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Diversity in School Leadership: Re-Conceptualizing the Narrative of Black Male School Principals and Assistant Principals for Recruitment and Retention

James Avery

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Diversity in School Leadership: Re-Conceptualizing the Narrative of Black Male School
Principals and Assistant Principals for Recruitment and Retention

by
James J. Avery

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
and School of Criminal Justice in Partial
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Approval Page

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Statement of Original Work

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James J. Avery

Name

June 5, 2020

Date

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Abstract

Diversity in School Leadership: Re-Conceptualizing the Narrative of Black Male School Principals and Assistant Principals for Recruitment and Retention. James J. Avery, 2020: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: principal, leadership, black, recruitment, retention

Educational leadership is one of the most vastly explored topics in education. School principals and assistant principals make up a substantial portion of those in leadership positions. Experiences in educational leadership have been chronicled for a number of years; however, the diversity in the recorded lived experiences is lacking. To that end, the purpose of this study was to contribute to the literature by developing an understanding of and recording the essence of Black males' experiences working in K-12 school leadership positions.

The intersection of race and gender has been proven to create dynamics which impact the enactment of leadership (Chin, 2013, p. 2). To begin to frame an understanding of how and in what ways leaders from different demographics and backgrounds experience and enact leadership, attention must be given to the experiences of those who exist at the various intersections of identity. It is not possible to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the landscape of educational leadership unless multiple experiences are considered and accounted for.

Through individual interviews and focus group discussion, this study identified a strong relationship between the racial and gender identity of Black male principals and assistant principals and how they experience leadership. Special notice was taken of the factors that contributed to the participants' desire to become school administrators as well as the factors that contributed to their resolve to remain in the position.

It was the researcher's intent that the information obtained from this study would be used to positively inform recruitment and retention programs and practices in an effort to address the disparity in the number of Black male school administrators.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The lack of racial diversity, more specifically the underrepresentation of Blacks in school leadership positions, has been a long-standing disproportionate statistic. The lack of diversification in school leadership negatively impacts student and school academic outcomes and furthers the use of policies and practices that disproportionately affect racially minoritized students (Riehl, 2000). While many districts have made claims to have established initiatives in order to diversify the education workforce, current data does not reflect that those initiatives have been successful, especially in the recruitment and retention of Black males.

The Research Problem

Diversity in leadership teams promotes a more overall effective team and contribute to more effective decision-making (Barta, Kleiner, & Neumann, 2012). In education, research has shown that students of all demographic intersections experience more positive academic, behavioral, and social outcomes when exposed to diverse staff members in schools (Dee 2004, 2005; Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015; Lindsay & Hart, 2017).

What is known about principal leadership is the result of generalizations based on research of sample populations consisting of majority White administrators (Smith, 2019). Additionally, most research studies about minorities in leadership treat them as idiosyncrasies instead of legitimate studies which should permeate the most widely-accepted scholarship (Chin, 2013, p.1). To that end, what is known about principal leadership may not necessarily be applicable to Black school administrators who share

different backgrounds and experiences from White school administrators (Lomotey & Swanson, 1989, p. 6). Ospina and Foldy (2009) argue that part of the agenda for advancing leaders of color is actually documenting their voices and experiences in order to understand how “individuals and collectives have resisted” thereby “creating spaces where marginalized voices become powerful” (p. 877). Smith (2019) substantiates the fact that Blacks continue to be the most underrepresented and under-researched group in scholarship surrounding educational leadership; what is more, Toldson (2011) also revealed that Black men who have a degree in education are more likely than any other race gender group to become an educational administrator (p. 183). Given that fact, existing scholarship stands to benefit from any empirical research which focuses on the experiences of Black males in educational leadership. Presently, it is not known how and in what ways the intersection of race and gender influences the aspirations and professional experiences of Black male administrators.

Phenomenon of Interest

The intersection of race and gender has been proven to create dynamics which impact the enactment of leadership (Chin, 2013, p.2). Most studies reviewed on the topic of race and its effects on leadership describe race as a factor to be overcome or a “constraint that must be managed” (Chin, 2013, p. 2). There are other studies, however, in which race is viewed as a personal resource in which “leaders turn negative experiences into constructive change in the enactment of leadership” (Chin, 2013, p.2). In leadership, Black men are members in the gendered majority, but still exist in the racial minority. Given the ability to capitalize on shared gendered experiences with men in the racial majority (White), Black men in leadership still report feelings of racial

alienation and isolation on the job (Wingfield, 2018).

The degree to which their leadership experience is impacted by race and gender is a layered phenomenon. Understanding this phenomenon is twofold as the demographic intersection of Black males must come to be understood from both their own consciousness, how they view themselves, and also how they are perceived by others. Both layers of perception are crucial in developing a more comprehensive understanding of the sum of the experience of Black male administrators. The implication here is that understanding how the intersection of race and gender influences how Black males experience working in school administration can ultimately give valuable insight towards the point of informing the methods districts use in recruitment and retention which will thereby increase the representation of Black males in administrative positions.

Background and Justification

Understanding more deeply the lack of diversity in school leadership is of particular importance because the demographics of the student population has continued to change, but the demographics of educational leaders has not (Hill et al., 2016; Castro et al., 2018). One of the first steps in rectifying the problem is determining why the problem exists and how it is perpetuated. The lack of literature dedicated to the study of Black principals and assistant principals and their contributions to the field of education both pre and post *Brown v. Board of Education* only serves to widen the gap of understanding in how Black male administrators experience the principalship and respond to the expectations of the position, as well as how those two factors impact their performance in schools (Brown & Beckett, 2007; Tillman, 2008). Focusing on the experience of Black males in school leadership is the beginning of a much larger

fundamental discourse involving the collective voices of the minority persons represented in school leadership to determine how their experiences can be used to inform recruitment and retention practices. To continue as is would mean that the gap in racial and ethnic representation will continue to grow, and the perpetuation of a racially and ethnically imbalanced workforce would continue to be the accepted norm (Murtadha & Watts, 2005, p. 591).

By gaining a deeper understanding through the themes that arise out of this research study of how Black males experience school leadership, school districts can provide focalized recruitment which could encourage more Black males to aspire to the position of assistant principal or principal and assist in closing the gap in representation. The themes that arise from this study might also highlight differences in the professional development needs of the target population which will help school districts provide adequate support to those in the position which will aid in the retention of those already in the position.

Ultimately, it is important that the literature that comprises the school of thought around school leadership is representative of the multiple perspectives and experiences that make up the current workforce. The investigation of the experiences of Black males in school leadership and the incorporation of their perspectives into the current body of research and literature will assist in the implementation of practices and policies that promote the diversification of the current workforce demographics.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

To begin framing an understanding of how the current demographic makeup of school leaders has been perpetuated, researchers must look at possible historical causes

and how they inform present-day societal constructs that continue to support the marginalization of minority groups in school leadership, and for this study, Black males. Further understanding the narrative, researchers must also analyze how race and gender impact the experiences of Black male principals and assistant principals. In support of the diversification of the school administrator workforce to be more closely aligned to the student population, attention must be paid to the motivations and experiences of the minority populations currently serving in the principal and assistant principal positions. In that regard, there remains a lack of literature addressing the present shortage of Black male school administrators, and while it is an ongoing trend, research has yet to conceptualize its true causes and offer solutions (Carter, 2008; Jones, 2002). Central to restarting the conversation is an examination of how Black males are presently experiencing the principalship and assistant principalship and using that narrative to reconceptualize the approach to recruitment and retention of Black male school administrators.

Audience

The primary audiences that may benefit from this study are Black men who are seeking promotion to or who are currently working in assistant principal or principal positions across the United States. Additionally, school districts that have an interest in equity and diversification of school leaders, as well as employees who are directly involved in the recruitment, hiring, development, and retention of assistant principals and principals may be interested in this research study.

Setting of the Study

All of the participants in the study were currently serving as principals or assistant

principals in a suburban school district in Virginia. The district was made up of 28 elementary schools, 10 middle schools, and 7 high schools. During the 2019-2020 school year, the district had an enrollment of approximately 41,600 students. Of those students, 46% identify as White, 33% as Black, 11% as Hispanic, and 8% as two or more races. Thirty-five percent of students in this district fell into the economically disadvantaged category and 38% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch. All of the district's schools were fully accredited as of the 2019-2020 school year.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher served as an assistant principal a neighboring school district, but does not and had not had a supervisory or nonsupervisory relationship with any of the participants in the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to document and describe how the experience of being a Black male influences and intersects the experience of being a school administrator. The goal of the study was to re-conceptualize the narrative of Black male assistant principals and principals by sharing the lived experiences of this underrepresented population. Specifically, this study examined the assistant principal's and principal's perception of the duties associated with school leadership, what internal and external factors motivated them to continue in the role, and what challenges they faced that they believed were unique to their position as Black male school administrators. This study was intended to provide updated information to audiences about the lived experiences of Black male administrators in order to inform recruitment and retention efforts to promote a more diversified leadership workforce in schools across

the country.

Definition of Terms

Administrator

This term is used throughout this study to collectively identify both principals and assistant principals (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments).

Assistant Principal

This term refers to a school-based education administrator responsible for facilitating the day-to-day requirements of their school (Bates, 2020).

Principal

This term refers to a person who has controlling authority or is in a leading position, such as the chief executive officer of an educational institution (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2020).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The review of the literature is organized into four thematic sections. Section 1 explains the theoretical perspective used to interpret and validate participant's voices and experiences. Section 2 provides background on the historical representation of Blacks in education. Section 3 defines possible causes of the underrepresentation of Black male assistant principals and principals. Section 4 provides an explanation of the concept of intersectionality that is used to describe the unique experiences of the participants in this study.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was selected as the most appropriate perspective for interpreting and validating participant's voices. Key to the understanding of CRT is the assumption that "race" as we know it is a social construct, and racial differences were invented by, and thereby are supported by, societal constructs (Ladson-Billings, 1998). This study applies Critical Race Theory in the attempt to identify ways in which the societal construct of race has perpetually supported the consistently low numbers of black males in assistant principal and principal positions. Critical Race theorists are of the mind that the majority of racism is not overt, but racism is more comprised of less conspicuous acts perceived as normal by people other than those who encounter it directly (Carter, 2008; Dixson, Anderson, & Donner, 2017). Respectively, it becomes important to seek out the narrative experiences of those who fall into under-represented categories as a means to determine which "less conspicuous acts" are more pervasive in the minority community of Black school administrators, and how their experiences of those acts shape the way they view themselves and operate in their positions. Researchers

who employ CRT as a framework place emphasis on the knowledge constructed by the lived experiences of people of color in efforts to challenge the commonly-accepted narratives around race, specifically that people of color are subordinate to whites. Dixson calls this “naming one’s own reality” which is a pillar in the work of Critical Race theorists (2017). Carter further identifies a total of five basic tenets of CRT, and of those five, two are central to the interpretation of the experiences of Black male administrators in this research study. Those specific tenets are:

1. the significance of experiential knowledge and employing storytelling to “analyze the myths, presumptions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and invariably render blacks and other minorities one-down” (citing Delgado, 1995, p. xiv), and
2. challenging traditional and dominant discourse and paradigms on race, gender, and class by showing how these social constructs intersect to affect people of color.

