interviews the transcriptions were written of each recorded interview.

### **Findings**

The findings of the research questions addressed by the participants are described in this section. Several themes were outlined in addition to subthemes that applied to each research question.

**Phase 1: Becoming familiar with the qualitative data collected.** The first step in this qualitative analysis was to immerse myself in the data and to ensure the data were in a format to confirm the analysis. I read each transcript at least three times and searched for words and phrases that were repeated. The 10 participants were building administrators, curriculum specialists, and division level administrators and one participant represented 10 schools as a director of programs. When I discovered the words and phrases that repeated, I highlighted each phrase or word in a different color in the transcript. After reviewing each transcript three times, I listened carefully to the audio recordings to confirm accuracy of the data that was written. I selected a transcript and created a chart to identify my understandings and thoughts of the transcript. I continued to do this for each transcript until all 10 were completed. The thoughts and understandings were used during the second phase of the data analysis.

Table 7

*Job Profile of Participants*

Participant 1	Director of Instruction
Participant 2	Assistant Principal
Participant 3	Principal
Participant 4	Director of Exceptional Education
Participant 5	Assistant Superintendent
Participant 6	Curriculum Specialist
Participant 7	Assistant Principal
Participant 8	Principal
Participant 9	Director of Schools
Participant 10	Director of Programs

**Phase 2: Generation of initial codes.** The generation of open codes suggests organizing data into a systematic and meaningful way and is a process by which I

reduced the data into small chunks of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2014). I analyzed each participant's responses and afterward I wrote notes in my chart and recorded general thoughts about the data at this stage (Creswell, 2014). Consideration was given to overlaps, disjuncture, patterns, and what they say about the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Each code provided meaning to the coded data. Open coding was completed by examining the raw data for repeated words or phrases, then labeling each code was conducted to give each code a meaning.

The next step was axial coding which is grouping open codes to form categories by confirming the raw and open coded data for relationships among the codes. During this stage temporary themes are formed based on the relationships between the codes. Temporary themes were designated for each group (Ravitch & Carl, 2020).

**Phase 3: Coding and theme development.** Coding and theme development can either be directed by content of gathered data (inductive approach) or directed by existing ideas and concepts (deductive approach) (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Theme development is based on axial coding. I searched the axial codes for patterns among the codes and the raw data for all ten participants. The patterns I found became emerging or temporary themes. Themes that were emerging or temporary were arranged to form broader themes which made the connection to the research questions and conceptual framework. The connections made determined the relationship of the codes to themes and the theory as the framework to analyze the data with a thematic approach (Ravitch & Carl, 2020).

**Phase 4: Reviewing themes.** Themes must answer the research questions and align with the conceptual framework. During this phrase, I reviewed the data with the

initial themes to determine if the data supports the themes (Creswell, 2014).

Consideration was given to whether the themes are distinct and if there are sufficient data to support them. It should be decided if the research questions support the categories and themes developed during the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2014). It may be determined during the coding and identification of themes that subthemes are needed because something is missing (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Themes must address the research questions because the research questions guide the study (Creswell, 2014).

**Phase 5: Definition of themes.** The objective of this step was to identify the core of what each theme is saying and determine whether the themes fit the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Ravitch and Carl (2020) indicated that this is the step where the stories of the themes are written. Not only is the data included to support the themes, but it is necessary to justify how the themes and the data are connected. Furthermore, the story shares the relationship of the themes to the research questions and the various ways the theory frames the themes.

**Phase 6: Write-up.** This final narrative answered the question to explore challenges of African American women in educational leadership. The write up ascertained the merit of the study, the worth, and the significance. In this phrase, I provided the reader a summative description of the study (Braun and Clarke, 2014).

Table 8

*Overview of Codes and Axial Codes Organized Into Emergent Themes*

Codes	Category Codes	Themes
RQ1: How do African American female administrators view the ways they contribute to and support diversity within their role as an educational leader?		
Code 1: Remaining active in community and working with the civic associations and working together to accomplish a common goal	Engagement	Theme 1: Importance of being engaged in a community
Code 2: Finding opportunities for teachers to attend professional conferences are encouraged	Empowerment	Theme 2: Creating opportunities for the staff and empowering the staff
Code 4: Recognizing the staff when they are doing great things and making positive changes and celebrating teachers	Engagement	Theme 3: Engaging the staff
RQ2: How do African American female administrators describe the challenges they face in serving as educational leaders?		
Code 10: Barriers of movement into administrative positions	Racism and Gender	Theme 4: Varying treatment based on race and gender

The themes were derived from the answers given by the participants in response to the two research questions that guided the project study. Research question one was created to garner insight into how African American female administrators perceive what they contribute to public education. Research question two was developed to gather insights into how African American females describe the challenges they face that prevent their access to leadership positions.



## **Patterns, Relationships, and Themes**

**RQ1.** How do African American female administrators view the ways they contribute to and support diversity within their role as an educational leader?

**Theme 1: Community engagement is the opportunity for the school, the community, and families to work together.** Raising the next generation has become a shared responsibility between families and schools. When both entities are working together, students are more successful and the entire community benefits from the partnership. Participant 3 stated,

We try to keep the community engaged. I'm very active in the community. We attend all the civic association meetings. We currently just had a foundation where the community raised over \$107,000, and that's just through strong communication, inviting them in, by saying 'Hey, would you like to come and volunteer? Would you like to see what our scholars are doing? Would you like to hear about some of the needs we have and how you can help?' So I think the biggest part is the communication.

Participant 4 made the following comment:

Again, being raised here and knowing our city's culture, you have to know how to approach various circumstances that may impact the division in one way or the other. And having the, what, collaboration and cooperation of your city officials only makes the job easier. But when they actually see you in the community, participating in the same activities that they're participating in, it makes them look at you differently. And it makes me feel good when I get that big smile or

that big hug and a, 'Hey!' And the conversations, and just their conversations about their daily life and not school life.

Participant 5 added, "I think presentation, especially as an African American female, how we present ourselves, how we communicate, and the relationships we build with people, not just those we work with, but those in the community, those in the schools".

Participant 6 commented, "Visibility and being very transparent, being in the community, being able to identify different community leaders, having conversations with them and letting them know what our school is doing."

There are numerous ways that families and communities can support schools and students on a deep and meaningful level stated participant 3. She continued to say it is not always apparent to families and the community how they can support schools and students. When the community and school are willing to partner in ways that encourage deeper engagement, shared participant 4, the students benefit.

**Theme 2: Creating opportunities for the staff and empowering the staff.** This formed to be an exceptionally important theme for all 10 participants as they described how important it is for them to empower their staff each day. Empowerment, often referred to as shared decision-making, is indispensable to schools and to the changing demands in the educational community (Shields, 2017). The principal and the administrative team are the building leaders who structure the climate to empower both teachers and students. Educational leadership is necessary to help schools develop a vision of what they can and should be, then empower the people in the organization to work toward the vision. Empowerment translates into teacher support, acceptance, and

leadership and epitomizes a paradigm shift. When decisions are made, the teachers are a part of the decision-making process rather than decisions being made in isolation. It is natural that the principal should be the leader in implementing and supporting empowerment and support for teachers.

Participant 2 revealed as females in leadership they are not afraid to acknowledge that there are some needs that they have [and] they are not afraid to tell you what those needs are. Participant 2 also revealed, “I created an environment for my staff where they felt empowered to go beyond their duties to reach success. I think they appreciate someone that they feel like they can approach.”

Participant 5 mentioned empowering her staff was an excellent way to motivate teachers outside of other strategies that she employed. As the instructional leader she made it a point to mention how “keeping your thumb on the pulse” was the most effective way to be “aware of the climate and culture in your building.” She maintained her awareness by administering surveys because in her opinion administering a “survey is the best practice because I can generate a host of ideas from across the whole building”. She thought “it’s important not to make these ideas or come up with these initiatives in isolation, but instead to survey your staff, so that way you have a proper gauge on what they would like to see happen”. She continued to share, “again, they see that you’re listening to what their needs are” or what motivates and empowers them”.

Participant 7 provided an enormous amount of information concerning her perception of empowering others as a leader. She spoke about how “most people are comfortable or more comfortable with a male leader than a female leader.” She explained

this in further detail when she noted: “I do believe gender plays a major role in whether a person is given a leadership position or not”. She further stated, “Females can often be perceived as being too emotional, too high strung, too wishy-washy. Moreover, “men are normally seen as the quick decision making, very effective in what they do. I was that woman for my two superintendents that I worked for as an assistant superintendent. “I was the one dotting the I’s crossing the T’s, doing all the grunt work behind the scenes”.

Participant 8 shared, “I encourage ladies within the building that I could see that take the initiative to want to grow professionally and try to motivate them to take on something, to just try to help build their confidence.” Participant 8 also shared the same opinion, by mentioning the importance of empowering their teachers and staff.

Participant 8 shared staff will often say you are not a people person, or they will say, I just can’t read her. I cannot figure her out. “This can often happen when the staff does not feel empowered”, shared participant 8. I think that very rarely happens with males.

Participant 8 divulged, this is my experience, “I have never really heard someone say that about a male. I just can’t read him or he’s overly aggressive”.

Participant 10 shared “and I work with them individually and in groups to help them develop leadership skills needed to run their departments” as a means of empowering her staff. Participant 10 expressed how she also instituted some policies where when staff members went out to conferences and workshops, they would come back and share with the whole staff and would conduct mini-presentations about what they learned and share with the staff upon returning to the building. Participant 10 expressed her goal was trying to make the work more expansive rather than having

people have these individualized experiences, trying to make these experiences go across the organization.

The data gathered from the participants revealed several shared themes. Empowering the staff was gravely important for their longevity in leadership, equity in educational leadership lacked equality for African American women and bracing the challenges African American women face as leaders.

**Theme 3: Engaging the staff.** Theme 3 provided a summary of how the participants engaged their staff and community. During the participants' interviews, six out of the 10 participants shared how they engaged their staff with the community at large and with each other. Research demonstrated that when the school leadership is effective and efficient, teachers remain engaged with the school leadership, engaged with the school community, and with the students (Will, 2018). Building administrators such as your principal and assistant principals, form the culture in the school building which drives engagement for their staff (Hoerr, 2016). Teachers are subject to migrate to a positive tone which reflects inside of their classroom which directly impacts student learning because they remain engaged with their school and community (Will, 2018). As building administrators, it is critically important to allow the teachers and staff to view their value and their worth (Hoerr, 2016).

Participant 3 explained during her interview, "I try to keep the staff and community engaged." They shared that they were incredibly involved in the community, and they made a conservative effort to encourage the staff to come out to events they attend. In addition, Participant 3 shared teacher and community engagement involved

providing everyone an update on what is happening at the school by sending fliers out to the community to make sure the teachers and the community are aware of what is going on in the school.

Participant 4 shared that “growing up in the school district where I have worked for a number of years and knowing the city’s culture have allowed me to approach various circumstances with an engaging and positive attitude. They also explained that engaging city officials from different governmental offices maintained the lines of communication between government officials and the school. They continued to state that when stakeholders see you in the community, participating in the same activities that they are participating in, community members look at you differently. “It makes me feel good when I get that big smile or that big hug from individuals with whom I am keeping engaged.”

Participant 6 shared that “engaging my staff means transparency and visibility for my staff and me. They shared, “Visibility and being very transparent, being in the community, being able to identify different community leaders, having conversations with them, and letting them know what our school is doing, allows me to keep the community and my teachers engaged.”

The participants articulated how engaging their staff and the community was important to their schools’ successes and their success as leaders. The participants also felt strongly that engagement is necessary for successful implementation of school goals. In addition, educator engagement is the basis for improving teacher and student

performance. Without staff engagement, most participants believed school goals could not be accomplished.

**RQ2.** What are the perceptions of African American females in educational leadership about the challenges they face in obtaining leadership positions?