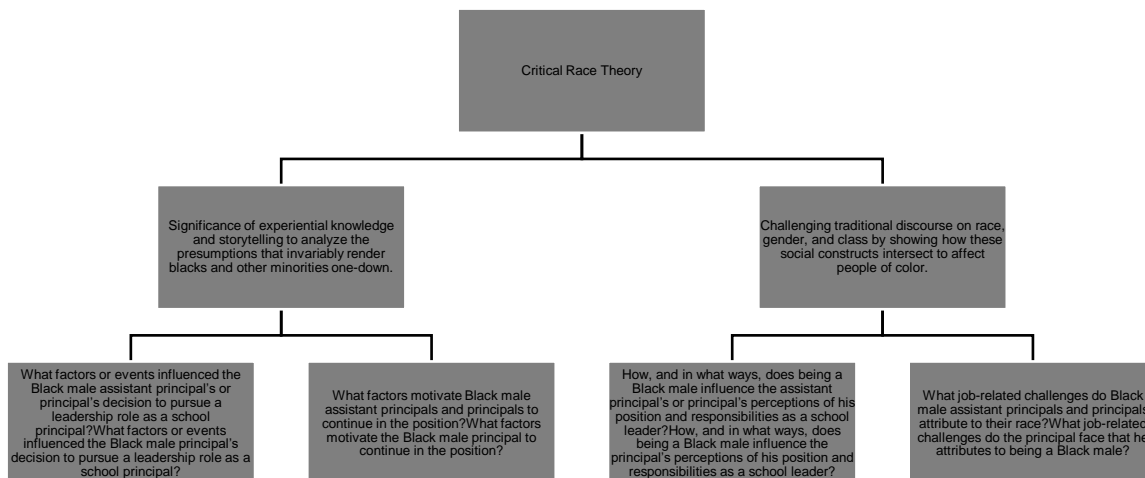


Figure. Alignment of research questions to the theoretical framework.

The second identified tenet which focuses on challenging the dominant discourse is essential to the use of Critical Race theory because, as Dixson states, “most oppression does not seem like oppression to the perpetrator.” It is akin to the African proverb which says, “until the lion tells the story, the hunter will always be the hero.” Black voices are exponentially important to a complete discussion and analysis of racial disparity due to that fact that the dominant group constructs reality in such a way as to maintain their privilege which has negatively affected members of the Black community and will continue to until Blacks have had the opportunity to speak on their own experiences and be heard.

Through his work with Critical Race Theory, scholar Devon Carbado (2011) developed certain boundaries for scholars intending to engage CRT in racial analysis of phenomena in education. Pertinent to this research study are Carbado’s ideas that 1) the racial progress narrative should not be viewed as a linear progression of uplift and improvement, and 2) racism is a structural phenomenon and not a problem derived from individuals and institutions not formally treating people the same. The claim here is not

that it is the fault of any one person or institution that there is a disparity in the representation of Black male school administrators, but that this is the sum of decades worth of discriminatory practices and philosophies that have created and sustained conditions under which this has become an acceptable part of our educational continuum.

Role of the Administrator

Highly qualified and dedicated school administrators are paramount in maintaining and running high quality schools (Cusick, 2003). Stakeholders view the principal as the face and central representation of the school and its programs (Cranston, 2007). Day, Harris, and Hadfield (2001) describe the role of school administrators as motivating teachers, school learning cultures, and parent participation. They continue on to say that the most effective administrators “remain enthusiastic and committed to learning” and place paramount focus on the “the betterment of the young people and staff who work in the school” (p. 55). As the educational landscape continues to change, the roles and responsibilities of principals and assistant principals continue to expand as well (Reddekopp, 2008). Principals and assistant principals are expected to be a transformational leader who can communicate the vision for a school and also develop systems and put people in place to sustain it (Connelly, 2008). Not only are they tasked with sustaining the vision of the school, but they are also expected to positively transform and impact the culture of learning and academic outcomes for students (Fullan, 2002). Principals and assistant principals are also responsible for meeting the social needs of the students they serve, including the promotion of diversity, social-economic disparities, and learning deficiencies (Durdin, 2008).

Historical Representation of Black Educators

Prior to *Brown v Board of Education* (1954), *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896) declared segregated schools to be constitutional. With that, the education workforce was segregated as well. Black teachers and school administrators were relegated to work in all-black schools serving all-black students. *Brown v Board of Education* unraveled the previous court ruling of *Plessy v Ferguson* and ruling the racial segregation of schools to be unconstitutional. The *Brown v Board of Education* ruling initiated the integration of schools, and ultimately the integration of the education workforce. The education field provided Blacks more employment opportunities than other arenas of the labor market during this time, and data collected from the U.S. census from 1890 to 1910 shows that nearly 45 percent of Black professionals were working in education during that time (Foster, 1997), but that number proved to be unsustainable.

The *Brown v Board of Education* decision was the anticipated dawning of an era of what should have been equal opportunity for Black students to receive a quality education, and theoretically, it should have provided for “a more equitable context for Black administrators to continue the important work of educating Black children” (Tillman, 2004, p. 110). This was not so, and the reality was that the decline in the number of Black principals and assistant principals continued to rapidly decline.

Black administrators were subject to overt and covert racism that took many forms over the immediate time period following the *Brown v Board of Education* ruling. Some Blacks were demoted to positions that were both undesirable and not comparable to the position of leadership they once held. Robert Hooker’s 1971 study uncovered trends in the Southern states, including Virginia, that contributed to the low number of

Black administrators. Such contributing factors included the transferring of established principals and assistant principals to other undesirable schools, assigning them to central office-type settings wherein they were subservient to White supervisors, and even placing them back into classroom teaching positions (Rousmaniere, 2013).

Montalvo (2018) describes the increase and decrease in the number of Black assistant principals and principals as happening in three distinct waves. The first wave of decline occurred in the four year period immediately following the *Brown v Board of Education* ruling wherein Blacks in education were experiencing overt racism as a result of the integration of schools. However, due to focused attempts to increase diversity in the early 70s, the number of Black administrators increased. By the mid-70s, the increasing rate of hiring and promotion of Black administrators had decreased and termination of employment had increased, leading to another drop in the overall numbers of Blacks in school leadership. In the February 1972 publication by the Columbia University National Center for Research and Information on Equal Educational Opportunity, it was stated that black principals were being removed from offices “at a time where they are most needed” in a national trend that would “alarm the dedicated educator and delight the bigot.” The publication also stated that in Virginia, the state in which this study is conducted, in 1964 there were 107 black secondary principals; by 1970, there were only 16. Hines and Bryne (1980) reported that Black principals lost employment due to factors such as integration issues, and that Blacks were not given the same level of respect as their white colleagues because white educators believed that many Blacks were hired because of their skin color and not their ability to perform the job.

Additionally, in a racially polarized society, Blacks were neither allowed to nor acknowledged to have the capacity to lead or supervise Whites in any role, including educational leadership. Except in communities which were made up of a mostly Black student and teacher population, Blacks were not able to keep their positions as school administrators.

As years progressed, the phenomenon described by Carter (2008) in reference to CRT became more prevalent. Carter states that racism in itself is normalized in American society, and historically, racism has been a pervasive part of the narratives of Black people. This theme continues to prevail as blacks in leadership in America are consistently perceived as being less-competent and capable than whites in the same field, and Ladson-Billings (1998) asserts that the normalization of racism is the primary cause.

Systemic Causes of the Perception of the Black Male Administrator Shortage

No one thing has been reported to be the sole cause of the Black male administrator shortage. However, certain factors have been identified as having an impact on the number of Black males who pursue the assistant principalship and principalship. Toldson (2013) recognizes several probable factors which point toward the low number of Black male administrators. According to Toldson (2013), Black males are less likely to graduate from a college or university, and they are less likely to major in education. Sanchez, Thornton, and Usinger (2008) list these additional reasons for Black males not aspiring to or attaining the assistant principal or principal position:

1. Black males may perceive that the values of the educational system ignore or conflict with their community.
2. Black males' aspirations are not influenced by the educational environment.

3. There may be a lack of support for Black males' aspirations.
4. Overt and covert resistance faced from the educational system exists.
5. There is a low number of mentors and role models who share similar racial and ethnic backgrounds.
6. Negative stereotypes regarding the principal position continue to be perpetuated.
7. There is a lack of research regarding Black principals and their career aspirations.

Racism and Its Impacts on Leadership

Educational administration continues to confront the issues of effectively engaging in efforts to promote racial and ethnic diversity in the leadership of K-12 schools resulting in a field that remains predominately white (Tillman, 2003, p. 1). By and large, the general study of leadership has left out minority perspectives in the literature (Gooden, 2012). While not fairly represented in the academic discourse on educational leadership, pop culture's representation of Black male administrators has added to the "knowledge-base" in a way that "narrowly defines" Black male administrators as "hero educators who are called to do the highly improbably while making it look routine" (Gooden, 2012, p. 68). Tillman (2007) outlined the role-defining tasks of Black male administrators, especially principals, as portrayed in pop culture as autocratic, keeping troubled (typically Black) students in line, running the school's operations with a "firm hand", and establishing their word as the final say.

The placement of Black school administrators also calls into question if lingering effects or assumptions from the era of *Brown v. Board of Education* still have impact today. The implicit indication of Black administrators indicates that Black administrators are better suited to, or can only be effective in schools that are predominately black and

White administrators are more equipped to lead schools which are diverse or predominately White (McCray, White & Beachum, 2007).

Shortage of Potential Candidates

The traditional path to becoming a school administrator begins with first being a classroom teacher (Davis, Gooden, & Bowers, 2017). Additionally, most states require an advanced degree in order to be eligible to pursue principalship. A 2016 National Center for Education Statistics report cited by Milner states that of 3.1 million school teachers in public school systems across the United States, only 2 percent of those teachers are Black men. With a shortage of Black male teachers, the already small candidate pool for Black male administrators is made smaller by default. Based on the current literature, there is not enough evidence to come to a definitive conclusion on how systemic practices may inform the Black male administrator shortage, but it can be inferred that an increase in the number of Black male teachers will at least set the stage for the enlargement of the potential candidate pool.

Intersectionality of Race and Gender

Central to reconceptualizing the narrative of Black male administrators is understanding how their identity impacts their experiences. Crenshaw (1989), who coined the term “intersectionality,” originally applied the concept through a feminist lens to the understanding of the experiences of Black women. Crenshaw asserted that the experiences of Black women could not fully be comprehended without taking into account the duality of their experience as both women and as being Black. Crenshaw’s same claim of the need to understand a person’s experience through all relevant lenses in order to better understand their sum lived experience can be applied in multiple ways: in

this case, to the understanding of the lived experiences of Black male assistant principals and principals.

Race is the first layer of the intersectional examination of Black male administrators. Krogman (1945) defines race as ““a sub-group of peoples possessing a definite combination of physical characters, of genetic origin, the combination of which to varying degrees distinguishes the sub-group from other sub-groups of mankind” (p. 49). In a purely biological sense, race does not impact or inhibit a person’s behavioral, social, educational, or psychological capabilities. However, other’s perceptions of the social construct of race can have negative implications for an individual’s development and functioning in society (Casas, 1984). Black males in leadership often experience racism and are stereotyped based upon societal perceptions of Black men in general (Riehl, 2000). According to Jones (2002), Black assistant principals and principals often have to fight against the stereotype that they are incompetent or not qualified to perform the job just based on the color of their skin. While schools have been integrated for some time, there is still segregation of thought toward Blacks as school leaders. Black school administrators find themselves having to work harder than their white colleagues to prove their ability to do the job. Even with additional credentials, some are still seen as not being qualified due to the color of their skin.

Gender provides an additional layer of intersectionality experienced by Black male administrators. Gill and Arnold (2015) investigated how male school administrators interpreted their work in light of recent shifts to a more managerial role in school leadership for principals. The study showed that work-induced emotional stress is a typical experience of running a school; however, men who exhibit emotional responses

toward work go against the stereotype of the impersonal male leader. Koenig (2018) describes two types of gender roles: descriptive and prescriptive. Descriptive describes how men and women usually act. Prescriptive explains how society believes men and women *should* act. At the intersectionality of race and gender for Black men, they are not only subject to the societal expectations of how men *usually* or *should* act, but they are subject to the societal expectations of how Black men *usually* and *should* act.

When analyzing how Black men experience being principals, it is through this lens of intersectionality that their lived experiences begin to make sense through their understanding and conceptualization of their own race and gender and the obstacles they face because of those two identifying attributes (Koenig,2018).

Gaps in Literature

A good amount of focus has been put on the low numbers of Black male teachers in the education profession; however, the conversation stops shy of talking about Black male representation in school leadership (Foster, 1997; Lynn, 2006; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010; Pabon, Anderson, & Kharem, 2011; Lewis & Toldson, 2013; De Brey, Musu, McFarland, 2019). The dominant voice that represents school leadership is White; however, there are others who hold positions in leadership whose experiences and attitudes are different which result in a need for differentiated approaches in recruitment, development, and retention practices. To ignore this phenomenon and not attempt to provide thorough analysis of the educational leadership experience of Black males is to leave a call for representation unanswered and to preserve practices which leave Black voices silenced and uninvited to the broader conversation of school leadership (Esquivel et al., 2002).

Research Questions

The research question which is central to this study is: How do Black males experience being school assistant principals and principals? Four specific questions were used to guide this qualitative research:

1. What factors or events influenced the Black male assistant principal's or principal's decision to pursue a leadership role as a school principal?
2. Perception is defined as "the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted" and "intuitive understanding and insight" (Oxford, 2019).
How, and in what ways, does being a Black male influence the assistant principal's or principal's perceptions of his position and responsibilities as a school leader?
3. What job-related challenges do Black male assistant principals and principals attribute to their race?

What factors motivate Black male assistant principals and principals to continue in the position?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The topic of this dissertation was the diversification of school leadership by way of the recruitment and retention of Black males. It was a phenomenological study of the lived experiences of Black male assistant principals and principals. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the internal and external factors that motivate Black males to pursue assistant principal and principal positions, and what factors increase the likelihood that they will remain in the position. Haynes (2006) notes that research questions are developed out of a “perceived knowledge deficit within a subject area or field of study,” and it is important to become familiar with the boundary between current knowledge and ignorance.

The research questions designed for this study were:

1. What factors or events influenced the Black male assistant principal’s or principal’s decision to pursue a leadership role as a school principal?
2. Perception is defined as “the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted” and “intuitive understanding and insight” (Oxford, 2019).
How, and in what ways, does being a Black male influence the assistant principal’s or principal’s perceptions of his position and responsibilities as a school leader?
3. What job-related challenges do Black male assistant principals and principals attribute to their race?
4. What factors motivate Black male assistant principals and principals to continue in the position?

Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach in which “the researcher is interested in understanding the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved,” “what is important to the [participants],” and “how the [participants] make sense of their lives and their worlds” (Merriam, 2009; Keegan, 2009, p. 11). Qualitative research is more concerned with what, why, and how, and less concerned with how many or how much (Keegan, 2009, p.11). Qualitative researchers are interested in three basic things: (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009).

Underscoring the qualitative approach of this research study was the philosophy of phenomenology which brings attention to the experience itself and how the experience is transformed into consciousness (Merriam, 2009). A phenomenological approach was utilized because the researcher wanted to obtain an in-depth, personal perspective concerning Black male administrators’ experiences in school leadership and how the intersection of race and gender influenced their experiences. Additionally, phenomenological research is “based on the assumption that there is an essence to shared experience... and these essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced (Patton, 2002, p. 106).

The most common method for data collection is the phenomenological interview; therefore, the most appropriate method for collecting data for this research study was identified as being a semi-structured interview (Merriam, 2009; Kvale & Brinkman, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Keegan (2009, p.13) describes the relationship between the researcher and the research participant in qualitative research as “informal,

rather like a normal conversation; fluid, open-ended... and creative.”

In addition to the interviews, the researcher developed a focus group comprised of three of the participants who agreed to the interview in order to gain further insight into their experiences. Focus groups present a more natural environment than individual interviews and allow participants to “respond to and build upon” ideas and views presented by others in the group which “produces a range of opinions, ideas, and experiences” that generate insightful information (Litosseliti, 2003). Litosseliti also states that participants should find focus group discussions “comfortable and enjoyable” and participants should be encouraged to present different points of view. In addition, Litosseliti stresses the importance of positive group dynamics conducive to discussion and interaction within the focus group.

Quantitative methodologies were not appropriate for this study because participant voices and perspectives are an integral part in describing their lived experiences. For this study, the descriptive nature of participant experiences could not be adequately expressed or illustrated through numbers or statistical analysis.

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants for this study. Purposive sampling involves identifying and selecting those who are knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest and is based on the assumption that “the [researcher] wants to ...gain insight and therefore must select the sample from which the most can be learned” (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Merriam, 2009). It is important that those in the sample be willing to participate and articulately communicate experiences and opinions (Bernhard, 2017). The strategy used to facilitate this sampling

was homogeneity which seeks to describe a particular subgroup in depth, reduce variation, and facilitate group interviewing (Palinkas et al., 2015). The three criteria for the composition of the study population were ethnic composition, gender, and professional position at the time of the study.

Researchers engaging in qualitative studies often use the concept of saturation to determine sample size (Morse, 2000; Jette, Grover & Keck, 2003; Ritchie, 2003; Charmaz, 2006). For phenomenology, Creswell (1998) suggests a sample size of five to 25, while Morse (1994) suggests the sample size be at least six. Strauss and Corbin (1998) states that one of the limits to saturation is the availability of participants. Due to the nature of the study, participant availability is a limitation of the study sample due to the small number of eligible administrators in the total population. The researcher expected at least five participants in the study sample however, six potential candidates consented to the study and became participants.

At the time of the study, the district employed 137 principals and assistant principals, ages 24 to 66, which make up the total population. The gender and race demographics of the total population were as follows: 84 identify as White and female; 23 identify as White and male; 14 identify as Black and female; 13 identify as Black and male; 2 identify as Other and female; 1 identifies as Other and male. Of the total population, the thirteen administrators who identified as both Black and made make up the study population. Of these thirteen, two were employed at the elementary level (K-5), six at the middle school level (6-8), and five at the high school level (9-12). Ages for those in the study population ranged from 28 to 62. LeCompte and Preissle established the term criterion-based selection wherein the researcher lists the essential attributes and

proceeds to find the units matching the list (1993, p. 69-70). Criterion for the selection of the sample population was based on the following: (a) the principal or assistant principal must identify as a Black male, (b) be currently employed as a principal or assistant principal, and (c) have served at least one full school year as a school administrator.

An informational recruitment letter was sent to each of the thirteen Black male school administrators in the district (see Appendix A). Included in the letter was a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B) about their race and ethnicity, experience and tenure, and willingness to participate in the study. Individuals who expressed interest in participating in the study received a follow-up phone call for confirmation and also received a thank you letter (see Appendix C).

The participants for this study included six Black males between the ages of 35 and 62. Years of experience as a school administrator ranged from 2 years to 25 years. One of the participants currently works in the elementary setting (K-5), one works in the middle school setting (6-8), and four work in the high school setting.

Table 1

Participant List

Pseudonym	Age	Current grade-level assignment	Years of administrative experience
Administrator Allen	62	Elementary (K-5)	25
Administrator Boyd	47	High (9-12)	16
Administrator Carter	35	High (9-12)	2
Administrator Dixon	41	Middle (6-8)	9
Administrator Ellis	38	High (9-12)	5
Administrator Ford	52	High (9-12)	21

Instruments

Data for this study was collected from individual semi-structured interviews of the selected participants, followed by the use of focus group inputs. The degree of flexibility that comes with less structured interviews allows the researcher to clarify and probe which “facilitates the generation of a richer dataset” than a more structured interview (Hobson & Townsend, 2010).

The following instruments were developed by the researcher to facilitate the research and data collection process.

Demographic Questionnaire

The demographic questionnaire was developed to assess the administrator’s compatibility to participate in the study. The questionnaire is composed of four questions that gather essential information about the administrator to determine his compatibility as a potential participant in the research study. The questionnaire asks the administrator’s name, years of experience, current grade level assignment (elementary, middle, high), and willingness to participate in the research study.