**Theme 4: Varying treatment based on race and gender.** Participant 1 expressed, “I can think of several occurrences where I know for a fact that if I was a man, I would have been treated differently. If I was a White man I would have been treated much differently. As women, we typically don’t want to rock the boat. We’re allowed to take more scrutiny, more harassment. Out of fear for losing our position, number one, we don’t want to be seen as being in defiance, being combative. And we don’t want to lose our financial means which is provided for our families because administrative position you’re at will employee, and if you ruffle feathers too much, then you won’t have a position. So, yes, gender, I believe, my perception of that is it plays a huge role, especially when you’re a Black woman. You suffer the most”.

Participant 3 articulated, “I think, you’re constantly trying to prove yourself as an African American woman. Not to go out there and say, ‘Hey, I’m gonna prove it,’ but we can’t afford to make mistakes. We can’t afford to fail, and that should not be the case because you would never be perfect in everything you do. But every time we make a mistake, it weighs heavy. It takes us so far back, and I think that’s not the case for other nationalities and other genders. They have opportunities to make mistakes. They have support, they have people helping them, they have people that will come in and support them.” Participant 3 also shared, “I think it’s hard for men to see themselves answering to

a woman. And so, when you talk about a female African American superintendent, that means all of these males are under me. That is a challenge for many men, my experiences,” And as a result, African American women do not get the role. We do not get the position as a female superintendent. When they talk about building level administrators, female African Americans said they need a male there.

Participant 7 expressed the following:

In my eyesight, women, African American women in leadership roles have always been perceived as being extremely assertive. But when a man is assertive, they're seen as being like, the superhero. But when a woman is assertive, they're mean and nasty, but when the male principal is assertive, he's doing the right thing. He's like the savior but for African American women, we're just being mean and rude. And I just think that's the problem that I've seen since I've been in education. A male principal can do one thing and a female principal can do the exact same thing, and the female principal is looked down on, and the male principal is looked upon as great.

Participant 7 continued to express,

I am African American female assistant principal. The other assistant principal is a white male, so just for me being in this leadership role, I can kind of see how, when I say something, teachers may want to go to the principal and ask, 'Okay, is this true?' Or they want to make sure what I said is right. But when the white male assistant principal tells them something, it's good. They don't need any



clarification. When he says something, it's really no question, but when I say something, there's always a question or follow up.

Participant 2 explained, they were not supported or encouraged to seek leadership positions or higher education. They stated that when they pursued leadership positions, "I often didn't get encouragement from my male counterparts." They thought it could have been "a man thing; it's an ego thing that they have to keep it within the gender." When looking back, they shared that as females "we're not encouraged to take on the leadership roles. We're not pushed to get that post-doctorate degree and those higher degrees so that we can reach after those leadership roles." Participant 2 noted the emotional attachment was an essential difference between men and females.

Participant 2 also described, "From what I've observed, I don't see men having the same number of challenges and being able to overcome those challenges. It seems like they kind of get over them quicker. They leave the emotional detachment sometimes that they have. I know, as females, especially in education, we deal with a lot of the things that we encounter emotionally." Participant 2 acknowledged how emotion could be a barrier for females, especially females seeking leadership roles. They did not observe men having the same problem as females in dealing with an emotional attachment to specific things that each encountered on a day-to-day basis.

Participant 7 shared,

African American females are often tagged or painted in ways that describe being overly emotional. It is just that perception that some people do not want to change about us, simply because of our race and our sex. African American females

constantly have to fight that battle. Those perceptions were so ingrained in consciousness and mind of others that even when she put forth efforts to disprove those perceptions, others maintained and continued to believe in those perceptions.

Participant 7 sensed it was a “battle every African American woman had to fight”. They acknowledged, “I questioned whether or not it could be cognitive dissonance others were challenged with because they were not able to change the perceptions they had despite the new evidence provided.” They mentioned how African American females “often have that chip on our shoulder” because they may have to continuously fight the mantra of other people’s perceptions.” The African American women who participated in this study have overcome challenges and the perceptions others have had of them while working hard to escape inequality while obtaining leadership positions.

During the interviews, the participants shared their experiences with race and gender as African American females in educational leadership. Even though several of the participants strongly felt that their race and gender were challenges for them rising to the top of leadership, they also felt that at some point in their careers a male colleague demonstrated support toward their achievement of their goals as leaders. Several of the participants also shared that personal experiences with racial discrimination and gender discrimination were common challenges for them, most notably when they shared with a supervisor that they were interested in obtaining a leadership position. Regardless of how the participants faced those challenges, I have noted that they rose above the challenges presented as Black, female administrators.

## **Evidence of Quality**

There are several accepted methods of assuring that data are credible. Among those are transcriptions, use of field notes, researcher logs, and member checking. I followed the procedures from the research design so that the data for the project were relevant and meaningful to address the identified gap in practice. Use of member checking was put in place throughout the data collection and reviewing of the transcripts (Scott, et al, 2015). Member checking is a technique to enhance trustworthiness of the data collection and transcribing of the data collected from the participants (Birt et al., 2016). All interviews were transcribed and reviewed against three recording devices. Through member checking from the participants and follow up questions when applicable, I was able to clarify any potentially unclear statements made by the participants. Member checking is important to create trustworthiness during the data analysis and presenting the results.

I checked the data recorded in my tables and charts by comparing the data recorded and transcribed to ensure they matched. It is possible to encounter errors when reviewing recordings and transcriptions. Their maybe words or phrases misrepresented or heard incorrectly therefore reviewing the interviews and transcripts for quality assurance is acutely important. I followed protocols and procedures when selecting the participants, collecting the data, concealing the data, and transcribing the data. Procedures of ethics supported by Walden University were followed to protect each participant's information collected through the data collection process. Before proceeding to analyze or code the data, it is worthwhile to review if coding the data and reviewing the themes and

subthemes formed from the coding interview were accurate (Amanfi, 2019). Each interview was transcribed, and member checking was completed.

### **Outcomes**

The problem of this study was that African American female school administrators have difficulty obtaining administrative roles within the local district. The study applied the BFT because the perceptions of a Black woman in leadership regarding personal challenges and professional challenges they face is both personal and the theory describes their own unique experiences. To further investigate this problem, I concentrated on two research questions:

RQ1: How do African American female administrators view the ways they contribute to and support diversity within their role as an educational leader?

RQ2. What are the perceptions of African American females in educational leadership about the challenges they face in obtaining leadership positions?

Through interviews with the participants, I obtained a deeper understanding of their perceptions of Black women who are in educational leadership. The participants contributed and supported diversity by intentionally hiring staff congruent to their communities and student populations. For several participants, the perceptions of who they are, how they lead, and how they are supported demonstrated for them that their race and gender are great factors in promoting African American women to leadership positions.

An analysis of the interview data revealed four common themes regarding the perceptions. First, each of the participants viewed themselves as supportive leaders who

empowered and engaged their staffs. The empowerment and engagement extended from developing professional learning communities in their schools or school divisions. In addition, the participants felt strongly that involving the community and stakeholders brought greater fidelity to the school community which provided the support the students and teachers needed. Finally, the participants perceived there were gender inequality and racism when they requested support from leaders and when they inquired about promotions. Generally, responses from the participants suggested they were not treated equally compared to their male counterparts.

The conceptual framework is based on the challenges African American women face as educational leaders and the perceptions others have of them as educational leaders (Sheehan & Ryan, 2017). Thus, the outcome of this study will help proffer recommendations for women desiring to serve as leaders in public education, specifically African American women, in addressing the challenges that prevent African American from obtaining leadership positions. The outcome of the project study encompasses ongoing professional development for the participants and other African American women who have the desire to serve as leaders in their school districts.

Participants, 1, 2, and 5 did share that they had a male leader who supported them as teachers and as educational leaders. Participant 2 described and explained the importance of having female mentors to serves as instructional coaches' coherent structures in on a consistent basis. Those structures would allow for African American women to have the support they need as they develop to become strong leaders in public education. The remaining participants mainly derived their perceptions of their lack of

support from women and men as a continued platform to hinder their growth. For several participants the perceptions of African American women in educational leadership will continue, however, as shared by participant 7, the focus must be on how they can survive as Black women in leadership even if they have to survive alone.

### **Project Deliverable**

The project deliverable is a 3-day professional development that addresses the data collected during the participant's interviews. The project deliverable encourages understanding of the challenges that women, particularly, African American women, in educational leadership face as educational leaders. The purpose is to demonstrate the need for promoting, supporting through mentoring, and elevating African American women in leadership positions. The connection will provide clearer understanding of the support women may need, particularly African American women when they serve as educational leaders in public education.

### Section 3: The Project

The project is a 3-day professional development to train African American women in educational leadership and to inspire African American women interested in leadership to work cooperatively with other women through mentoring and coaching. I arranged the professional development breakout session topics according to the needs expressed during the interviews. The breakout sessions focused on the components of effective coaching and mentoring, empowering themselves and their staff. A plan is provided to demonstrate how the districts in the targeted state can implement next steps to support African American women in educational leadership. The professional development for this project is scheduled for 3 days to consist of workshops on mentoring, coaching, interviewing, advocating, and building capacity. The professional development is open to all women who desire to serve as educational leaders. Presenters will be former and current district leaders, building leaders, and instructional specialists who have demonstrated their knowledge as educational leaders.

#### **Components of the Professional Development Project**

The objective of the sessions is to provide practical strategies in supporting African American women in educational leadership to implement the social change that is needed in their school divisions and in the targeted state. The sessions consist of a blend of research, coaching sessions, interviewing strategies, and examples of successful leadership strategies identified in the project study. The professional development consists of the following components:

1. Collaborative activities, self-reflection, and pulse checks to identify the various challenges for African American women in educational leadership.
2. Development of successful mentoring strategies for African American women in school leadership.
3. Establishment of a flexible time frame to provide opportunities for current leaders to train and transfer their knowledge to African American women desiring to serve in educational leadership.

### **Goals of the Professional Development Project**

The goal of this project is to provide a compilation of successful mentoring strategies for African American women pursuing school leadership. In addition, participants will have an opportunity to develop a network of relationships with other women, particularly African American women, who are current school leaders or who are emerging school leaders. Such connections will help build the capacity of African American women serving as school leaders and decrease the barriers of African American women who are pursuing positions as school leaders. Opportunities will be provided for these individuals to have formal and informal time together where they can learn from and about each other. The sessions are designed to support the establishment of relationships that will last beyond the provided 3-day professional development.

The 3-day professional development will consist of breakout sessions focusing on the support of African American women in educational leadership. The professional development will also be implemented to develop a mentoring program for current school leaders who are African American women. This plan will also provide support for



aspiring school leaders who could benefit from the preparation and training to become successful school leaders. A third group who could benefit from this program are African American women who are now in positions of school leadership. This professional development plan can provide support for African American women who can learn to advocate for themselves and other African American women in school leadership. The professional development plan will also provide an opportunity for the participants to reflect on their experiences as an African American woman in educational leadership. In addition, the professional development plan will outline collaboration through activities to develop mentoring strategies and to discuss a flexible time frame to provide opportunities for current leaders to train and transfer their knowledge during the school year. The mentoring component of this program should be implemented on a biweekly basis involving face-to-face meetings via Skype, Zoom, or UberConference; email; phone; and social media. Professional development is implemented using venues such as district conferences or workshops to assist African American women in leadership to address the challenges they face.

The role and the voices of African American women in educational leadership within literature are seldom reported. This project was determined by the results of the study. There is not a great deal of peer-reviewed research available due to the lack of African American women's lived experiences as educational leaders. African American women who choose to remain in education and desire to serve in leadership positions are challenged with an overabundance of conflicts that affect them in ways that do not impact White women, White men, and other people from other cultures (Staats, 2016). This

project study was chosen because studies on leadership coupled with perception, empowerment, and support have not embraced the experiences of African American women in leadership positions (Beckwith, Carter & Peters, 2016).