Interview Protocol

The interview questions (see Appendix D) were developed to assist in revealing significant factors that lead to the participant’s decision to pursue a position as a building principal, and what factors have influenced his decision to remain in the position. The purpose of the research study provided guidance in the development of the interview questions. The researcher reviewed research questions for potential themes which led to the development of specific interview questions aligned to the four central research questions. There are twenty-eight items on the interview instrument. Questions one

through three are introductory in nature and gather participant background information pertinent to analyzing responses to subsequent questions. Interview questions four through eight are aligned with research question one. Interview questions nine through fifteen are aligned with research question two. Interview questions sixteen through twenty-one are aligned with research question three. Interview questions twenty-two through twenty-five are aligned with research question four. Questions twenty six through twenty eight are meant to bring closure to the interview.

The interview questions were created with the intent to guide the conversation between the researcher and the research participant through the most important areas of inquiry of the research study while still providing fluidity and flexibility for the research participant to provide in-depth insight into his own perceptions and experiences as they relate to the broader research question.

Focus Group Protocol

Focus group discussion protocol and prompts (see Appendix E) were developed to further examine participant's experiences and assist in the analysis and synthesis of information for the development of themes. The Focus Group Protocol instrument was developed by assessing the Interview Question instrument and selecting questions that were suitable for extended open-ended responses and building upon those questions to promote interaction and discussion among focus group participants. The Focus Group Protocol instrument allows for the introduction of participants, establishes the protocols and parameters for discussion and is followed by discussion prompts which will be used by the researcher as the moderator of the discussion to promote thought and discussion amongst the participants.

There are fifteen discussion prompts on the Focus Group Protocol instrument. Prompt one is introductory in nature and meant focus participant's attention and subsequent responses on the research topic. Discussion prompt two is aligned with research question one. Discussion prompts three through six are aligned with research question two. Discussion prompts seven through nine are aligned with research question three. Discussion prompts ten through fourteen are aligned with research question four. Discussion prompt fifteen is meant to bring closure to the focus group discussion.

As no previously developed research instrument specifically addressed the area of focus for this research study, professional colleagues were used to support the validity and reliability of the interview protocol and focus group protocol developed by the researcher. The researcher selected and engaged seven members of the professional community in a test of the researcher-developed instruments. Those who participated in the test of the instruments were outside of the study population and shared the demographics of and held the same positions as members of the study population in the interview data collection process. Feedback was gathered from those who participated in the test and adjustments were made to both the interview protocol instrument and the focus group protocol instrument to ensure clarity of items on the instruments as well as alignment of items on the instruments to the research questions.

Procedures

After approval of the Institutional Review Board, the researcher began data collection procedures. An external research request was submitted to the identified district in the research setting informing them of the research study and its purpose. Once the research study was approved by the district, possible participants were identified

based on the demographic interests of the study and an informational recruitment letter was sent to them outlining the purpose of the study and the procedures for data collection. Potential participants who consent to participate in the study consented to complete a demographic questionnaire to further determine their compatibility for the research study, an individual interview, as well as participation in a focus group if selected.

Interviews were scheduled to be completed within one hour based on the preferred time, date, and location of the participant. Each participant in the sample population was reminded of the interview protocol to include the purpose of the interview and study, the role of the participant in the study, and the process and parameters for data collection. The researcher ensured confidentiality of the participant's demographic information and responses.

Notes were taken during the interview using both pen and paper as well as a recording device. Rapport with the participant was established through information discussion about the participant's personal and professional background. A set of interview questions developed by the researcher was used to facilitate the interview and collect data. After the interview, the interview was transcribed by the researcher and returned to the participant to allow them to check recorded responses for accuracy. After member checking for all participant responses was complete, transcriptions were prepared for analysis.

After individual participant interviews were complete, participant responses were reviewed for the purpose of creating a focus group of three participants. Focus group participants were selected based on participants' individual interview responses and the need for a diversity in the representation of experiences. The focus group was scheduled

based on the availability of participants and conducted in a neutral space to help in avoiding participant bias. The researcher moderated the discussion using the focus group discussion instrument (see Appendix E). After the completion of the focus group discussion, the discussion was transcribed by the researcher. The researcher sent a copy of the transcription to each participant to allow them to check the transcription for accuracy.

At the conclusion of the individual interview cycle and the focus group discussions, transcription, and member checking, a thank you letter was sent to all participants.

Data Analysis

After the completion of data collection from the interviews and transcription, the researcher completed the analysis of the data. Qualitative data analysis requires a high level of interpretation and synthesis of the results (Keegan, 2009, p. 13). More specifically, in interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), it is assumed that the researcher is interested in learning something about the participants' psychological world in the form of constructs that arise out of the participants' responses (Smith & Eatough, 2006). The data analysis process used by the researcher was informed by the steps outlined by Smith and Eatough (2006).

Responses were categorized and coded based on instances in which participants express 1) personal thought or opinion, 2) feelings, 3) stress and challenges, 4) positive experiences, and 5) suggestions. The researcher realized that upon further review of the data collected, additional codes were necessary to accurately categorize participant responses. Once coded and categorized, the researcher sought trends in the frequency of

certain words and phrases in the participants' responses to determine themes that arose out of the data. Words and phrases that appeared most often were reported as themes that were most important to the participants; words and phrases that appear least often were reported as themes that were of lesser importance to the participants.

To initiate the data analysis process, the researcher carefully reviewed each transcript in order to promote familiarity with the accounts, and make marginal notes about what seems to be important or interesting in each of the participants' responses, akin to a free textual response. These marginal notes were organized, analyzed, and synthesized into emergent themes.

While reviewing participant responses to the interview questions which were aligned with the central research questions, the researcher looked for themes that arose out of participants' responses which connected participants' experiences and provided context for comparative analysis.

Next, the researcher reviewed the transcript of the focus group discussion to determine the important themes that arose out of the discussion. The researcher annotated the discussion using the same categorization and coding used to identify themes in the individual interviews.

Limitations

This study was limited to the perspectives of those participants included in the study; therefore, the findings of the study are not a comprehensive representation of the much broader general population of Black male principals. Participants' perspectives were influenced by environmental and personal factors which are unique to them and may not be shared by other Black male principals in other regions.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This study explored how the intersection of race and gender influenced the experiences of Black male principals and assistant principals in the K-12 school setting. Studying their experiences revealed the importance of understanding the diverse experiences of school administrators provided that current systems and structures were developed for demographic majority which happens to be white males. The results presented are a culmination of the administrator's perspectives and experiences and allow the reader to delve more deeply into their lived experiences. The data collection interview and focus group processes were guided by four central research questions:

1. What factors or events influenced the Black male assistant principal's or principal's decision to pursue a leadership role as a school principal?
2. Perception is defined as "the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted" and "intuitive understanding and insight" (Oxford, 2019). How, and in what ways, does being a Black male influence the assistant principal's or principal's perceptions of his position and responsibilities as a school leader?
3. What job-related challenges do Black male assistant principals and principals attribute to their race?
4. What factors motivate Black male assistant principals and principals to continue in the position?

Chapter Four presents the findings that arose from the individual interviews of six Black male administrators and a focus group of three. The varied educational and professional backgrounds, current work settings, and years of experience provided for a

more comprehensive overview of lived experiences and allowed for a broader understanding of the implications of race and gender on their experiences. The analysis of the interview and focus group transcriptions provided the opportunity for the researcher to identify commonly used words, phrases, and patterns of thought which lead to the emergence of themes. The researcher identified patterns in the way the participants described their experiences and then categorized them based on frequency. The seven themes represented in the findings provide a starting point from which to explain how race and gender inform and impact the experiences of Black male administrators as well as provide a point from which to begin to address the research questions which are the foundation of this study.

Participant Descriptions

Each of the six participants provided background information in addition to the information contained in the demographic questionnaire which gave additional insight into who they are as individuals outside of and inside of the professional context. Participants have a combined 68 years of administrative experience in K-12 schools and currently work in elementary, middle, and high school settings. Pseudonyms Allen, Boyd, Carter, Dixon, Ellis, and Ford were assigned to the participants to in order to promote confidentiality when reporting the findings of the research study.

Administrator Allen

Administrator Allen is a sixty-two-year-old elementary school principal with 25 years of experience. Mr. Allen is originally from Virginia. He has served as an administrator at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. His highest level of educational attainment is a master's degree. Prior to entering into administration, he

served as a middle school social studies teacher.

Administrator Boyd

Administrator Boyd is a forty-seven-year-old high school assistant principal with 16 years of experience. Mr. Boyd is originally from New Jersey. He has served as an administrator at both the middle and high school levels. His highest level of educational attainment is a doctoral degree. Prior to entering into administration, he served as a high school math teacher.

Administrator Carter

Administrator Carter is a thirty-five-year-old high school assistant principal with two years of experience. He has served both years as a high school administrator. His highest level of educational attainment is a master's degree. Prior to entering into administration, he served as a middle school science teacher.

Administrator Dixon

Administrator Dixon is forty-one-year old middle school principal with nine years of experience. He is originally from Virginia. He has served as an administrator at the middle school level for all nine years of his experience. His highest level of educational attainment is a master's degree. Prior to entering into administration, he served as a high school social studies teacher.

Administrator Ellis

Administrator Ellis is a thirty-eight-year-old high school assistant principal with five years of experience. He is originally from South. He has served as an administrator at the high school level for all five years of his experience. His highest level of educational attainment is a master's degree. Prior to entering into administration, he

served as a high school English teacher.

Administrator Ford

Administrator Ford is a fifty-two year old high school principal with 21 years of experience in administration. He is originally from Virginia. He has served as an administrator at the high school level for all 21 years of his experience. His highest level of educational attainment is a doctoral degree. Prior to entering into administration, he served as a physical education teacher and athletic director.

Emerging Themes

Research questions were answered through the individual participant interviews as well as through the focus group discussion. Research question one was answered through participants' responses to interview questions 4-8 and focus group question 2; research question two was answered through participants' responses to interview questions 9-15 and focus group questions 3-6; research question three was answered through participants' responses to interview questions 16-21 and focus group questions 7-9; and research question four was answered through participants' responses to interview questions 22-25 and focus group questions 10-14.

Through the interview and focus group processes, participants chronicled their experiences as Black male school administrators, and across the discussions, seven prominent themes emerged. These themes, while not comprehensive of all that the administrators face, provide a broad stroke overview of how Black males experience the principalship and assistant principalship.

Tables 2-5, organized by research question, show the frequency in which each emerging theme appeared in the transcriptions of each of the individual interviews, the

focus group, and the total number of appearances across conversations. Following each table is a narrative summary of the themes that arose to address each of the research questions.

Themes From Research Question One

Research question one asked: “What factors or events influenced the Black male assistant principal’s or principal’s decision to pursue a leadership role as a school principal?” This research question was answered by participants’ responses to questions 4-8 during the individual interviews and question 2 during the focus group. There were four emerging themes which explained why the participants chose to enter school administration. The frequency of which those themes were mentioned by participants can be found in the table below.