### **Rationale**

Based on the one-to-one interviews with participants, I identified a need for professional development that targets the challenges African American women face in educational leadership. According to the results of this study, African American women empower their staff, demonstrate community support, and work cooperatively with their staff while addressing sexism and racism. This population in educational leadership can be encouraged to obtain additional education, mentoring, advocacy, and capacity building with other African American women so the opportunities for leadership positions can be increased. Additionally, participants' responses indicated the importance of building capacity in their workplace by building relationships with those who did not support their successes. Those responses provided opportunities for the participants to grow and empower other women while serving the school community.

Participants also addressed the need to build a strong mentoring program and professional development for women to provide opportunities for growth and capacity building. The mentoring and professional development components should last over several years as mentees serve in opportunities to learn from experienced leaders in education (Hayes & Burkett, 2020). This is important to negate beliefs that African American women are not strong and competent leaders. Mentoring women to include African American women allows for personal and professional development as women

strive to serve as effective leaders (Patton & Harper, 2004). In addition, leadership must continue to use suitable hiring and placement practices that situate personnel in the best positions, therefore providing a quality education to the students.

This project will include the study's findings regarding a mentoring program and professional development for African American women in educational leadership. I provided a summary of the findings that can serve as a reference when participants attempt to transition from one role to another as leaders. During the semistructured interviews, the participants described their roles as building and district leaders, the success of building relationships with their staff and the community, the marginalities they face as African American women in leadership, community engagement, and the lack of support they receive from other women and men in leadership. The outcome of the project study includes ongoing professional development for the participants and other African American women who have the desire to serve as leaders in public education. As part of developing and strengthening the mentoring program, a 3-day professional development will be provided for the participants.

### **Review of the Literature**

This subsection provides the theoretical and contextual framework within which the project was designed. The literature search focused on professional development for women currently serving as educational leaders and for those who desire to serve as educational leaders. In particular, what emerged was a review of relevant literature on professional development that included the following: (a) capacity building for women in leadership; (b) advocacy for women in leadership; (c) local and global concerns for

African American women in educational leadership; (d) promoting training for women in educational leadership, and, (e) women in educational leadership.

### **Capacity Building for Women in Leadership**

Many would argue that one of the most egregious contributors to the achievement gap is the opportunity gap (Fink & Rimmer, 2015). Another contributor to the achievement gap is the promotional gap of African American women in educational leadership. It is about capacity building and building relationships. Holder, Jackson and Ponterotto (2015) indicated African American women do not often have full access to such resources as quality pre-training programs for leadership, highest quality mentors, maximized time, enriching life experiences, and the supports essential for a leader's success. The challenge for African American women in leadership is to ensure they receive fair and equitable opportunities as those received by their counterparts (Quin, Bischoff, & Johnson, 2015). To meet this challenge, opportunity, preparation, and mentoring must be driving forces in the development of African American women in educational leadership.

**Mentoring programs.** Mentoring programs are vital for the success of African American women in school leadership. Haycock and Crawford (2008) showed that students taught by African American teachers in the top quartile of effectiveness advance, on average, approximately five percentile points each year compared with their peers. In the case of for-profit corporations, opportunities for professional development, inclusion in informal networks, beneficial mentoring, and sponsoring are out of reach for most women, especially women of color (Mainah & Perkins, 2015). If those same teachers

enter school leadership after serving as highly effective and knowledge-based teachers, then it is not clear what happens when they enter school leadership to serve as principals or assistant principals. For men they obtain leadership positions far better than African American women partially due to the mentoring and capacity networking they form for themselves (Zambrana, et al. 2018).

Many school districts across the nation believe in building their own when it comes to educational leadership. The investment is made into building their teachers into future leaders partnering with local higher institutions of learning which forms a capacity building between the local school district and the university. If school districts desire to promote African American women as educational leaders the capacity to build on their strengths and strengthen their weaknesses must be an honest dialogue allowing those women, the same platform for success as their counterparts (Morgan & Shakeshaft, 2010).

**Professional development.** Professional development for all school leaders is essential to create a thriving school (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). It is also critical that all practicing educators have opportunities to participate in professional learning communities (PLCs) or professional development activities that center collaboration and pedagogical innovation related to shared goals that are student-centered (Cochran-Smith, 2015). Professional development is used for a wide variety of specialized training, formal education, or advanced professional learning intended to help administrators, teachers, and other educators improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness (Crowley, 2017).

Professional development for African American women in leadership positions is critical for their retention and success as educational leaders (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2017). As African American women in educational leadership understanding that collaboration, student success, and communication are keys to success for all leaders, the professional development must be provided to develop stronger leaders. A full spectrum of professional development for women educational leaders circulates around the following domains: professional growth and learning, student growth and learning, school planning and progress, school culture, instructional leadership and professional qualities and stakeholder support and engagement (Hansen, 2014).

Professional development and preparation for all women in educational leadership is critically important. Women are identified and trained to become a teacher and a leader in some capacity, however; encouragement towards becoming a principal or superintendent must be intentional and purposeful (Alston, 1999). An added domain for professional development and mentoring will be inspiring the formation of the longevity for women in educational leadership as leaders. Professional development will be implemented in a variety of ways to assure comprehension and distribution of material for differentiated learning styles of the participants. Professional development workshops will be smaller in size compared to a lecture format. It will consist of a question and answer period after each presentation and hands on approach for participants. It will also include sessions that consist of role playing for participants desiring to strengthen their interviewing skills. “The potential of mentoring as a component of professional

development is gaining ground as a legitimate professional development activity” (Skrla, et. al., p. 125). In conclusion, mentoring provides benefits to both mentor and mentee.

The lack of African American women in educational leadership has a long and complicated history that mirrors the shortage of teachers of color. The NCES (2019), *Females in Educational Leadership* report noted that because principals are often drawn from the pool of teachers, the teacher demographics, like race and ethnicity, may affect principal demographics (Thomas, 2020). Additionally, for African American women school principals specifically, the after-effects of school desegregation were devastating (Tillman, 2009). A March 2014 journal article examining the post-Brown v. Board of Education era found African American administrators were routinely fired and demoted as school integration took hold which was identical to what happened to African American teachers at the time (Vaden, 2014). In the decade following the landmark Brown decision, per the article, an estimated 90 percent of African American principals across 11 southern states lost their jobs (Vaden, 2014).

New professional standards and expectations for school leadership are forcing many colleges and university-based preparation programs to redesign the curricula and delivery format for aspiring leaders in public education (Coleman, 2012). Today, the role of the educational leadership for African American women has grown more complex. However, the need for building managers reduced in public education and turned to the need of a leader that was an aspirational, a team builder, a coach, and an agent of visionary change. Yet even with this changing landscape, one notable characteristic has

remained intact and that is public-school principals, like teachers, are overwhelmingly White (NCES, 2016).

### **Advocacy for Women in Leadership**

Advocacy is supporting others, obtaining public support or recommendation of others to a position or role (Khalifa, 2012). Advocating for yourself and for what you believe while supporting others can often be a daunting process. The success of African American women educational administrators in the United States is influenced by many variables, including but not limited to how people advocate for them to obtain leadership positions. Currently, African American women make up about 68% of leaders in the Georgia Public School Systems (Randolph, 2015) which in 2017 was higher than other states. In schools that are Pre-K through Grade 12, 82%-85% of public-school principals are White, 11% are African American, 5% are Hispanic, and less than 3% are identified as Asian and Native American (Snyder, 2018). This statistic has become quite common in the public-school system and creates less opportunities for African American women and other minority females to be mentored and advocated to obtain leadership positions.

By acknowledging that there is a need to advocate for African American women in leadership, existing White dominance is preserved, therefore it is problematic to address and fix (Irving, 2016). Additionally, the 10 African American women who participated in this study who served in school leadership, all possess a strong self-image, a cultural understanding of their own personal histories, and can clearly articulate the support they need to succeed. This allowed the study participants to recognize that advocacy needed to become successful leaders in their district is not the same for their



White and male counterparts. Yet, they do recognize they need someone such as their supervisors to advocate for them and their work and support their professional development.

### **Local and Global Concerns for African Americans in Educational Leadership**

Not conforming to leadership expectations presents challenges for African American women leaders. School districts must invest time and money in developing school leaders and teacher-leaders to facilitate these conversations, particularly for African American women leaders serving in predominately White school districts (Irving, 2016). Support from organizations such as the women organizations and the Superintendents Academy in the targeted state, are critical in developing and training African American women to become successful leaders in their district. This support is not just for the students but also for the staff and communities, where they serve as leaders.

African American women serving as educational leaders, especially in public education, have been involved in educational leadership despite challenges presented to them. Prior to the Civil Rights Era, African American men and women faced significant barriers to education and literacy (Becks-Moody, 2004). Despite the challenges, African American women overcame them by completing their high school diplomas and professional degrees to become successful women. According to Kleber (2015) African American women served as both role models and mentors to other African American women seeking educational leadership positions. Having role models and mentors to

support them can be encouraging as African American women confront barriers and issues related to racism, sexism, biases, and readiness to lead in educational leadership.

I chose a 3-day professional development program as the project of this study. Professional leadership development usually begins with an understanding of the needs of the educational leader (Watson, 2015). Professional development programs use different approaches to address leader performance, but there is limited research to guide their design and use (Taie & Goldring, 2015). Professional development is about practices being transferred or provided to the participants that can be applied (Svendsen, 2016).

### **Promoting Training for Women in Educational Leadership**

Preparation is a critical component for African American women desiring to advance in their careers in education. Development and implementation of an effective preparation is critical for African American women to advance in education leadership, ensuring equitable access. However, the study also discussed how those women who were surveyed did not have mentors or adequate preparation to serve in those leadership positions. Furthermore, when mentoring and preparations are lacking for African American women in leadership the opportunities to leadership positions are decreased. Preparation is key to the success of not just the staff they lead but also for themselves. By using professional development to redefine a woman's work in such ways, the subsequent changes necessitate shifts in identity—shifting notions of what it means to be a woman in leadership and what constitutes good instructional practice (Crowley, 2017).

Out of the 10 participants in this study, four of the women have earned their doctorates. However, the preparation to exercise the learning in the field for those women is not easily obtained as their White and male counterparts. Chapman (2015) explained that the lack of preparation for African American females in educational leadership is more alarming now than ever due to the many challenges they face within the system.

Presently, all school districts in the targeted states have websites that applicants may visit and apply for positions; however, for African American women, in many situations it is training and mentoring that will keep them from the interview. The preparation does not just include the coursework completed in an approved program, it is also the preparation of the interview and the networking prior to the interview. Advocacy plays a vital piece for African American women in educational leadership it is equally important as preparation (Kemp-Graham, K, 2015).

### **Women in Educational Leadership**

I identified professional development related to promoting, training, and advocating for women desiring to serve as educational leaders. Professional development for women educational leaders should engage the women as leaders (Svendsen, 2020). Professional development designed for women educational leaders should begin with an understanding of their needs as a female leader (Watson, 2015).

There has been professional development that included sessions improving the skills and abilities among women (Kapur, 2018). These are the professional development workshops that organize trainings where the participants are required to learn essential aspects of school leadership. When women are going to get engaged in leadership

functions, they need to sharpen their expertise and aptitude. Enhancement of knowledge and skills enables the individuals to perform their job duties in an adequate manner. When individuals are assuming leadership positions, it is essential for them to generate awareness and render an effectual performance, as they are the leaders, who need to coordinate the workings and operations of the entire educational institution. This is essentially important for African Americans as they desire to maintain upward mobility in their careers (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016). Education and effective professional development for many, particularly African American women, has been the upward mobility to an improved quality in their careers (Horsford, 2012).

### **Professional Development That Advocates for Women in Leadership**

Several factors have contributed to the importance of professional development for women and African American women in educational leadership. Preparation programs for individuals aspiring to become principals have been a collection of sessions and courses covering leadership styles, public school laws, requirements, and procedures, with little emphasis on women development as leaders and professional development for women (Klein, 2015). As African American women enter educational leadership, their lived experiences and the need for professional development should be an integral part of the conversations in forming training. According to Clark (2011), an assessment of how women lead can result in a deeper understanding of how educational leadership reflects diverse perspectives and that involves a community as opposed to a single leader. Therefore, it is important for African American women to obtain the professional development they need to graduate into effective and long-term educational leaders.

Exemplary professional development workshops require significant resources to shape professional development for African American women. The participants in this basic qualitative study indicated that professional development attendance varies by school division. Professional development for African American female educational leaders currently does not exist in the targeted state.

### **Promoting Training for Women in Educational Leadership**

Preparation is a critical component for African American women desiring to advance in their careers in education. Development and implementation of an effective preparation is critical for African American women to advance in education leadership, ensuring equitable access. Lindsey & Lindsey (2014) discussed that 40% of African American women desire to be leaders in their school districts, and they work extremely hard to fulfill their aspirations. However, the study also discussed how those women who were surveyed did not have mentors or adequate preparation to serve in those leadership positions. Furthermore, when mentoring and preparations are lacking for African American women in leadership the opportunities to leadership positions are decreased. Preparation is key to the success of not just the staff they lead but also for themselves. Crowley (2017) stated by using professional development to redefine a woman's work in such ways, the subsequent changes necessitate shifts in identity—shifting notions of what it means to be a woman in leadership and what constitutes good instructional practice.

Out of the 10 participants in this study, four of the women have earned their doctorates. However, the preparation to exercise the learning in the field for those women are not easily obtained as their White and male counterparts. Chapman (2015) explained

that the lack of preparation for African American females in educational leadership is more alarming now than ever due to the many challenges they face within the system.

Presently, all school districts in the targeted states have websites that applicants may visit and apply for positions; however, for African American women, in many situations it is training and mentoring that will keep them from the interview. The preparation does not just include the coursework completed in an approved program it is also the preparation of the interview and the networking prior to the interview. Advocacy plays a vital piece for African American women in educational leadership it is equally important as preparation.

### **Leadership Preparation for African American Women**

Data analysis in this basis qualitative study discovered the participant's persistence in demonstrating their commitment to absorbing the knowledge to be prepared for educational leadership. The quest to complete additional training and education was encouraged by participants' loved ones or mentors. Leadership preparation for women must be ongoing and supported allowing them the opportunity for professional growth (Catalyst, 2017). Participants noted during their interviews that they strongly believe ongoing leadership preparation is a must for them as African American women in leadership. Ongoing leadership preparation and opportunities presents opportunities for African American to prove their capabilities (Farrington, 2020).

The participants offered that gaining higher levels of education and experience should serve to open doors to gain access to opportunities to work and advance into leadership positions to influence change (Hammond, 2020). As stated earlier, the

participants have higher education degrees with three who earned doctoral degrees. Each participant identified the value of academic preparation.

### **Training**

What is it like to be a principal of color and female? Nationally, only 11% of school principals are African American, and 20% of division level administrators such as the superintendent, assistant superintendents, and principals, are people of color in total (Quinlan, 2016). Meanwhile, the teaching population is still very White (Loewus, 2017). Principals of color are often dealing with pushback from their White counterparts and subordinates in their district who may treat them as if they do not have the expertise to do their job due to racial bias (Nasir, 2020). In recent years, principals of color have filed lawsuits alleging discrimination against school districts for giving them harsher penalties than White staff members, or for holding them more accountable for problems at the school due to their race (Quinlan, 2016). African American women who decide to leave the teaching profession for leadership in the district often observe a lack of support and continued training while serving in their leadership roles such as the principalship. Many often struggle to retain important relationships they held as classroom teachers.

The growing acceptance of this conception of school leadership has raised an accompanying challenge: how to ensure that professional development and support that novice principals receive is in line with the new leadership model as well as district needs and standards. Over the last decade, there has been notable progress in revamping principal preparation (Ebell, et al., 2017). What has been ignored is the preparation and training for African American women entering the leadership roles. Since 2000, virtually

all states have adopted new learning-centered leadership standards (Danzig et al., 2004). The targeted state created over 20 years ago a Superintendency academy in partnership with several universities, in the targeted state (superintendent, personal communication, 2018). However, when those programs were formed with the targeted states Department of Education, it appeared that African American women were not meeting the criteria to be accepted to those programs due to a lack of opportunity, mentoring and training. The curriculum was formed to train White men and then later the language changed to train White females to serve in urban school districts. Some states are using these valuable programs to grow teachers into principals and principals into superintendents to include African American women (Carters & Peters, 2016).

The last decade has also seen more diversity among leadership training providers for future leaders in public education. Efforts such as New Leaders, the National Institute for School Leadership, Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), and women organizations in the targeted state have emerged as innovative, alternative training programs for future leaders. A purpose of a women's educational organization in the target state is to help increase the percentage of African American women to obtain leadership positions and become effective school leaders in their district.

### **Mentoring**

Mentoring is typically characterized by the relationships developed between a less experienced and an experienced professional. Mentoring may alleviate feelings of isolation and alienation in early career faculty experiences (Bertand, et al, 2015). The benefits of this mentoring and professional development program target the success of



African American women educational leadership. The second benefit is that it identifies the critical components to mentoring: advocacy, training and building capacity. Thirdly, the professional development can demonstrate and foster successful strategies for African American women who desire to lead in their school districts and how African American women who currently lead can continue to grow as strong and respected leaders in the field of education (Cook & Glass, 2014).

Mentoring, in a classical sense, refers to a relationship between a younger adult and an older, more experienced adult, who helps the younger individual learn to navigate the adult world and the world of work” (Higgins & Kram, 2001, p. 2). Mentoring is critically important for relationship building, advocacy, and support (Harris, 2016). The current discussion of the use of mentoring encompasses other developmental relationships that can be developed in dyad (Christou et al., 2017). Irby (2012) differentiated mentoring from coaching in the former is generally long lasting and involves a shared relationship with a focus on the development of the individual. This style of advocacy is highly encouraged for African American women who are currently in educational leadership and for those women who desire to serve in that capacity.

Presently, many school districts in the targeted state lack the professional development for Africa American women in educational leadership due to the lack of advocacy and mentoring for those females. It is not just wannabe mentees who suffer; senior leaders are not receiving the coaching skills they need to become effective mentors (Miller & Bytham, 2015). There are benefits to mentoring particularly for African American women:

- Personal growth
- Career advancement
- Psychosocial support

Longman (2014) argued that mentoring is a channel through which the wisdom, knowledge, advanced experiences, skills, principles, and social capital of mentors is transmitted to protégés. A key success factor for women is their recognition that they need help and that establishing a mentoring relationship could be a means to their success (Laukhuf & Amlone, 2015). These women also demonstrated the personal confidence to reach out to potential mentors and to establish mentor relationships. Mentoring was reported to be a tool these women could use when facing barriers. Recent studies on mentoring have explained mentoring benefits for people of color (Chang, Longman, & Franco, 2014). Women of color can benefit greatly from mentoring and coaching since they are essential to their professional existence because they are challenged with double marginality, grounded racism, and sexism (Siple, 2015).

Mentoring is a developmental relationship between a mentor and mentee focused on the learning, goal attainment, and personal growth of the mentee, and where the mentor aids the induction of the mentee into the culture a profession (Hastings & Kane, 2018). Emerging attention to mentoring for African American women is encouraging and needed for their continued success. Although still significantly underrepresented in educational leadership in comparison to percentages in teaching, females in general have made some gains in attaining positions such as superintendent (Holder et al., 2015). While African American women have been subjects of some studies

regarding their absence in educational leadership roles, a mentoring program developed and centered for their needs as administrative leaders could increase the percentage of women of color entering educational leadership and create a decline of those females exiting the positions.

Developing effective school leaders requires concerted efforts not only by universities but also by school districts (Jensen, 2016). The time and effort must be implemented by school districts for African American women as they serve in leadership positions allowing them to reach their potential as leaders. When districts make it a priority to create a mentoring program for females of color, it provides opportunities for African American women to grow, engage in authentic leadership, building capacity and advocacy.

### **Professional Development Plan**

The objective of the 3-day professional development is to provide practical strategies in supporting African American women in educational leadership to implement the social change that is needed in their school divisions and in the targeted state. The professional development plan for the project study is a 3-day workshop covering mentoring in leadership, preparation in leadership, and promoting in leadership. Due to the current status of public education in the targeted state caused by COVID-19, the 3-day professional development will be conducted through google meets or Zoom Conferencing, Participants will register through a link created and reminders will be sent 3 days in advance of the 3-day workshop. At the end of each day, the participant's will be provided a link to complete a survey.

## **Project Description**

### **Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of the project study is to explore during the 3-day professional development mentoring strategies, develop building capacity and support for African American women in educational leadership. As noted in the problem statement of this study, and as corroborated by the findings of the study, the challenges African American women encounter as educational leaders can be damaging. African American women enter educational leadership with a range of professional knowledge, content experience, and qualifications that are equitable to their counterparts (Alexis, 2018). Professional development for African American women in educational leadership can catered to their needs to include attendance or presentation at professional conferences, workshops on mentoring and coaching, collaboration and breaking the glass ceiling (Cook & Glass, 2014). Professional development may also take the shape of long-term mentoring for African American women who are new to the leadership. The 3-day professional development is designed to provide support, proper resources, opportunity, and mentoring for African American women in educational leadership.

For African American women in educational leadership, it is important to educate other African American women on the importance of including the voice of women in leadership positions (Sligh-Conway, 2019). To provide African American women with adequate professional development and mentoring, school divisions must view African American women as diverse, unique, and equally as important as their counterparts in positions of leadership (Lewis, 2019). Professional development and mentoring can

provide ongoing support for women not just African American women in leadership. Continued opportunities in both may assist the openly the immediate leadership needs of African women in educational leadership (Decker, 2019). Catalyst (2017) recognized barriers to African American women's advancement as the lack of mentorship, role models, professional development, lack of support as decision makers, the lack of opportunity for growth, and personal and family responsibilities. The need to provide ongoing training designed for African American women in educational leadership provides a window of opportunity for retention and growth.

### **Resources**

To successfully plan and execute this professional development, there are several resources that are needed. The resources include participation from the participants and their current school divisions, stakeholder partnerships, as well as financial support to conduct the workshops over 3-days, and instructional materials. In particular, the mentors and mentees relationship of the participants in the 3-day professional development is essential to the success of the African American women involved in the mentoring. These partnerships will encourage other women to participate in this professional development.

I will also need funding to secure a venue and provide light refreshments and meals for participants given the duration of the professional development. Furthermore, funding will also be needed to purchase instructional resources and materials to support the professional development and the hands-on activities scheduled for the participants.

### **Existing Supports**

While there is little comprehensive professional development developed for African American women in educational leadership in mind, there are organizations that provide workshops, seminars, and mentoring for women in leadership (Participant 4, 2020). Even though there are few programs that directly address the encounters African American women are challenged with as educational leaders, workshops and seminars provide women an opportunity to connect and network with other African American women who are faced with similar challenges (Dishman, 2017). There are opportunities for funding to support professional development through the federal funds of school divisions earmarked for building and division leaders (Director of Instruction, personal communication, 2020).

### **Potential Barriers and Possible Solutions**

The literature regarding professional development for women indicates that there is a lack of focus of for African American women in educational leadership (Hastings & Kane, 2018), therefore, the participants in this case study were asked interview questions about the barriers that prevented their growth. While developing and facilitating professional development seems like a relatively small task, there are potential barriers to consider. The primary barriers include time for the participants to participate, division support and financial resources to support the 3-day professional development. While these barriers are important to review, there are a range of solutions to alleviate such barriers.