Table 2

Emerging Themes for Research Question 1

Themes	Number of mentions		
	Interviews	Focus Group	Total
Have broader impact on students	11	7	18
Seeking increased salary	8	7	15
Peer/colleague influence	3	5	8
Seeking general promotion	4	2	6

Broader Impact on Students

The most frequent reason participants cited as motivation for entering into school administration was to have a broader impact on students. Administrator Ellis stated, “in the classroom, I was able to get to know the thirty kids who were assigned to me. Outside of that, there wasn’t much time to get to know the other hundreds of kids in the building. I wanted to build relationships with them too, but the classroom kept me in a

box.” Administrator Allen shared a different perspective sharing his experience as one where he was able to build relationships with students through other avenues such as coaching; however, when it came down to helping them on the backside of things, he realized that he didn’t have the influence that he needed to really make major things happen on behalf of his students.

Having that larger impact on students is a motivation that all of the participants shared, and three participants expounded on that saying that it remains one of the greatest rewards of working in school administration. Administrator Ford shared that his transition into school administrator was motivated by a student who was “on the cusp of failure” and was facing many circumstances outside of school and he was not able to help the student in the ways he wanted to. Administrator Ford didn’t feel as if the current administration of the school did everything they could to help the student, and it was at that moment that Ford vowed to one day become an administrator to help prevent other students from “falling through the cracks.”

Increased Salary

Administrator Boyd recounted how he felt when he got his first paycheck as a teacher. “It was a memorable moment. I was finally making adult money after working odd jobs all through college.” He noted that after years in the classroom and a family that continued to grow, a teacher’s salary was no longer enough. Administrator Carter shared a similar story in that his growing family prompted him to seek promotion and the salary that came with it. “Some decisions you make, you make for yourself. Other decisions you make for your family. For me, this was a little of both,” Carter said.

“Everyone man wants to be able to supply for his family, and unfortunately, as

much as I loved teaching, it was becoming hard to make ends meet with a teacher's salary alone. I could have picked up another job on the side and stayed in the classroom, but that would have taken me away from my family" added Dixon.

Peer/Colleague Influence

The third most frequent theme supporting research question one was the influence of a peer or colleague who encouraged the participant to seek the position. "For me, it was my principal who saw something in me. She pulled me to the side in the hallway one day after an observation and asked me how long before I was gone. I didn't understand what she meant because administration wasn't even on my radar, but she was the first one who saw the potential in me" shared Dixon. For others, taking teacher leader roles such as department chair, PLC (professional learning community) leader, team lead, or grade-level lead, was the stepping stone to administration. Both Boyd and Ellis shared how other teachers they worked with while in leadership roles in the classroom noticed their leadership capacity and pushed them toward considering roles in administration. Allen recalled "teachers would tell me all the time if I ever got a school, they would come work for me. You know, people say things all the time, but you never really think about it like that—until you do."

Seeking Leadership Position

In addition to the other aforementioned themes, some of the participants were in the market for a general promotion and administration seemed like the logical next step. "After teaching for so long," said Ford, "I was ready to move up." He further explained that when he thought of routes to take, the assistant principalship "seemed like the next step most people took." The other five participants in the study also transitioned into

administration directly from the classroom.

Four of the six participants mentioned the desire for general promotion as a reason for seeking a position as a school administrator; however, further discussion revealed that, of those four, only two felt adequately prepared by district initiatives and programs to assume the role. “Even though I was ready, I don’t feel like [the district] prepared me for promotion. It was my master’s program and working with my principal at the time that really got me ready” said Dixon. Ellis agreed citing conversations and shadowing others in the position as the primary district-based developments. “For me, I navigated and figured it out the best way I could, but there are other brothers out there like me who are going to need some more training and support,” added Ellis.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 1

Participants discussed four major reasons why they pursued positions as assistant principals or principals. Three of the reasons were based on internal motivating factors such as a desire to have a broader impact on students, the opportunity for an increased salary, and also the desire for general promotion within education. Of those factors, the desire to have a broader impact on students was the theme that emerged the most during discussions. Additionally, peer and colleague influence was a common extrinsic factor which motivated the participants to become assistant principals and principals, respectively.

Themes From Research Question Two

Research question two asked: “How, and in what ways, does being a Black male influence the assistant principal’s or principal’s perceptions of his position and responsibilities as a school leader?” This research question was answered by

participants' responses to questions 9-15 during the individual interviews and questions 3-6 during the focus group. Six themes emerged out of the participants' responses regarding this question. The frequency of which those themes were mentioned by participants can be found in the table below.

Table 3

Emerging Themes for Research Question 2

Themes	Number of mentions		
	Interviews	Focus Group	Total
Resident disciplinarian	8	19	27
Role model for Black male students	15	11	26
Cultural minimization	8	14	22
Professional overcompensation	8	12	20
Empathetic towards students	5	9	14
Equity champion	2	5	7

Resident Disciplinarian

All participants shared that at some point during their tenure in administration, they felt as though they were perceived as the resident disciplinarian. Resident disciplinarian in this case refers to the perception that, due to being a Black male, one is more effective at student discipline, or the realization that one is sought out more than others to handle student discipline issues. "I first noticed it when I was in the classroom" shared Ellis. "Teachers would constantly ask me to intervene with students, and most of the time—almost all of the time—the student was Black," he continued. One participant shared a story of how the perception of resident disciplinarian impacted his relationships with students:

"I'm very by-the-book and I treat all of my students the same. I don't care what color [the student is]. Some of my colleagues hold some pretty different values

though. I know it, and I'm sure the students have picked up on it, too. They pretty much know what they're going to get based on the administrator they get to see. Some administrators bend the rules for the kids they like. I'm a rule-follower though. Of course I take the kid's individual circumstances into account, but you're not leaving my office with a high five and a handshake. That's just not me. Teachers know this, so of course they send students to me all the time because they want something to happen. Well, you can imagine what a couple of months like this can do to your reputation. I quickly became known as the one the kids didn't want to come see, but it also made it hard because that made it hard for me to build relationships with the kids. They see me as unapproachable, when really, I'm probably a lot nicer and more relatable than some of my colleagues, but [the students] would never know that."

Participants also shared how they try to overcome these perceptions. Dixon and Ford both shared how they make it a point to spend as much time talking about instruction as possible. "It's almost like you have to prove you can do other things sometimes," Ford shared. Dixon agreed, adding, "my job is to be an instructional leader. That's why I come to work every day. I don't come to work to suspend kids, although sometimes [I] have to. I just don't ever want that to become or people to think that's my focus because it's not."

Role Model for Black Students

Right after being a disciplinarian, the participants shared how being a Black male administrator brought about a responsibility to be a role model for Black students. "Now people talk about not having a black man teacher growing up, but I can remember coming

along in elementary school and there wasn't a black man in the whole damn building other than the janitor, and we only had one of them," Allen recalled. He continued on, saying, "Yes we had Black teachers, but none of them were men. There was nobody in the school I could look to as a model for what I could be as a man. That came from the community, but I couldn't find it in the school." Boyd shared a similar account in that he didn't have a Black male teacher until he was attending college at an HBCU.

"I think about some of the Black students who come into my office and some of the off-the-record conversations we have about real issues they're facing, especially navigating a White world wherein they're still the minority and probably will be for their lifetime. They need somebody who is able to say 'do this,' or 'don't do that' and a lot of the kids don't get that at home" stated Carter. "Sometimes it's not even in what you say to the kids. Just seeing a black man in a suit who isn't going to court sends a message" added Boyd. "We all know what the media has to say about [Black men], but we have to show not just students this color," Ford stated as he pointed to his skin, "but all students—we have to show them that there are some successful Black men out here doing what is right and were doing okay for ourselves and our families."

Cultural Minimalization

The term cultural minimalization in this case refers to having to hide or scale back parts of one's culture to operate effectively in an organization. During the focus group discussion, participants summarized it as "not being too Black." Participants shared very personal opinions about how they have often felt constricted due to the duality of being true to themselves while also attempting to combat the stereotypes of Black men. "I think extra hard about saying things because I don't want it to come across as me being

angry,” shared Ford. Allen also shared how he feels that he almost has to censor himself sometimes when speaking with White colleagues because of past experiences of being accused of making everything about race. “How can it not be about race?” posits Allen. “Everything I do, everything I see, everything I feel, I do it as a Black man,” he added. “I can’t turn that off.”

Other participants shared how being Black has influenced the perceptions that staff have of them. “Some Black teachers have told me they are glad to have a Black [administrator] in the building and others say it’s good to have somebody they can talk to who ‘understands where they are coming from,’” shared Ford. Both Ford and Ellis shared how they often are affirmed by other Black colleagues that it is okay for them to exist as Black men in the professional setting without having to be overly cautious about how they will be perceived. However, Ford and Ellis also shared how although they are being affirmed by other Black colleagues, they rarely receive that same affirmation from White colleagues.

Professional Overcompensation

“I’m sure my parents weren’t the only ones who told them ‘you have to be twice as good as them to get half of what they have,’” Carter shared during the focus group. The other participants immediately agreed, sharing other pieces of advice shared by their parents for navigating life as Black men. Professional overcompensation speaks to that advice by naming the experience all of the participants shared of taking every precaution, even extra precautions, to make sure they perform their assign tasks and cover themselves. Boyd asserted in the group, “you know just as well as I do that we are not allowed to make the same mistakes as some of the White administrators we work with.”

His point was met with head nods and sounds of affirmation. For many of the participants, they have witnessed or experienced the double scrutiny that inherently comes with being a Black administrator. Allen recalled that “back in the day, they already thought we weren’t good enough to be doing the job and we only got the position because of some act of affirmative action or to get some black faces in the school, so they were looking for reasons to run us out.” According to Dixon, there are traces of this that still exist today.

Empathetic Towards Students

Participants shared how their own upbringing and experiences as members of the minority community have informed the way they empathize with students. “I understand a lot of what [Black students] are going through because I’ve been there already,” said Carter. Boyd added that his experiences as a Black man have not only helped him to empathize with Black students, but it has helped him relate to all of his students a little better. Boyd stated, “I can take what I’ve been through and use that to find some common ground with these kids. It makes [me] a little more human when [I] can say [I] understand and actually mean it.”

When asked how, specifically, that empathy manifests in their day-to-day work, many of the participants shared that it comes up in discipline decision-making, daily interactions, and mediating issues between teachers and students. Ellis shared his take on how his experiences have impacted the way he interacts with students:

“Students don’t need me to pat on their back and tell them everything is going to be alright all of the time. A lot of these students come to me for real advice about real life, and I thank God that I’ve been through some of the things that I’ve been

through because it has allowed me to get inside these kids' heads on a personal level. I don't want any of these kids to have to go through some of the things I've been through. Life was not easy. Life is not easy. They need to know that, and they need to know not only that it gets better, but they need to know what to do right now. I've been there. I can tell them some of that.