Several barriers could potentially halt the professional development. First, gaining stakeholder support is a potential barrier. Without the support of local school divisions in the targeted areas in the targeted state and the support for their participants (Giang, 2015), it will be difficult to both generate interest and promote participation among African American women educational leaders who are the primary audience of the 3-day professional development. To mitigate this challenge, I will need to work with organizations whose primary focus is providing mentoring and support to African American women currently in leadership and those who are interested in leadership roles. I will need to present my research as well as outline the professional development plan and objectives in advance that demonstrates the need of mentoring, support, and capacity building for African American women in educational leadership and the potential positive social impact of the professional development. Specifically, I will focus on how the professional development will positively influence African American women in educational leadership.

As an African American woman and a 29-year educator, with 10 years serving in leadership, it has been demonstrated the barriers African American women face serving in leadership. The lag of support for African American women in leadership and aspiring to serve as leaders continues to leave a void for black and brown students in education (Participant 8, 2020). Countless times, the mere perception of inequality among African American women in educational leadership has hindered their career advancement (Lewis, 2017). U.S. Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (2013) noted that

researchers have acknowledged that perceptions of unfairness or inequality impacted the career advancement of African American women.

A second potential barrier might be that it is not the priority of the division leadership to support the professional development for African American, if applicable. Opportunity to identify adequate time for a professional development conducted by an outside team would be a challenge. Due to the pandemic of COVID-19, the school year calendar has been revised tremendously in the targeted state while school divisions are reviewing approved calendars to reduce face to face professional development to follow the CDC guidelines of social distancing. In addition, school divisions will be extremely busy creating unique ways their division leaders and teachers will receive training for the school year which impacts when I can conduct the professional development. Securing time for professional development with building administrators is a difficult ask because they manage the day to day operations of the school. To mitigate this barrier, I will need to secure a time well in advance of the school year to work with a cohort of building and division leaders. My activities might also be offered in several points virtually using WebX or Zoom applications throughout the school year to be the least disruptive to the revised calendar. I might also offer the professional development on Saturdays for three weeks, or one Saturday per month for three months, or when school is not in session. Being flexible, communicating, and working around the existing schedule of the school and division leaders' calendars will be the key to addressing this potential barrier.

The last barrier to consider will be the funding support to secure a venue, provide light refreshments and meals, as well develop the instructional resources needed for the



professional development. There are educational and nonprofit organizations that support women in leadership and support African American women in educational leadership in the targeted state that are willing to entertain proposals for activities that support positive social change in the community that impact women, minority women and children. I will also have the option to work with the women who serve as public officials who desire to support a 3-day professional development. With the professional development being offered at minimal cost to the participants there is likely to be a wealth of support to mitigate some of the barriers described (CTE Workshop Participant, Personal Communication, 2019).

### **Project Goals**

I intend to achieve specific goals, to identify the challenges African American women face as educational leaders and present strategies that could increase the support, mentoring, and training they need to survive as leaders in public education. Also, another specific goal is to develop a calendar for future seminars. The overarching goal is to promote positive social change that African American female administrators could be more empowered to serve as leaders thereby leading to positive social change by opening career opportunities for African American female administrators.

Thus, it is imperative to note that larger goal is that the more African American women throughout seminars and workshops will gain exposure to the challenges that prevent them to serve as successful educational leaders in public education.

**Project Outcomes**

With the execution of the project, my intent is to deliver various outcomes. Specifically, the participants and African American women in educational leadership, will be able to develop the skills and support they need to rise above the challenges they often face as they serve as leaders in public education. Participants will gain more accurate perceptions regarding the challenges they face as educational leaders and the support they lack. And participants will increase their awareness of their needs as educational leaders.

**Target Audience**

The project is targeted for all women and African American women in educational leadership in the building and the division level in K-12 school divisions. Therefore, the professional development is open to all women in educational leadership in the targeted region and throughout the targeted state. Women serving as curriculum specialist, department chairs, and coordinators of special education are also invited to attend the professional development.

**Roles and Responsibilities of Persons Involved**

**Facilitator.** The professional development will be organized and facilitated by me. My role as the organizer will be to ensure that sessions and activities related to the professional development are in order and remain on schedule. These responsibilities include engaging pertinent stakeholders, securing funding, setting up the venue, and obtaining instructional resources. Furthermore, my role as the facilitator will be to formalize a team of volunteers who will work with me to contact each presenter, develop a

registration team and oversee the 3-day professional development. My responsibilities as the overseer include tracking of participant attendance with the registration, obtaining presenters for the breakout sessions for the professional development, review each proposal submitted by the presenters along with the selected registration team, work with the presenters to conduct the related activities, managing time, providing support throughout the professional development as well as executing evaluations and processing certificates of completion.

**Presenters.** The role of the presenters, women educational leaders, will be to come prepared to learn and engage with both me, the presenters, and educational sponsors. The professional development is content heavy and driven by interactive instructional activities that will require collaboration, so participants will need to adhere to professional norms and respect the contributions of others. Furthermore, the participants will be encouraged to complete the professional development from start to finish and complete the evaluation each day. Commitment thus is needed by all participants to stay engaged for 4 hours a day for 3-days, maximizing the potential to achieve the outcomes and goals of the professional development.

**Registration team.** The registration team will meet at 7am each morning to register the participants, prepare the badges in alphabetical order, receive payment if necessary, support the presenters with needs they may have, work with the venue managers, and registering the vendors each day. The registration will also discuss with the participants the agenda, breakout sessions, and logistics pertaining to the 3-day professional development.

### **Timetable and Components**

As designed, the professional development will take 3-days to complete. Participants will invest a total of 6 hours each day of focused and interactive professional development. The professional development will include a light breakfast each day, light refreshments, and a full buffet lunch. Therefore, a leeway of up to 45 minutes is a consideration for lunch, and several 10-minute break. In total, participants will have complete 18 hours of professional development.

1. Day 1: Registration, meet and greet, morning session guest speaker, sessions 1 and 2
2. Day 2: Registration, A light breakfast, sessions 3 and 4, lunch, afternoon guest speaker
3. Day 3: Registration, participant reflections, lunch, author introductions, sessions 5 and 6

The session overall will focus on helping African American women both understand the challenges they face as leaders, the perceptions they have of themselves as leaders, the perceptions others have of them as leaders, and how gender marginality impacts their ability to lead as successful leaders. Additionally, the seminar will emphasize instructional practices and routines that foster a mentorship that can lead to success for the participants.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

Engaged and effective professional development utilizes evaluation measures to assess if the objectives were met. To be considered effective, it will be necessary to

gauge this professional development's effectiveness throughout the 3-day sessions and when it is completed.

The proposed project is intended to meet three main goals: to improve the perceptions African American women have of themselves as leaders, to address the challenges they face as women in educational leadership, to create strategies to address those challenges, and to develop mentoring strategies for current and future leaders. An outcome evaluation process will be used to determine the effectiveness of the 3-day professional development. This subsection therefore provides the following evaluation criteria for the project (See Appendix of the project's evaluation criteria):

### **Project Goal 1**

To improve the perceptions African American women, have of themselves as leaders. The expected outcomes for this goal include improved knowledge of reflecting on their work as educational leaders. The following criteria questions will be used to evaluate whether Goal 1 and its expected outcomes have been achieved:

1. Have the perceptions of yourself as an educational leader changed since obtained the leadership position?
2. How often do you reflect on your practice as an African American woman in educational leadership?

### **Project Goal 2**

To address the challenges, they face as women in educational leadership as African American women and create strategies to address those challenges. The

following criteria questions will be used to evaluate whether Goal 1 and its expected outcomes have been achieved:

1. Are you supported by your staff as an African American woman educational administrator? Please explain.
2. Are you supported by other women as an African American woman educational administrator? Please explain.
3. What challenges have you faced from other genders?

### **Project Goal 3**

To create mentoring programs for African American women in educational leadership. The expected outcome for this goal is creation of an ongoing and supported mentoring program for African American women in educational leadership to increase awareness of the need for mentors and coaches for African -American women among division stakeholders in the targeted state. The following criteria question will be used to evaluate whether Goal 3 and its expected outcomes have been achieved: Are (more) teachers now aware of the importance of integrating mindset practices in their classrooms than before?

### **Formative Evaluation**

Formative assessment and formative surveys are widely utilized as a strategy to measure new measures for workshops and to guide instruction, and professional development. There are multiple ways to engage in formative assessment, including questioning and reflection (Milawati, 2017). In developing the evaluation tool for the project study, I considered the use of a formative assessment. I chose formative

assessment because it is used by educators and researchers that provides feedback to adjust future professional development sessions that improve the outcomes.

I will formatively assess participants after each session as well as at the end of each day. The formative assessments will include completing a survey at the end of each day, completing a brief survey after each session they attend and allowing for participants to complete reflections. In addition to the formative assessments, I will also write notes on my PowerPoint slides to capture shareable moments, comments, and lessons that may arise during the breakout sessions that I attend, the whole group presentations, and those “aha moments” for participants. The administration of these formative assessments will allow me to learn in real time if participants are gaining new knowledge or if it is necessary to adjust any format of the 3-day professional development that will meet their needs in a different way than I had prescribed.

Each day will end with an exit ticket, which is a way an educator assesses student learning. They will consist of two questions, “Identify how today breakout sessions met your needs?”, “What will you share with other African American women in leadership about today’s workshops?” These two questions will allow me to gain insight into the learning of each participant not only on day one, but also, as different breakout sessions are added as needed during day two and day three. These questions also allow me to meet the participant needs, by learning the ways they feel the session outcomes were accomplished and ways in which I can support feedback from each breakout session and mentoring sessions. As the goal of this project the goal of this project was to develop, provide, and present a template of successful mentoring strategies for African American

women in educational leadership, capturing real-time and in-the-moment evaluations are critical.

### **Summative Evaluation**

Summative evaluations are utilized to assess and determine if the learning and goals were met, (Omowunmi & Hiatt, 2017). The summative evaluation will be administered as a survey at the culminating activity on the final day of the professional development. This summative evaluation will not be used to provide formative feedback, as that is not the purpose of summative survey. Guskey (2014), as cited by Merchie, Tuytens, Devos, and Vanderlinde (2018), account for evaluating professional development allows for a high-level understanding of how the breakout sessions has impacted positive change, improved practice, and to serve as a guide to consider reform. The results of these summative evaluations will inform future professional development for African American women in educational leadership and their needs as educational leaders.

### **Evaluation Goals**

The overall goals of this the 3-day professional development is to develop, provide, and present a template of successful mentoring strategies for African American women in educational leadership. The goals in cooperation, the formative and summative evaluations align with the goals of the workshop, as they will provide both real-time awareness African American women in educational leadership as well as useful information for developing on-going professional development for African American women. In addition, the evaluation data will afford me insight into the breakout session



the participants learned well, those which need reinforced, and those which may need to be differentiated to meet the needs of individual participants. The data collected from the evaluations can lead to creating topics to engage participants during ongoing, monthly professional learning sessions for them. This can also lead to the participants establishing skills that leads to serving as presenters while learning new information as educational leaders.

### **Key Stakeholders**

The key stakeholders for this project are African American women in educational leadership. Building and division level administrators (and their African American female department leaders if applicable) are the key stakeholders for this project. Because the project is designed to address the perceptions of African American women in educational leadership, African American women are considered the key stakeholder for the project, as this new knowledge may increase their collaboration to support African American women desiring to enter into leadership as well as more intentional support for other women. In addition, the increase in awareness about the barriers African American women face in leadership may lead to the development and implementation of professional learning opportunities for women in leadership.

### **Project Implications**

Prior studies have noted the need to examine African American women who overcame challenges while ascending to leadership positions in public schools. Studies have been conducted to expose challenges experienced by women in the United States. The targeted state where the interviews were conducted has become a more progressive

state supporting women in leadership, boards, political office, and K-12 public education. The current study found that African American women encountered challenges in educational leadership, when pursuing the positions of leadership such as the superintendent of schools, that White men and White women may not have encountered (Wiley et al., 2017). The findings of this study are like those discussed in the existing literature that examined factors and attributes associated with African American women pursuing the positions of leadership in the targeted state. This project study allows for social change by challenging oppressive beliefs, bias, and gender inequality of African American women.

The project study is expected to accomplish a variety of objectives and propose a variety of implementable recommendations. It is expected to address the challenges African American women face as educational leaders and perceptions they have of themselves as educational leaders. Discussing this project study at future professional seminars with a targeted audience can create a better understanding of the challenges African American women face as educational leaders. In addition, African American women who desire to serve as educational leaders can have a binocular view of perceptions of African American women in educational leadership, the marginalities they face as leaders, and how they can prepare to be mentored as leaders.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

The professional development program focused on promoting the professional growth of African American women in educational leadership and equipping them with the necessary tools they expressed through during 3-day professional development. During the professional development, the participants described the marginalities they felt as African American women serving as educational leaders. The professional development included a laser-focused approach to identify and address the perceptions of African American women in educational leadership. I selected a professional development project because most African American women in my study expressed the importance of balancing roles as leader, mother, and wife and how that impacted their leadership.

The project developed in this study included multiple recommendations under several major topics that formed the 3-day professional development: The Comprehensive Professional Development Plan for African American Women Who Desire to Serve as Educational Leaders. The design of the project was based on the analysis of interview data collected in the study and information gathered from peer-reviewed articles on the topics of African American women in educational leadership, mentoring African American women, challenges African American women face as educational leaders, and the support they desire as leaders. Although the project included strategies to implement in the local school divisions in the targeted state, consideration of the project's strengths and weaknesses in delivery was needed.

The content of the project was derived from the analysis of interview data collected in the study and the outcomes presented in peer-reviewed articles on the importance of engaging and supporting staff and the community as African American women in leadership through ongoing collaboration and communication. The literature presented in Section 3 indicated the link between mentoring of African American women in educational leadership and their ability to build a collaborative school surrounding data (Jennings, 2015). The recommendations presented in the project provide all women, not only African American women, with the encouragement to establish a consistent mentoring and support program that emphasizes collaborative support and ongoing communication for African American women in educational leadership. When educational leaders work collaboratively for African American women aspiring to become leaders and who are currently leading by mentoring, providing professional development, and providing ongoing support, African American women develop a sense of worth as educational leaders (Patton & Harper, 2003). The recommendations in the project also highlight the importance of professional development for African American women as educational leaders and emphasize how ongoing professional development builds their leadership capacity.

The project may guide leaders to develop an understanding of how supporting African American women in educational leadership is foundational to the establishment of retention for African American in educational leadership. Mentoring and professional development are components that any leader needs for growth. For African American women, they serve as components to their professional development. In alignment with

the literature in Section 3, the project presents various positive outcomes associated with the perceptions of African American women as educational leaders.

The content of the project builds from the analysis of interview data collected from the participants and highlights the validity of outcomes presented in peer-reviewed articles. The literature presented in Section 3 indicated the link between gender and leadership, sexism and racism, and lack of support for African American women face in educational leadership (Kennedy, 2015). The recommendations presented in the project provide African American females with the information needed to establish a culture emphasizing collaborative support, mentoring, and ongoing advancement. When male and female leaders of other ethnic groups work collaboratively with African American women throughout their careers by mentoring, support, and advocating, African American women develop a sense of communication and ongoing support and do not feel left behind (Huber & Solorzano, 2015). Educational leadership for African Americans requires the constant fight to overcome social barriers of poverty and lower class (Murtadha & Watts, 2005).

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of African American women and the challenges they face in educational leadership and present successful leadership strategies for promoting and sustaining African American females in educational leadership. A basic qualitative design allowed me to examine the responses of 10 African American females who currently serve in leadership positions in their school districts in the targeted state. Individual semistructured interviews with selected participants followed by data analysis revealed essential elements included in the

perceptions of African American women. The project study findings included leadership strategies that resulted from the data analysis. A PowerPoint presentation was created to include successful leadership strategies for African American women. The PowerPoint presentation and 3-day agenda provided the framework for a 3-day professional development program for school leaders, which is presented in Appendix A. Both programs were created to present successful leadership strategies to school leaders.

In this section, the strengths and limitations of the project study and alternative recommendations to address the problem of sustainability of African American women in educational leadership in targeted districts are discussed. Next, there is a review of what was learned from conducting this study with respect to scholarship project development, leadership, and myself as a scholar practitioner and project developer. In addition, this section includes summative reflections on the importance of this experience and implications for social change and directions for future research. In conclusion, a summary includes the key points of the study with my concluding thoughts as a researcher.

### **Project Strengths**

Professional development, capacity building, advocacy, training, and preparation for African American female educational leaders in public education are necessary. Presently, there are no set standards in school leader preparation specific to African American women (Kimmons, 2009). Staff engagement and school culture were important considerations in this study. Effective school leaders can change school culture or sustain a positive school culture to attain a thriving school (Prokopchuk, 2016). A positive school

culture is essential for a school to be effective and functional (Hall & Hord, 2015). When trained and mentored on a continued trajectory, African American women in educational leadership create, implement, and sustain positive school climates and relationships.

Participant responses indicated essential elements that encourage sustainability in their schools and the development of the project. The elements included the following: gender and leadership, racism and sexism, community engagement, empowering the staff, and communication. Findings demonstrated application of these elements in the leadership strategies and became the components of the project guide and implementation of professional development program. The importance of these elements for effective leadership strategies was guided by the conceptual framework of Kouzes and Posner (1995). This professional development model emphasizes effective leadership strategies that will allow school leaders to implement and create an effective and sustainable school system.

Another strength demonstrated is the need for district leaders' involvement in providing professional development for African American female educational leaders. Top stakeholders in the public schools such as the superintendents and school board members need to support professional development and education by providing time and money for participation of African American female's educational leaders. Even then, female efforts are unlikely to be rewarded. The achievements of African American women in public education have not been celebrated throughout history. When examining the presence of African American women in public education and higher education, it is important to be aware of their service in traditional educational positions

in lower to mid-level leadership, as well as their absence from leadership positions in academic institutions.

When African American women in educational leadership are provided equal opportunities for growth, advocacy, and collaboration the stakeholders who benefit from this collaboration of leadership are students, parents, and teachers/staff. Effective African American women educational leaders will be able to keep a school community sustained using alliance with faculty, students, parents, and community. Teamwork and advocacy are two tools important for African American women to use as educational leaders. A positive school includes positive attitudes and behaviors that create a more effective and functional school (Kowalski et al, 2011).

An additional strength is the identity and faith of African American women in educational leadership. The African American female identity is a major misconception in public education, but an essential part of the project. Therefore, African American women narratives are sometimes lost. The findings in this study included the perception and identity of their worth as an African American woman in educational leadership a vital component for sustainability, therefore becoming one of the strengths in the project study.

### **Project Limitations**

One limitation for this project study is several educational leaders interviewed were from the same school district and whose immediate supervisor was also a participant. In addition, the study was limited to ten African American women. The selected school districts and participants were agreeable to the data being collected within



the needed timeframe. Demographics and enrollment size may have influenced outcomes (Fiore, 2011).

Secondly, this project study was designed to interview 10 African American women in educational leadership for 40-60 minutes. However, due to scheduling conflicts caused by COVID-19, face to face interviews were difficult to accomplish. Therefore, zoom interviews were conducted. Interview questions were well prepared, organized, and data were collected under minimal time restraints; however, several African American female superintendents were not available due to the urgent matters of the pandemic, closed schools, and limited contact due to COVID-19. Written documentation is available for reference, which assisted in collected needed data. In addition, interviewing during the months of March and April was extremely difficult due to fact that the targeted state was in a mandatory quarantine. However, the participants were cooperative with coordinating their schedule to meet the needs of the study. A final limitation is that the development and implementation of the project will take time, money, and an agreeable on-site location for implementation of a 3-day professional development for the educational leaders.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

One of the future recommendations for approaches to address is cultural dexterity in leadership for African American women. Cultural dexterity is the ability to build relationships with others with diverse backgrounds and personal views that are different (Ely and Thomas, 2001). For any educational leader, building cultural awareness and sensitivity increases their platform to serve as effective leaders. It is difficult to be a true

leader without understanding how diversity and cultural ingenuity are attributes in becoming successful leaders in public education. In the end, African American women leaders must make certain they are creating a culture where other African American women are valued for their unique contributions to public education and they can achieve their highest potential.

Finally, evaluation of professional development and mentoring is essential to justify effectiveness of the program. Pending approval for the professional development to occur, a program evaluation will be distributed to the participants at the end of each day seeking the appropriateness and usefulness of the presented information for the school leader (Appendix A). In addition, a long-term questionnaire will be e-mailed 6 months later seeking effectiveness and application of any leadership strategies presented in the program (Appendix A). An evaluation will be completed by the attendees which will provide their responses for the break-out sessions they attended over the 3-day professional and determine if the objectives for each break-out session were met.

### **Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change**

Education has been a major part of my life personally and professionally. I had a goal in life to reach the highest educational level possible to establish academic status in my career, the attainment of a doctoral degree. Although this journey has taken 10 years to complete, I received accolades, recognition, and rewards for my strong passion, knowledge and communicative abilities that I have obtained while pursuing this degree and the skills that I have shared with others in the educational community. This path of attaining my doctoral degree led me to serve as a political official for four years. Through

that service, I was able to share with more than 1000 females and men about the challenges African American women face in educational leadership. It is my passion for learning and sharing information that allows me to help others and my personal experience as a teacher, curriculum specialist, testing coordinator, administrator, and public figure that guided me towards completion of my doctorate degree.

I have served in public education for 29 years. During this time, I have served as a math teacher, curriculum specialist, math specialist, compliance specialist, testing coordinator and assistant principal. I then realized I wanted to do more for public education so when the opportunity arose to become a school board representative in the targeted state, I accepted the challenge. The first administrative experience was a summer school principal position and then as an assistant principal. As an administrator, I was able to make the most contributions for the school, students, and teachers of color.

As a school and central office administrator, I have served in several states and in numerous capacities. In both areas, I gained a wealth of experience and faced many challenges serving as an African American female with a background in mathematics. As an assistant principal in the targeted state, I observed the need for increased collaboration, communication, and advocacy to become a more effective educational leader as an African American female. When stakeholders work together, sustainability of an organization can be achieved (Fullan, 2005). Using collective collaboration and clear communication with faculty, school community members, and outside community, I was able to improve the quality of instruction, develop a quality educational programs and improve the mentoring of future leaders. After serving only one year as an assistant

principal in another state that neighbors the targeted state and making those changes as an assistant principal under the leadership of a dominant African American male principal, I was moved to the middle school to serve as the curriculum specialist and testing coordinator. For many years, I felt bitter for the move, even though it was lateral and the change in location did not affect my pay.

Leadership requires trust, respect, effective communication, and collaboration. These components were quite vivid in my data collection. As a current administrator who experienced and observed both ends of the spectrum with leadership and change, it is quite clear that effective communication and widespread collaboration, trust and respect are essential for an effective educational leader. These components were evolved from the findings of my research and were included in the successful leadership strategies for my project study.

An effective educational leader includes a positive attitude and building positive relationships with their team. For African American women to break the glass-ceiling, they must be supported in creating a positive school culture consists of positive behaviors including trust and respect among all stakeholders. Stakeholders include top administration as the division's leadership team and the division school board. When leaders conduct transparent communication, and collaborate with all stakeholders, trust and respect are earned amongst each other. However, keep in mind, sometimes positive change in school climate such as instruction implemented by an African American woman is not always accepted by others they lead. New leadership is usually met with some resistance and will need time for stakeholders to acquire and build trust to the new

system. African American women in educational leadership will need to be patient and give those whom they lead time to absorb and accept their new ideas and not take their opinions of doing things different personal.