Equity Champion

Equity champion in this context refers to someone who constantly and consistently promotes equity for all students. For two of the participants, this was something that was of utmost importance. Allen and Carter specifically cited an assumed responsibility to promote equity as a result of their identity as Black males. "I have to speak up for these kids," Allen stated. "I'm fighting every day for students. When I'm invited to the table, we're going to talk about equity before I get up," posited Carter. Equity is something these administrators care deeply about and it comes from history of minority students receiving an education that wasn't always equal to the education of White students. "That is something that is really big to me. How can we expect our kids to have an equal opportunity at being successful, functioning members of our society when a lot of what you get depends on the neighborhood you live in," argued Allen.

During the focus group discussion, this point was discussed more deeply with Dixon stating that "today, equity is a buzz word. You didn't hear the term 'equity' a lot until a couple of years ago really. Now that it's a 'thing' I find that a lot of the equity committees want to hear from Black folks. I've had more invitations to contribute to conversations about equity than anything else. It kind of makes me feel like now they're expecting us to be race experts and I'm not that person." While all participants

understood the importance of the conversation, none of them shared the desire to be the go-to person for discussions surrounding the topic.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 2

Participants discussed how the intersection of race and gender influence their perceptions of their position and responsibilities as a school leader. Throughout the discussions, six themes emerged. Of those themes, four are tied directly to the administrators' interactions with or for students. Being characterized as the "resident disciplinarian," being a role model for Black male students, having empathy for students, as well as being an equity champion all reflect back on the administrators' internal reflections on his role as a positive figurehead in the lives of students. The remaining two themes, cultural minimization and professional overcompensation, addressed how the participants navigated their professional role as school administrators and how other people's perceptions influence the administrator's professional perception of themselves and their professional identity. In terms of frequency, cultural minimization and professional overcompensation fell short only to being the "resident disciplinarian" and being a role model for Black male students.

Themes From Research Question Three

Research question three asked: "What job-related challenges do Black male assistant principals and principals attribute to their race?" This research question was answered by participants' responses to questions 16-21 during the individual interviews and questions 7-9 during the focus group. From participants' responses regarding this question, the researcher identified five themes. The frequency of which those themes were mentioned by participants can be found in the table below.

Table 4

Emerging Themes for Research Question 3

Themes	Number of mentions		
	Interviews	Focus Group	Total
Limited network of Black male administrators	8	17	25
Limited perceptions of capacity	8	11	19
Limited Black male mentors	7	10	17
Racial/cultural saviorism	5	9	14
Racial/cultural representative	3	5	8

Limited Network of Black Male Administrators

The lack of a network of Black male administrators dominated the discussion of challenges the participants face. “There really are not a lot of people I can talk to, not who look like me,” Carter said. Only having worked in administration for two years, Carter shared the importance of having people around you are comfortable speaking with about the challenges you’re facing. “Some things I can’t go to my principal about because it doesn’t affect her the way it affects me,” said Carter. “It can get lonely.”

Other participants have found supplemental networks via social media. Ford shared that he is a member of several social media-based groups. “I’m a member of a lot of Facebook groups just for Black male educators in general, and its nice to have that arena where I can be 100% me and I can vent and people understand what I’m saying without me having to explain everything.” Other participants such as Dixon and Ellis participate in chats hosted on Twitter to connect with other Black male administrators. With limited numbers of Black male administrators in districts, it can be hard to form and sustain a network of support, but social media has helped to bridge that gap for hundreds of Black male administrators across the country. “It brings us together,” Dixon shared.

“I have administrators from Georgia, Maryland, Texas who I talk to every week and it feels good,” he added.

Limited Perceptions of Capacity

Another challenge faced by administrators echoes the aforementioned refrain, “you have to be twice as good as them to get half of what they have.” All of the participants shared some sort of experience where their capacity to perform the job was questioned because of being a Black male. There were varying degrees of experiences from overt racism to microaggressions, but all of the participants agreed that in some way at some time, they were discredited based upon race.

Limited Black Male Mentors

In addition to the previous theme of having a limited network of other Black male administrators, finding a Black male mentor has proven to be another challenge faced by the participants. “We know we are few and far between as a far as overall numbers, so that makes it difficult to find someone who can mentor you through your first few years in administration,” shared Carter, a second year assistant principal. “I think there is a difference between someone who can give you good advice and a mentor. For me, a mentor is someone who can coach me through things, but also somebody who can be there if I need them.” Ellis, a fifth year administrator was able to find a mentor in the district and he stated that made a huge impact on him in his formative years in administration. “There were questions I had that I just wanted the perspective of another Black man on and [my mentor] was able to be there for me. We still have contact today and I use the advice he gave me. I can’t imagine having to go through my first or second year not having [my mentor].

Participants shared the need for a mentor, but also expressed that it is an added bonus when the mentor shares similar demographics and experiences. Allen, on the other hand, shared a different experience. His mentor was White and female and Allen added that he learned a lot about being an administrator from his mentor and he is grateful to have had her. “There is definitely something you can learn from everybody and I’m not going to take anything away from the lady who helped me when I was coming along. She was a piece of work. She knew her stuff and she knew how to run a school.” When asked if he had wished he had a Black male to mentor him as well, Allen responded with, “at that time, I was willing to take anything I could get, you know? I’ll listen to anybody who knows what they’re talking about. Black, White, man, woman. It doesn’t matter to me. If you know something I don’t know, I’m not going to turn you around because you don’t look like me.”

Racial and Cultural Saviorism

Four of the participants shared experiences wherein colleagues shared and communicated an expectation that the participants had the tools and experiences necessary to provide an out for Black students who were struggling academically, behaviorally, or socially. This came with the perception that Black administrators were able to connect with these students because of their shared experience of being Black. Ford shared:

“Often times, and I noticed it last year for the first time, when [Black] students needed help, out of all of the administrators on the team, [teachers] would bring them to me. I watched it. I studied it. Very seldom, from what I saw, would teachers take Black students who needed some kind of immediate assistance to

one of the White administrators. It's not really a compliment. I don't know if the teachers think it is or what their motive is for doing it, but sometimes I take offense to it—not because I don't want to help the kid, it just seems like the teacher is trying to say something without saying it, you know?"

"I don't really see myself as a savior of Black students, but I can definitely see where Ford is coming from," said Carter in response to Ford's example. "I think for a lot of people, its an unintentional thing that they do. We have ESL (English as a Second Language) students in our building, and when they need help, we send them to the Spanish teacher because they share that language. When our athletes need a push, we send them to their coaches because they share that connection. I think in a lot of ways, just looking at race alone, some probably feel like because we share the same race, we have that connection, too. I don't think it's done with any ill intent. It's just how it is. I definitely don't want to be seen as the savior for it, though."

From the discussion and participants responses, it can be concluded that the challenge is not that addressing Black students is an issue; but the challenge is insomuch that some people use race as a motive to force interactions they believe to be helpful which may further promote the stereotype that Black administrators are trying to fight against, that Black administrators are good for all students, not just Black students.

Racial and Cultural Representative

The last theme that emerged from participants' responses to the third research question is the experience of being the racial and cultural representative in that participants shared they are often called upon to give the Black perspective on issues. Participants attribute this to the fact that they are often the only Black person at the table

at all, so they wind up offering the Black perspective out of an assumed duty to do so.

“The issue isn’t really with me giving my perspective. I don’t mind doing that at all. The issue is that it comes across as me having to speak up because I’m the only [Black] one at the table, and that’s not okay,” posits Carter. “There is know way I can know what is on the mind of all of my black colleagues,” argued Ford, “so to take my perspective and use it to inform decisions that are going to make a difference for masses of other people, that’s a lot of responsibility that I didn’t necessarily agree to.”

Not only does this present itself in interactions with colleagues, but it appears in conversations surrounding students, too. Dixon recalled a time when his principal called him and asked, “what are we going to do for students for Black history month?” Allen, knowing exactly why he was asked, diverted by stating, “I think this is something we should discuss with the entire team.” It is important to note that Allen did not assume that principal asked him out with any ill intent, but Allen stated, “like a lot of people, when dealing with issues of race and even culture, nobody wants to get it wrong and offend anybody, and I think that is what she was doing.”

Allen, Carter, and Ellis agreed that in other cases, it can become tiring. “It’s almost like nobody wants to do any research about anything; they just want [us] to have the answers, and that can become exhausting,” said Carter.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 3

Participants were asked to describe the challenges they face which they attribute directly to being a Black male. Five major challenges were presented which highlighted areas in which the administrators require more support as well as areas in which there are needs for systemic overhauls. Two of the presented challenges are related directly to the

low numbers of Black male administrators. A limited network of Black male administrators and a limited number of Black male mentors are a direct result of the low population of Black male administrators. Participants expressed numerous times how this makes it difficult to establish and sustain an effective support system.

Other themes are related specifically to other's perceptions of and use of the participants' race in the workplace. The participants described how this manifests with some colleagues projecting the idea onto the participants that they are limited in their capacity because of their race. Participants also described how colleagues use the participants' race to imply that they are equipped to address the needs of all Black children which results in the projection of being both the racial and cultural savior and representative onto the participants.

Themes From Research Question Four

Research question four asked: "What factors motivate Black male assistant principals and principals to continue in the position?" This research question was answered by participants' responses to questions 22-25 during the individual interviews and questions 10-14 during the focus group. The researcher was able to identify four themes from the participants' responses. The frequency of which those themes were mentioned by participants can be found in the table below.

Table 5

Emerging Themes for Research Question 4

Themes	Number of mentions		
	Interviews	Focus Group	Total
Sense of impact	17	15	32
Salary and benefits	6	8	14
Years of service	4	9	13
Gain experience for promotion	2	0	2

Sense of Impact

Overwhelmingly so, participants cited that the sense of impact they have while working in the position is what keeps them coming back. “I feel like I make a difference. In fact, I know I make a difference,” said Ford. All of the participants were able to share multiple stories of students who have come back to thank them for the difference they made in their lives. Allen shared, “I can’t think of a better job where I can leave work every day knowing I’ve made a difference in some child’s life. I’ve been doing this for many, many years and it’s a feeling I’ve never felt doing anything else.”

Boyd shared similar sentiments: “Wow, for me, the best moment is graduation. To see where they came from as freshmen, to where they are now. Some going to colleges, others serving our country. That’s the best moment for me. Hearing each of their names being called and knowing where they came from.” Everyone wants to have a sense of purpose and fulfillment, and for these participants, that continues to bring them to work each day. Dixon shared his truth, saying, “this is a challenging position, we all know that, but I’m here for a reason and that’s what I keep at the front of my mind when things get bad. When I can help a student in any way, there’s nothing that makes me feel better about my job than that.”

Salary and Benefits

Participants shared that being paid an acceptable salary and having good benefits is a major factor in deciding to stay in the position. All of the participants are employed in the same district, and they all agreed that the salary and benefits in the district are sufficient and play a factor in their desire to continue in the position and continue working in this district. “I can take care of my family. That’s what matters to me, and this

job lets me do that,” said Ford. “If that ever changes,” continued Ford, “I’ll have to consider doing something else.” Ellis stated, “other districts in the area don’t have salaries like [this one]. And I have two children and a wife, so health insurance is very important to me. That can get expensive very quickly, but the price here isn’t too bad.”

Years of Service

Allen, who has been in administration for 25 years; Boyd, who has been in administration for 16 years; and, Ford, who has been in administration for 11 years all partially attribute their decision to continue in the position to the number of years they have already committed to the position. Allen, having spent a total of 37 years in education says he is too close to retirement to consider doing anything else. According to Boyd, he enjoys what he does and has more years behind him, now, than he does in front of him. For Ford, he has been committed for eleven years and at this point, he doesn’t think it would be worth it to try to make a career change now, unless it is for promotion.

Gain Experience for Promotion

Carter, Dixon, and Ellis all have career aspirations beyond their current position, and they say that remaining in the position is allowing them to gain valuable experience which will help them be marketable to assume a position at the next level. “I want to gain all of the experience I can, now, so when it’s time to move up and move on, I’ll be ready,” said Carter. Dixon and Ellis shared similar sentiments.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 4

The fourth research question required participants to reflect on their future as assistant principals and principals, respectively, and discuss what factors would contribute to them remaining in the position. Of the four themes, the one that was

presented the most is a direct reflection of the most cited reason why participants chose to enter in to the role of a school administrator. The number one factor influencing the participant's desire to remain in the role of a school administrator was the impact they feel they have on students. For the participants, the fulfillment of their desire to make a difference for students is what keeps them in the position. Also discussed as reasons for remaining in the position were the salary and benefits the position provides, the number of years the participants have already dedicated to the position, as well as the opportunity to gain necessary experiences to make them marketable for further promotions.

Summary

Chapter four presented the themes that arose out of the interview and focus group discussions. Using the unique intersection of race and gender to guide the development of the interview questions, each participant was able to respond in a way that allowed him to center himself and his experiences as Black male administrator. Each of the themes that arose from participants' responses was presented with narrative evidence that supported the relevance of the themes and connected them to the experiences of each of the individual participants.

The shared lived experiences of these participants brought not only brought attention to the challenges faced by Black male school administrators, but it also highlighted many of the reasons why these men are such valuable figureheads in our schools.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview of the Study

The demographics of the student population in the United States has continued to change over the years, however the demographics of educational leaders remains starkly the same (Hill et al., 2016; Castro et al., 2018). The lack of diversity in school leadership has negative implications for minority students which includes lowered academic outcomes as well as the perpetuation of practices and policies which disproportionately affect students in the racial minority (Riehl, 2000). Diversity in the leadership of schools has been proven to have positive impacts on all students academically, socially, and behaviorally, and also contributes to more effectively functioning teams (Dee, 2004, 2005; Barta, Kleiner, & Neumann, 2012; Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015; Lindsay & Hart, 2017).

While the lack of diversity in educational leadership has been a cited issue, research has not yet conceptualized its true causes, nor has research offered resolutions (Carter, 2008; Jones, 2002). The current knowledge base surrounding school administrators is largely based on studies around the majority which happen to be White (Smith, 2019). This has produced a wealth of literature that has its focus and implications based on the needs and experiences of White leaders in education which has produced knowledge and resources that do not represent minorities in leadership and treats studies related to the minority experience in educational leadership as idiosyncrasies instead of legitimate and needed contributions to scholarship (Lomotey & Swanson, 1989; Chin, 2013). This has contributed to the lack of research surrounding the low numbers of Black school administrators, especially male, which continues to be an

issue today.

The intent of the study was to utilize the results in identifying effective means of recruiting and retaining Black male school administrators. The study focused on the lived experiences of Black male principals and assistant principals and how the participants' race and gender impacted their experiences. A qualitative study was conducted using six participants who are currently employed as principals or assistant principals in the district of study. A phenomenological approach was utilized due to its ability to allow the researcher to obtain the in-depth, personal perspectives of the participants (Patton, 2002). As the most common method for phenomenological data collection, the interview was selected as the most appropriate method for collecting data for this research study. Also, the interview allowed for the participants to go deeper into their experiences and expound upon them in ways not always afforded to them by other means. Additionally, the focus group was employed to further delve into the experiences of the participants as they relate to and affirm the experiences of others in the group.

Data was collected in the form of individual interviews and a focus group of four of the research participants. The researcher used four research questions to provide a foundation for the study, and participants' responses were analyzed to determine themes relevant to the research question. The data collected during this study overwhelmingly supported the existence of an association between the participants race and gender and their experiences as school administrators.

Interpretation of Findings

The researcher used four research questions to collect data on participant's experiences, and those findings were organized into themes. An interpretation of the

findings related to each of the research questions can be found below.

Research Question 1

Research question one asked: “What factors or events influenced the Black male assistant principal’s or principal’s decision to pursue a leadership role as a school principal?” Participants’ responses revealed that there are a number of reasons why Black males enter into leadership positions as assistant principals or principals, and there is no single motivator that is more predictable than another. The most frequently shared factor among all of the participants was an internal drive to make as big of an impact on students as they possibly could, and all of them saw assuming a role as a school administrator as the next logical step for them to do so. This highlights the fact that central to of each of the participants’ desire for promotion was a desire to positively impact students. This suggests that when engaging with potential principals and assistant principals, it is beneficial to highlight the ways in which the candidate can positively impact the students he will serve in that capacity.

Also discussed by the participants was a desire for general promotion in which assuming a role as a school administrator seemed to be the next logical step. Each of the participants began their career as classroom teachers, and they were classroom teachers when they made the decision to transition into the role of administrator. Classroom teachers generally populate the pool of potential administrator candidates and most recruitment efforts begin there (Davis, Gooden, & Bowers, 2017). Following the trend, for these participants, classroom experience helped to cultivate their desire to assume administrator positions.

Research Question 2

Research question two asked: “How, and in what ways, does being a Black male influence the assistant principal’s or principal’s perceptions of his position and responsibilities as a school leader?” The stories shared by participants of how their race influences their perception of themselves and their professional identities helped to determine that being Black is one of the key influences in how they enact leadership. Being Black not only influences how they enact leadership, but moreover, it heavily impacts the way their leadership is perceived and what others expect from them.

Others’ perceptions of the administrator’s race is not something he can control, but it is still something that he will have to navigate. Participants expressed concerns that they were not comfortable being completely authentic in the professional setting which causes cultural minimization which is hiding parts of one’s culture in order to perform more effectively in professional, predominately White spaces. Also for the participants, others’ perceptions of their race resulted in professional overcompensation which reflected the need to be astutely and, to some degree, overly professional in all manner of appearance, speech, and interaction to address the participants’ fear of being judged by different measures and more harshly than their White colleagues.

Racial identity is not something that can be analyzed separately in this case as it plays such a large role in crafting the spaces in which these participants operate. Being Black is not something that the participants get to leave at home or neglect to bring to work, but it is a visual representation of a part of their identity that has shaped a lifelong list of experiences and continues to have an effect on how they experience life today, even at work.

Research Question 3

Research question three asked: “What job-related challenges do Black male assistant principals and principals attribute to their race?” School administration is a job that brings on a certain set of challenges of its own; however, the participants acknowledged that the intersection of their race and gender can sometimes compound or exacerbate those challenges. While some of the challenges the participants faced are shared amongst members of other demographic communities, the participants cited challenges that are definitely unique to being a Black male.

In addition to the presence of those challenges, participants revealed that there is a lack of support for navigating or overcoming them. The small pool of Black male administrators makes it difficult to find and sustain local professional networks with members of the Black male administrator community, and the low numbers also make it difficult to find and establish relationships with local mentors. There is an identified desire for support, but for the participants, there is a lack of structures and programs in place to address that need. This lack of support for Black males aspirations as well as the low numbers of mentors and role models of similar demographics are two of the reasons Toldson (2013) identified as a contributing factors to the low number of Black male administrators.

Participants described how their race is often used to craft narratives in which the participants are expected to operate, such as the narratives of Black male administrators being able to address all of the problems faced by Black students and Black male administrators having the capacity or willingness to be the representative for all Black students and colleagues. This is a callback to the “hero educator” perception described

by Gooden (2012, p. 68) in which Black male administrators are “called to do the highly improbable while making it look routine.” Participants shared how these narratives are mentally and emotionally taxing and bring burden to the experience of being an administrator. These are not things that the participants shared they willingly accept, but these are roles projected onto them by colleagues in which they are expected to operate.

Research Question 4

Research question four asked: “What factors motivate Black male assistant principals and principals to continue in the position?” The sense of impact participants feel was the most cited reason for participants continuing in the position which directly correlates with the most cited reason for them pursuing positions as school administrators in the first place: to make a greater or broader impact in the lives of students. Day, Harris, and Hadfield (2001) posit that the most effective administrators place the most focus on the betterment of the young people in the school. This is a sentiment that was shared among all of the participants in the individual interviews as well as among those who participated in the focus group and it echoed throughout their responses to the other questions. If there is to be an increase in the number of Black males who go into administration, the sense of purpose and impact should be strong in recruitment efforts when sharing the rewards that come along with holding those positions.

In addition to having a sense of impact, salary and benefits also heavily impacted the participants decisions to stay. As with any job, compensation packages are important, and while the feeling of making a difference is strong, there is also a very basic human need to provide for oneself and his family. Also, from the responses, there is a level of dedication to the profession and position that comes after one has been in the role for a

number of years. Half of the participants in the study have been in administrative roles for ten or more years and shared that they have committed so many years now that there is no good reason to seek professional change except in the case of promotion within the field of education.

Implications of the Study

The study yielded invaluable insight from currently-practicing Black male administrators that should shape the way districts look at recruiting, supporting, and retaining Black male administrators.

Recruitment

Participants' responses indicated that, as with many other demographic intersections, the opportunity to make a difference on a broader scale is what attracted them to the position of school administrator. While the classroom afforded them the opportunity to impact the lives of their students, there was an overwhelming realization that the participants had something to offer to more than just the students who were in their classroom. Additionally, a desire for personal growth and promotion caused many of the participants to seek a position as an administrator.