### **Reflection on Importance of the Work**

My purpose for developing the project study was to educate African American women educational leaders on the perceptions, challenges and marginal practices that have been problematic for their careers as school leaders. Identifying challenges has led to strategies to eliminate or minimize those challenges going forward. During the pursuit of this goal, I realized my work would influence more than educational leaders and African American women but also women and women of color. Once stakeholders comprehend the importance of the professional development, the goal for sustainability of African American woman in educational leadership will be more attainable. It is with stakeholder involvement, support, and collaboration that the pursuit of equity for all will be achieved. Professional development such as my project study for African American women leaders is essential. This is because many school leaders not been prepared in areas as racism, sexism, workplace bullying, and gender inequality. The project includes elements and strategies for African American women to be successful as leaders in public school education and higher education. It is my hope that the project will be able to guide all females' educational school leaders to support, advocate, train, and educate future females' leaders in educational leadership.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

The importance of this project study implies a need for more African American women in educational leadership. Current African American women in leadership have many responsibilities other than instructional best practices and staff evaluations.

Professional development needs to include a capacity building and mentoring preparation. More consistent preparation for African American women in educational leadership will certify more African American women are prepared to serve as school leaders in all areas such as empowerment, capacity building, and leadership.

Another implication is the importance to provide professional development to all administrators, male and female, and all ethnic groups. Sometimes these administrators are too removed or preoccupied with other responsibilities and lose the understanding of why it is critically important to train and support African American women in leadership and others. Therefore, providing a separate professional development for top administrators may encourage positive attitudes towards and collaboration with the local female school leaders of color.

Future research may include studying the perceptions of African American women that serve at higher educational institutions. Another direction for future research will be to review African American men who serve as educational leaders in public education.

### **Evidence of Quality**

It is possible to encounter errors when uploading survey data to a database. Data may not load correctly, so it is necessary to check that all data has been correctly

transferred. Therefore, I reviewed the steps several time to ensure that the data collected was uploaded correctly leaving minimum to no errors while demystifying the data. I verified the data was uploaded with 100% accuracy by comparing the data in the database with the data recorded to certify they matched.

The project study followed protocols and procedures when selecting the participants, collecting the data, concealing the data, and transcribing the data. Procedures of ethics supported by Walden University were followed to protect each participant's information collected through the data collection process. The accuracy of the transcription plays a role in determining the accuracy of the data that are analyzed and with what degree of dependability (Creswell, 2015). Before directing to analyze or code the data, it is important to recognize the task of handling the qualitative research data during and after the interview (Ravitch and Karl, 2020). Each interview was transcribed verbatim and member checking was completed.

### **Conclusion**

African American women who are in leadership positions in public schools are educationally prepared to lead as impressive classroom teachers in their respective schools. Presently, a consistent professional development preparation program has not been created for African American women who desire to take their talents and skills to the next level. Many men who are White are hired to serve as Principals and Assistant Principals without the same level of education or experience as African American women while those women are passed over for positions of leadership. Today's school leaders have a plethora of responsibilities to handle throughout the year. Consequently, it is vital

that they all receive consistent professional development opportunities or preparation training to successfully meet these responsibilities and create effective educational systems for all students and for future leaders in public education.



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## Appendix A: The Project

### **3-Day Professional Development for**

#### **African American Women Who Desire to Serve as Educational Leaders**

The results of the data gathered from semistructured interviews with ten novice African American females in leadership formed the foundation for this project. The women who participated in the project study have served in educational leadership ranging from 4-24 years described their experiences of marginalities, sexism, frustration with the lack of support and the lack of mentoring, isolation from other leaders, determination, empowering their staff, community engagement, and resiliency. Nevertheless, all the women expressed they desired an effective and structured comprehensive professional mentoring plan (CPMP) to prepare African-American women who aspire to lead. The comprehensive professional mentoring plan will be designed and supported by current African American women educational leaders. Specifically, the women who participated in the study discussed the need for support by their male superiors and colleagues to create an equitable working environment to meet their emotional needs and the needs of the staff, students, and community. Furthermore, the women in the study asked for tools and resources to strengthen their leadership skills, increase student achievement, and grow as a educational leader.

I am recommending a 3-day professional development on *Empowering Yourself as an African American Woman in Leadership*, an introduction to the comprehensive professional mentoring plan, CPMP, and the morning mentoring session training women to lead in their districts while building capacity, training other women to lead, and

supporting aspiring female leaders in leadership. Additionally, I am proposing women with leadership experience in the targeted state to serve as presenters, panelist, and mentors to African American women who desire to serve as educational leaders. The Comprehensive Professional Mentoring Plan is will provide professional development to more than 2,000 African American women in educational leadership in the targeted stated. In addition, the women attending the 3-day professional development will receive invitations to participate in future seminars and professional development to support African American women who desire to lead in their school districts with training, mentoring, and the support they need to be successful leaders. The 3-day professional development will also include a session to conduct mock panelist interviews. The questions will be generated from several African American women superintendent's in the targeted state. Eventually, training could be provided to African American female women who desire to serve as department leaders, curriculum team leaders and who desire to serve on their districts school leadership team. However, for this project, I am including a 3-day plan for the CPMP as an introduction to the mentoring, training, advocating, and building capacity model.

I am also proposing a comprehensive long range CPMP, Comprehensive Professional Mentoring Plan, (See Appendix B) for inducting aspiring female's leaders, which will include additional components of a CPMP that will build capacity amongst the African American women participants, include mock interviews for the participants, mentoring long term, and job satisfaction. The objective is to advocate and prepare African American women to meet the needs of leadership in their school districts, which

will lead to positive instructional practices and empowering teachers and students while building a stable and responsive educational learning community for students to achieve academic success. This requires a comprehensive long-range plan.

From the participants' interviews, I concluded that African American women in leadership have a strong desire to support their staff and students, build capacity in their school community, provide strong leadership that is transformational while taken seriously at their jobs. I also noticed that the female's participants did not feel supported by their male counterparts in many situations such as proposing new projects for their school districts. Consequently, they often find themselves in survival mode preparing to serve as leaders with a lack of support from their male counterparts. Furthermore, the female's participants strongly felt that their male colleagues serving in leadership positions had the depth of understanding of the level of discontinuity and challenges the women faced as school and district leaders. As such, African American women continue to have trouble breaking the concrete ceiling of discrimination, gender pay differences, mentoring and promotion.

Mentoring, training, and building capacity for African American women in leadership schools are critical to teachers and students' success. However, it is often the challenges these women face that becomes their focus as transformational leaders, which may lead to their demise as educational leaders. The comprehensive professional mentoring plan will provide the platform and the next steps that will be needed to ensure African American women leaders are implementing the CPMP best practices for educational leaders to address the needs of their staff, their students, and the community.

Continuing with their professional development, the participants attending the professional development, will be able to design a systemic learning community that addresses holistic community.

Future professional development needs of incoming women leaders hired for the 2021-2022 school year can be determined by completing a survey that addresses their professional needs as educational leaders. The following is an example of a Professional Development Survey to determine how the CPMP can meet the induction needs of women leaders, particularly African American women entering educational leadership. To develop a survey to address the needs of African American women in educational leadership, it is important to have input from the members contributing to the development of the survey. Therefore, the survey identified below is a draft.

**Professional Development Needs Assessment Survey for Novice Teachers**

**1. Please rate your interest in each of the following professional development formats and strategies:**

Presentation Format	Strong Interest	Some Interest	Little or No Interest
8am Speaker			
Break Out Sessions			
Mentoring			
Building Capacity			
Mock Interviews			
1pm Speaker			
Your Leadership Tool Box			
Working Together as Females			
Advocating			
Other- Please Specify			

**2. Please rate your interest in each of the following professional development topics:**



Professional Development Topics	Strong Interest	Some Interest	Little or No Interest
Preparing to Lead Like a Pirate			
Breaking the Concrete Ceiling			
Advocating for the "Other" Woman			
When Females Lead, Things Get Accomplished			
Think Like a Man but Act Like a Lady			
Creating Your Own Power House: With Females			
Cooperative Learning: With Females!			
Leading the Way for Other Females to Follow			
Our Skin is Different But Are We Really Different?			
I am A Black Woman: Whose Has My Back?			
Leading While Bleeding in Stilettoes			
Other- Please Specify			

**3. Which best describes your current position?  
Please select.**

Superintendent	
Assistant Superintendent	
Other Central Office Position	
Pre-K-5 Administration	
6-12 Administration	

School Based Team Leader	
Other District Level Leader	

4. Please answer the following questions. Circle only one choice.

Agree          Slightly Agree          Slightly Disagree          Disagree          NA

1. PD in CPMP has been relevant to my leadership experience.

Agree          Slightly Agree          Slightly Disagree          Disagree          NA

2. PD in CPMP has improved my ability to serve as an instructional leader.

Agree          Slightly Agree          Slightly Disagree          Disagree          NA

3. I am applying the strategies learned in the PD with my teachers, students, and families.

Agree          Slightly Agree          Slightly Disagree          Disagree          NA

4. I am applying the strategies that has been presented in PD with my students and families.

Agree          Slightly Agree          Slightly Disagree          Disagree          NA

5. I have the necessary support in my school district to assist with the follow-up of PD training.

Agree          Slightly Agree          Slightly Disagree          Disagree          NA

6. I have the benefited directly from the strategies and seminars of the PD sessions?

Agree          Slightly Agree          Slightly Disagree          Disagree          NA

**Please Answer the Following Questions:**

1. The most effective/beneficial PD training for females that I have attended was:  
**(Be specific- list the name of the class/content/activity).**
2. Why was this class identified as the most effective or beneficial? Explain any positive take-always that you currently implement as a leader?
3. The least effective/beneficial PD training for females that I have attended was:  
**(Be specific- list the name of the class/content/activity).**

4. Why was this class identified as the least effective or beneficial?
5. Have you participated in any follow-up activities, joint training, or ongoing PD seminars with others who attended the seminar and training with?
6. What type of follow-up activities have you applied?  
**(Building Capacity, Mock-interview training, District level training, Mentoring, other- Please Specify).**
7. What additional PD would you like to see offered for females in educational leadership?

### **Audience**

The 3-day PD seminars will be a part of the Empower Yourself... Empower Others to Lead Only Like A Girl Can Lead. I am proposing the 3-day professional development is held in July. July is a time where many division leaders and building leaders attend professional development while the teachers and students are on summer vacation. It is highly recommended that the participants attending the professional development address the needs of African American women who are new to leadership, who are aspiring to serve as leaders, and African American women who have at least 5 years in educational leadership. The CPMP for new female's leaders will require mentoring and support from other leaders in education. Additionally, funding will need to be allocated to pay the presenter and for follow-up workshops.

**“Empower Yourself.....Empower Others  
to Lead Only Like a Girl Can Lead”**

Shonda M. Harris-Muhammed  
Candidate for Doctor of Education

Walden University  
September 2020



**WALDEN  
UNIVERSITY**  
*A higher degree. A higher purpose.*

## Agenda:

- **Purpose**
  - **Mentoring**
  - **Advocating**
  - **Training**
    - Advancing your education
    - Development of leadership philosophy
  - **Capacity Building**
    - Interview preparation
    - Resume preparation
- **Are you prepared to lead?**
- **What's in your "leadership" toolbox?**
  - Training others to lead
  - Servant Leadership
  - Mentoring African American women
  - Hidden fears
  - Support Group

## Purpose of the professional development:

- To address the challenges of African American women in educational leadership by focusing on mentoring, advocating, interviewing development, resume building, and capacity building.
  - Striving to serve as a leader in a male-dominated society, and culturally dominated by a Eurocentric culture (Kirpatrick & Locke 1991), proves more than difficult for these women.
  - Educational leaders can benefit from the professional development by understanding how African American women define themselves in their roles as educational administrators and continue to establish the context for an alternative way of thinking as leaders.