Knowing this, focalized recruitment efforts can be directed at Black males who hold non-administrative positions who have taken on other responsibilities such as coaching or sponsoring clubs, as this shows a desire to impact students outside of the classroom and is a motivator that can be translated to the administrative position. The participants of this study reaffirmed that it is highly important to administrators that they be able to make an impact on students.

Supporting Practicing Administrators

Participants' responses also indicated that there are challenges that are unique to the experience of being a Black male in school administration that are not always addressed by the districts in which they serve. Participants shared that there are times when the intersection of their own race and gender put them in positions where they assume responsibilities not always shared by other demographics who hold the same position. Additionally, having such a small network and community of resources specifically designed to assist them in their navigation of these challenges also proves to add to the weight administrators carry each day.

Responses brought about the realization that there is room for growth in how Black male administrators are supported and how their experiences are validated with the systems they serve. While they often validated for pouring out in ways other demographic intersections may not, they are not often validated in the challenges they face that may differ from others who hold the same position. Numerous times, the desire for a mentor who shared a similar demographic background was brought up in the discussions as this is something that would assist in helping the administrators navigate their experiences as Black males in the position.

Retaining Black Male Administrators

Support, a sense of fulfillment, and sufficient salary and benefits packages were themes that arose in the study and spoke to why the participants chose to stay in the position. Participants expressed a strong desire to ensure they could take care of their families and the ability to do so is a driving force in ensuring that they remain in the position. Additionally, feeling supported and validated is another factor in their decision

to remain in the position. The participants shared that it is easy to feel lonely as a member of one of the most underrepresented populations of school administrators, so being able to connect with and learn from others is essential.

Informing Current Literature

The depth of the participants' responses in this study and their stories are an invaluable asset in updating the current literature. Their willingness to provide honest and transparent accounts of their lived experiences may serve as an inspiration to others to share their experiences to ensure that there is more representation from all groups in the literature surrounding educational leadership. A story untold is a story unheard, and having heard the stories of the participants in this study, it is a sign that there is a definite need for more from various demographic intersections to share their experiences in order to have a more composite understanding of the current state of educational leadership: its strengths and its needs.

Limitations

The participants were limited to Black male school administrators in one school district in the state. The study population was inherently small given the purpose of the study, and the number of respondents to the invitation to participate provided for an even smaller number of total participants.

The demographic interest of the researcher as well as the smaller number of participants limits the extent to which findings can be assumed a general representation of the experiences of all Black male school administrators. While the researcher structured the interviews and focus group discussions to align with the research questions, the reliability of the study is limited based on the truthfulness and

thoroughness of the participant's responses.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this research study was to determine how the intersection of race and gender impacted the experiences of Black male school principals. Considering the results of this study, the following recommendations are suggested for further research:

1. Add other social identities to the baseline demographic intersection to further concentrate research on specific marginalized groups for example, Black gay male school administrators.
2. Further define the work context of participants to further concentrate research on Black male school administrators who work in specific settings such as urban school districts, private schools, or alternative education settings.
3. Specify specific areas of leadership such as specific leadership styles, influence on student academic achievement, or teacher's perception of administrator effectiveness to investigate how those areas are impacted by the leader's identity as a Black male administrator.

Conclusion

Participants in this research study shared valuable insight into the lived experiences of Black male school administrators. For the participants, Black is not an accessory, but it is an asset. The wide range of experiences, tenures, backgrounds, philosophies, and challenges represented by the participants made for a research study that was both diverse yet, at its core, provided multiple paths of connection between the participants.

The results of the study support the fact that the lack of representation of Black

males in the literature and scholarship surrounding educational leadership is not due to a lack of experienced individuals who are willing to share their experiences to shape the discussion. However, a more active approach is needed in seeking out the members of these populations, hearing their stories, and affirming the importance of their role in educational leadership.

The narrative still remains incomplete as this study merely scratches the surface of all that there is to know about Black males in school administration. However, this study can be used as a point of reference in conversations everywhere which seek to further the understanding of these men, their stories, their abilities, and their contributions to the practice of education leadership.

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Appendix A
Informational Recruitment Letter

Informational Recruitment Letter

June XX, 2020

Name
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Principal's Address

Dear Principal

This is James Avery, a doctoral student at Nova Southeastern University. I am preparing to conduct research on the experiences of Black male principals and assistant principals, and I am inviting you to be a part of this study. I am currently seeking participants for this study from the pool of Black male school administrators in your district. You were identified as a possible participant because you (a) are representative of the intended demographic for the study, (b) are currently employed as a principal or assistant principal, and (c) have served at least one full school year as a school administrator. It is anticipated that the findings of this study will help to inform recruitment and retention practices by local school districts which will positively impact the number of Black males seeking to attain positions as school administrators.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete and return the demographic questionnaire. Following your completion of the demographic questionnaire, I ask that you participate in an interview with me. The interview will last approximately one hour and will be scheduled at a time and location that is convenient to you. All interviews are confidential, and the confidentiality of participants will be protected at all times. My contact information can be found below.

Mobile Phone:
E-mail Address:

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire

Please complete the demographic questionnaire. Your responses will be helpful in determining if you are a compatible candidate for this research study.

Demographics:

1. Name _____

2. Years of experience in school administration _____

3. At what level are you currently serving?

Choose one: Elementary / Middle / High

4. If asked to engage in an interview which asks questions related to how your race and gender influence your motivation to work as a school administrator, would you be willing to engage in that dialogue?

Choose one: Yes / No

Contact Information:

Mobile Phone:

E-Mail Address:

Appendix C

Thank You Letter

Thank You Letter

June XX, 2020

Name
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Principal's Address

Dear Principal

Thank you for participating in my research study on the experiences of Black male school administrators. Your responses provided valuable insight into the lived experiences of Black male administrators and as a result of your insight, this research study will be available for use by districts in informing targeted recruitment and retention efforts.

Sincerely,

Appendix D

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

Introduction

1. Please provide information on your personal background. Where did you grow up? What kind of school did you attend—public, private, other? Feel free to share any additional information you deem important about your background.
2. In what ways does being Black impact the way you view yourself?
3. What terms would you use to define your professional identity?

Research Questions

RQ 1: *“What factors or events influenced the Black male assistant principal’s or principal’s decision to pursue a leadership role as a school principal?”*

4. Before entering into school administration, what other education-related positions did you hold?
5. When did you know you wanted to become a school administrator?
6. What initially attracted you to the position?
7. Was there anyone who helped inform or influence your transition into administration?
8. Did you know any Black males in administration prior to becoming an administrator? Did they directly or indirectly influence your decision to pursue the position? If so, in what ways?

RQ 2: *“Perception is defined as “the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted” and “intuitive understanding and insight” (Oxford, 2019). How, and in what ways, does being a Black male influence the assistant principal’s or principal’s*

perceptions of his position and responsibilities as a school leader?”

9. Which three personal attributes, biological or not, are most important to your professional identity?
10. How does being a Black male influence the way you interact with the following stakeholders?
 - a. Other staff members?
 - b. Students?
 - c. Parents?
 - d. Supervisors?
11. How does your racial identity impact your decision-making?
12. How has being a Black male benefited you professionally?
13. Do you ever feel like you have to “turn off” parts of your Blackness to operate effectively in the professional setting as a school administrator?
14. Do you believe there are unspoken responsibilities for Black male administrators? If so, what are they?
15. As a Black male school administrator, do you feel more compelled to ensure the success of students who share certain demographics? If so, what types of students fall into that category and why?

RQ 3: “What job-related challenges do Black male assistant principals and principals attribute to their race?”

16. Administrators face challenges daily. Do you feel being a Black male has compounded those challenges? In what ways?
17. How have you learned to overcome those challenges?

18. Have you ever been restricted professionally because of your race? In what ways?
19. How do stereotypes play into your experience as a Black male administrator?
20. Have you experienced overt racism in the professional setting in your role as an administrator? In what ways?
21. Do you perceive there are double standards for Black men in school administration? What are they and why do they exist?

RQ 4: “What factors motivate Black male assistant principals and principals to continue in the position?”

22. Do you feel supported as a Black male in school administration?
23. You have been an administrator for XX years. What keeps you coming back?
24. When you consider whether or not to remain in the position, what job-related incentives are most important to you?
25. Do you aspire to any other positions in education? If so, which ones?

Closure Questions

26. What do you think the most effective method(s) is/are for districts to employ when recruiting Black males to positions as school administrators?
27. What do you think the most effective method(s) is/are for districts to employ when retaining Black male school administrators?
28. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix E

Focus Group Protocol Instrument

Focus Group Protocol Instrument

Welcome

Introduction of Moderator

Introductions of Participants

Purpose

Explanation of the Topic by Moderator

Parameters

1. Only one person should speak at a time. Please state your pseudonym before speaking to ensure validity in recording.
2. Remain respectful of differing viewpoints.
3. Feel free to elaborate on or make connections to another participant's response.
4. Moderator's job is to guide the discussion, not participate. Engage as much as possible with the other participants.

Discussion Prompts

1. Opening Question: "What is it like being a Black male in school administration?"

RQ 1: *"What factors or events influenced the Black male assistant principal's or principal's decision to pursue a leadership role as a school principal?"*

2. Why are you a school administrator today? Who or what was instrumental in getting you to this point?

RQ 2: *"Perception is defined as "the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted" and "intuitive understanding and insight" (Oxford, 2019). How, and in what ways, does being a Black male influence the assistant principal's or principal's perceptions of his position and responsibilities as a school leader?"*

3. How do societal issues around race impact how you do your job?
4. Do you think students are impacted by your race? In what ways?
5. Is there a stereotypical Black male administrator? What are those characteristics?
Do you think you fit that mold?
6. Are you living your truth in this position? Is this “who you are?”

RQ 3: “What job-related challenges do Black male assistant principals and principals attribute to their race?”

7. What are some of the roadblocks you’ve faced on your professional journey because of your race?
8. Does discrimination exist in school leadership towards black males? How and in what ways?
9. How are you perceived by White co-workers? How do you know they view you that way?

RQ 4: “What factors motivate Black male assistant principals and principals to continue in the position?”

10. What is your main reason for coming to work every day?
11. Would you recommend school administration to another Black man? Why or why not?
12. What is the biggest job-related reward for you?
13. Closing Question: All things considered, do you regret your decision to go into school administration?
14. Closing Question: Of all the things we discussed, what is most important?

Provide an Oral Summary of Main Points

15. Final Question: Have we missed anything?

End Focus Group Discussion