## Mentoring:

- Catalyst.org research shows that women of color—that is, racially/ethnically diverse women—have experiences and perceptions that are unique from women as a group and men of color as a group. (Goldman, Sachs, & Co.)
- When they're carving their own paths, minority women want mentors to guide the way—but there are few to be found.
- Men are more than willing, the women—especially black women—do not respond to request to mentor other black women
- More than half of organizations in a recent national survey reported that they did not specifically target women of color in their mentoring programs



## Why African American Women Need African American Women Mentors

- Research says if you are a minority woman, you need at least one minority woman mentoring you
- A lot of people simply don't feel comfortable giving feedback to others who aren't like them because they don't know what to expect, especially Black women
- It's more difficult for African-American women to find other African American women as mentors due to the limit of African American women in leadership and the support from other African-American women
- The higher African American women climb in their careers, the more they are required to break out of their comfort zones.
- This causes anxiety and the feeling WE need to do whatever we need to do to remain at the top
- Diverse women with influential mentors still lag their white women counterparts in educational leadership

## Advocating for African American Women in Leadership Roles

- Research explains that African American women administrators continues to lag that of men, women must move beyond advocating and mentoring aspiring leaders and begin to more overtly create school places where all groups of people are valued and nurtured.
- African-American women in leadership is constantly undermined by the white counterparts and sometimes white parents due to the lack of trust and gender discrimination. Women of Color face the stigma of NOT knowing as much as their white counterparts. Mentoring and Advocating Africa - American women can lead to a more successful tenure as educational leaders.
- Most principals come from the teaching ranks and fewer Blacks are entering the teaching profession. (Ferrandino, 2000; Lewis, 2000; Page & Page, 1991; PR Newswire, 2003). Which means fewer Blacks are entering into the leadership roles in public education.
- Per Zamani (2003), African American women traditionally have faced both race and gender bias and does not receive the same advocacy as White males

## Advocating for African American Women in Leadership Roles

- The number of racially/ethnically diverse women with mentors has grown over time—from only one-third in the late 1990's to almost a half in 2009
- A difference between diverse women and white women is that diverse women are much more likely to have mentors who lack power
- In a recent Catalyst study, 62 percent of diverse women with mentors cited “lack of an influential mentor or sponsor” as a barrier to advancement vs. 39 percent of white women.
- Diverse women with influential mentors are more likely than those with non-influential mentors to experience the workplace (e.g., greater satisfaction with career advancement) and the organization (lower intent to leave and higher organizational commitment) advantageously.

## Cultural Sensitivity

“There is much diversity among the African American population in terms of origin, appearance, experiences with oppression, demographic characteristics, residential patterns, social class, interpersonal styles, and patterns of functioning and lifestyles”.

Ruth G. McRoy

“Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world”.

Harriet Tubman

## What White women must know about African American women

- Cultural Sensitivity is being aware that cultural differences and similarities between people exist without assigning them a value – positive or negative, better or worse, right or wrong. (Suyemoto & Ballou, 2007)
- The situation facing women of color is more complex than that faced by White women.
- White females, who share the same skin color as most male leaders, can more easily focus exclusively on gender discrimination and may overlook the influence of race and ethnicity on perceptions of leadership (Suyemoto & Ballou, 2007).
- Women of color face additional forms of discrimination in the workplace that White women may escape.
- Women of color receive lower pay than White men and women as well as men of color, and they must learn to maintain a positive self-image when confronted with “micro aggressions” that could halt promotions, mentoring, and success (Holvino & Blake-Beard, 2004).



## What White women must know about African American women

- Some of the reasons given for the slow progress of women of color in leadership include lack of line experience, inadequate career opportunities, racial differences in speech and socialization, ethnosexual stereotypes, “old boy networks,” and tokenism (Oakley, 2000).
- African-American women in leadership are not viewed as equal to White women in leadership
- African-American women in leadership are not viewed as equal to ethnic groups in leadership
- African-American women do not have a solid network of other AA women to network with and to lean on during stages of success
- African-American women do not have a “Emily’s” list

## What African American women must know about White Women and other groups

- Bringing more women of color into the White status quo will require understanding of how White women think and operate to rise to CEO leadership positions; knowledgeable diversity officers, and programs to nurture talent. A fresh approach to obtaining leadership positions for African-American women requires building a network of White women
- African-American women must understand that White women accomplishments are recognized by other White women. AA women must celebrate in each other’s successes
- A mere 11% of women of color win the support and sponsorship of senior leaders in their companies, the report found. Whereas White women will receive the support from White men and other ethnic groups in the workplace
- White women will not hang their heads down when things are not working in their favor. Research shows that AA women are likely to put their heads down in frustration and will not fight for respect, equity and pay increases (Valerie Purdie-Vaughns, 2015)

## Training

- Diverse women with influential mentors still lag their white women counterparts on a number of dimensions, including
  - Overall satisfaction with the mentoring relationship
  - Trust and mutual understanding
- A mentoring program that includes a mix of demographic groups, including diverse women optimize the program to more effectively meet the needs of diverse women
- Be willing to mentor another Black woman who desires to lead or NOT desire to lead. Just serve!

## Training

Program Goals	Individual Mentee Outcomes	Target Groups	Can we DO it?
Develop a diverse talent pipeline	Develop knowledge in areas that will optimize individuals' performance Entry-level diverse group	Develop knowledge in areas that will optimize individuals' performance Entry-level diverse group	Yes
Develop a more inclusive workplace Gain insight on experiences and perspectives of diverse talent Senior-level executives	Develop a more inclusive workplace Gain insight on experiences and perspectives of diverse talent Senior-level executives	Develop a more inclusive workplace Gain insight on experiences and perspectives of diverse talent Senior-level executives	Yes
Create a more diverse succession-planning slate Gain political expertise and perspective by establishing relationships Mid- to senior-level diverse group	Create a more diverse succession-planning slate Gain political expertise and perspective by establishing relationships Mid- to senior-level diverse group	Create a more diverse succession-planning slate Gain political expertise and perspective by establishing relationships Mid- to senior-level diverse group	Yes

## Training African American Women To Lead

- There are fewer women leaders in politics, business, academia, non-profits, religious organizations and more and there are fewer women of color who are leaders in those areas as well.
- Men and women should both challenge stereotypical ideas about gender roles. Just as the status quo is holding women back from leadership roles, it is holding men back from embracing caretaking and support roles.
- It's good for business and for schools to draw on the creativity of a diverse staff and recognize the purchasing power of women of color.
- AA women must be familiar with the bias's, barriers, and gender stereotypes that exist when leadership.
- AA women must walk out of the fear of losing self-identity when discussing fair and equitable pay.
- AA women can lead more effectively when they learn how other ethnics are successful in leadership positions.

## Training African American Women To Lead

- African-American women must continue to educate themselves on the diverse curriculum
- Attend trainings and professional development that challenges how you lead as educational leaders
- Commit to additional training throughout their careers to include obtaining additional degrees and certifications
- Attend leadership institutes designed for African-American women who desire to serve as leaders in their schools
- Taking the initiative to lead in situations
- Understanding how to build capacity and network with men and women of different ethnic groups
- How to develop and lead an effective staff

## Training African American Women To Lead

- Learn how to hold a winning presence
- Going from expert to advocate
- Demonstrate how you can serve as an effective leader
  - Attend additional trainings without request
  - Step up and complete additional tasks without request
  - Volunteer to lead organizations within the workplace environment

## Capacity Building

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U\\_zti6rxB0I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_zti6rxB0I)
  - *What design or platform has been created to support Black women leaders?*
- <http://shine.forharriet.com/2015/04/32-incredible-ted-talks-by-black-women.html#axzz4cMNIulbp>



## Next Steps

- A mentoring and support program that is created for African American women in educational leadership
- Black women leaders must be committed to serving as mentors to support the growth of African American women leaders
- White women must learn and understand how African American are marginalized in leadership positions
- African American women can learn to understand and gain knowledge from White women to assist them in moving up the ladder
- Capacity building and networking is critical for Women of Color who desire to lead



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## Appendix B: Participant Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:

Duration: Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Shonda Harris-Muhammed

Interviewee:

You are invited to take part in a research study about Perceptions of African American Females in Educational Leadership. The purpose of this study is to explore the contributions and the challenges of African American females' in educational leadership. I am inviting African American females in public school leadership positions who have held or currently hold positions such as the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Director, Principal, and/or Assistant Principal, and Content Area Leaders/Specialist for at least three years. Your name/contact information was obtained via the targeted state Department of Education school division website.

The purpose of this study is to explore the contributions and challenges for African American females in educational leadership. Educational leaders can benefit from this study by understanding how African American females define themselves in their roles as educational administrators and continue to establish the context for an alternative way of thinking as leaders. The purpose for the proposed study is to utilize interviews conducted with African American female educational leaders to gain a better understanding of their lived experiences as school-based or district administrators.

You will be asked to participate in an interview. The interviews are expected to last 30-60 minutes that will occur in a natural setting confined to a quiet, confidential location. You will have your responses audio recorded using a recording device. It is planned that one meeting will take place. If additional questions arise, I will contact you for a follow up interview. If a follow up interview is required, the contact may be in the form of email, phone interview, letter, or face-to-face meeting. You will be invited to review your transcript for accuracy.

## Appendix C: Interview Questions

**The following interview questions correspond to Research Question 1:**

**RQ1.** How do African American female administrators view the ways they contribute to and support diversity within their role as an educational leader?

- 1) What do you believe are the contributing factors to your success as a female educational administrator? Are there any specific career opportunities that contributed to your success?
- 2) Do you believe that your leadership style is more participatory, directive, or political in nature? Please explain.
- 3) What type of leadership style do you use to oversee your faculty and staff? How has this style influenced your working relationship?
- 4) What leadership style do you use to promote professional staff development? How do you believe this style is perceived by the staff?
- 5) How do you maintain positive school relations and community relations?
- 6) What do you do to help create positive public relations with the community at large? With staff members?
- 7) Can you identify ways in which you have seen men support and encourage African American women to seek leadership positions? Please explain.
- 8) What are some of the perceptions and experiences that you have of men in those same or lateral positions?
- 9) What is your vision for the future of your school or district?

10) Please describe the location of your upbringing. Did the location you were raised in impact your educational advancement? Please explain.

11) Did any members of your family have a similar career path as you? Please explain.

**The following interview questions correspond to Research Question 2:**

**RQ2.** What are the perceptions of African American females in educational leadership about the challenges they face in obtaining leadership positions?

12) What barriers did you face in your community as you advanced your education?

13) As an educational leader what types of conflicts have you experienced? How do you use your leadership style and skills to manage conflict when others try to prevent you from attaining your goals professionally as an educational leader?

14) Do you perceive different standards for men in leadership positions in comparison to African American women? Please explain.

15) Have you perceived any unique challenges to women in similar leadership roles? Please explain.

16) What role do you believe that gender plays in the underrepresentation of African American women in central office, district level, and building level administration?

17) Has gender caused any obstacles in achieving your vision? Please explain. Given your current situation in your district, do you anticipate any obstacles? Please explain.

- 18) Does your ethnicity present additional challenges in obtaining a administrative position when compared to women of other ethnicities? Please explain.
- 19) Are there different risks/challenges for African American women than men in educational leadership positions? Please explain.
- 20) Do you see a difference in the way's men handle barriers in leadership? How so? Do the discussions of barriers and challenges for men appear to be equal and to those of African American women in educational leadership? Please explain.
- 21) What role do you believe gender plays in the fact that men hold a prevalence of educational leadership positions? What role do you believe gender plays in the fact that African-American women remain largely underrepresented in educational leadership positions?