

TEN AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT IN
PUBLIC EDUCATION: HOUSTON PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by
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Abstract

Background: African American women principals are underrepresented in public education. The National Teacher and Principal Survey for 2015-2016 reports the school principal distribution for women principals: African American - 6,340 (12.9 %), Hispanic- 4,100 (8.4%), and White, non-Hispanic 36, 830 (75.1 %). Houston, the 4th largest city in the United States which includes several large school districts, revealed a pattern of underrepresentation of women African American school principals. This underrepresentation per Texas Employed Principals Demographics 2013-2017 and Texas Academic Performance Report 2017 may be because of the teachers' perceptions of the path for advancement into educational administration. **Purpose:** The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to examine how African American women in the greater Houston area in public education seek and procure the position of school principal. Regardless of race, gender, and economic status, the principalship is an attainable goal. By examining and discussing the processes for advancement, a gap in the literature has been addressed providing a reference point for future educators. The research questions are: What are the perceptions and experiences of African American women principals hired in the greater Houston area: (1) of the pre-interview qualifying process, (2) the interview process, and the (3) post-interview process? **Methods:** This descriptive phenomenological study utilized the recommendations of educational colleagues for purposeful sampling. Ten African American women principals, from seven different school districts in the Houston area, were selected to examine the phenomenon of being hired. Participants were individually interviewed for transparency using semi-structured questions. The women verified transcriptions of the interviews for

accuracy (member checking). Also, interviews were entered into Dedoose computer software for coding of common themes and patterns. The primary focus was to develop an understanding of the cognitive process of African American women principals hired in the greater Houston area. In addition to an in-depth interview, participants' curriculum vitas, district human resource requirements, and archival data were examined. **Findings:** The key findings of the study revealed that half of the participants initially did not see themselves as public school principals. Additionally, each of the African American women principals interviewed spoke about the value of mentors who recognized their school leadership attributes and pushed them toward school leadership roles. Each participant stated that their mentors and advocates contributed to their procurement of the principalship. **Conclusion:** This research produced findings that point towards a need for increasing the representation of African American women principals in the greater Houston area. The requirements for the principalship interview process were clear and on-going. Staff development after being hired was required to learn how to prepare budgets, understand school finance, and other critical skills. Cognizant of the path for African American women who aspire to become principals, these women are enthusiastic about increasing the number of African American women principals. Lastly, each African American woman principal expressed gratitude for this rewarding assignment that has enabled them to mentor new principals.

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Chapter I

Introduction

The underrepresentation of African American women principals has been a concern in public education for decades (Growe & Montgomery, 1999; Howard-Vital, 1989). The majority of principals in Texas are White women with Hispanic/Latino and African American women as the second and third largest group (Texas Employed Demographics 2013-2017). Low representation and small percentage increases in Texas for African American women school principals are noticeable. The problem of practice is that African American women in the greater Houston area who successfully qualified, interviewed, and were hired as a public school principal were largely due to having a mentor to guide their aspirations and an advocate to promote their leadership traits. This research study was exciting because it examined the stories of successful African American women public-school principals in the greater Houston area. This study chronicled the narratives of successful women principals hoping to inspire more African American women teachers to aspire to become a public-school principal.

A primary prerequisite for the principalship begins with being a successful classroom teacher. The 2014-2015 Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR) for the greater Houston area, Region IV, revealed five teacher distribution categories: African American 14,464.4 (20.3%), Hispanic 13,611.6 (19.1%), Caucasian 39,796.0 (55.9%), Asian 2,142.4 (3.0%) and Other 283. One mega urban school district in Region IV, per the 2014-2015 TAPR teacher distribution revealed a breakout per population. Population distribution from which to prepare and recruit potential school administrators revealed: African American 4,156.7 (36.4%), Hispanic 3,102 (27.2%), Caucasian 3,395.6 (29.7%)

and Other 765 (6.7%). According to the employment of public-school principals for 2014-2015, this same mega urban school district showed approximately 68 African American women principals (26.2%) of the 259 principals for charter, combined, and general education (TAPR, 2014-2015). This mega urban Houston area district profile was representative of other mega school districts in the state of Texas and in the greater Houston area (TAPR, 2014-2015).

This research examined the narratives of 10 African American women principals from 7 different districts in the greater Houston area journey from classroom teacher to the school principal. Local school boards in the United States from the east coast to the west coast and from the north to the south use a system of selecting school principals that they believe are capable of meeting federal standards of education (Burrows-McCabe, 2014; Cotton, 2003; Peters, 2012). A school principal job usually occurs due to transfers, relocations, and retirements (Pregot, 2016; Reeves, 2007). The school principal sets the tone for the school (Fullan, 2010; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). Across the United States, each school principal continues to be accountable in their school for the achievement or the lack of success for its students, regardless of ethnicity, language, or culture (Borek, 2008).

The relationship between the school leader and staff made a big difference in high-performing schools (Marzano, 2000). The focus continues to have a school principal who can lead a faculty to improve student achievement (Edmonson & Fisher, 2002). School principal-candidates in the pipeline are expected to be able to take the helm of administration as the opening occurs, and to keep the system intact (Duke, & Salmonowicz, 2010). In the following paragraphs, the author of this paper described the

perceptions, experiences, and challenges of 10 African American women whose careers took them from school settings as a classroom teacher to a school principal in school settings in several large school districts in the greater Houston area. Table 1 is an excerpt from the Texas Academic Performance Report of School Profiles and reveals district comparisons for teacher population by ethnicity.

Table 1.

Comparison of Five Districts by Teacher Population 2014-2015

Ethnicity	Aldine	Cy-Fair	Fort Bend	Houston	Humble
AA	1,660.90	789.70	1,243.30	4,156.70	296.60
H	1,077.00	876.50	566.40	31,1022.50	274.20
W	1,322.90	4,795.50	2,282.70	3,395.60	1,846.30
Male	967.50	1,267.00	978.30	2,861.19	532.10
Female	3,268.80	5,460.00	3,432.50	8,559.70	1,939.80

(Excerpt from Texas Academic Performance Report/School Profiles)

Table 2.

Texas Employed Principals' Demographics 2013-2017

Year	Total Female	African American	Total for all (male and female)
2016-2017	5,286	1,033	8,295
2015-2016	5,131	989	8,193
2014-2015	5,079	977	8,126
2013-2014	4,967	947	8,005
2012-2013	4,848	903	7,914

(Excerpt from Texas Employed Principals Report)

Conceptual Framework

In this descriptive phenomenological study, I examined the experiences of 10 African American women who started in public-school classrooms and moved into

public-school administration in the greater Houston area. The shared personal experiences of the 10 African American women promote an awareness of the experiences, relative to access to the administrative pool, for principal candidates hired as a school principal. Local school boards attempt to match the school administrator skill sets with the culture of the community and the school to promote efficacy (Shakeshaft, 1989; U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Race and gender were seemingly considered in hiring practices for school leadership. The effect of race and gender was examined to explain the interplay of race and gender in the hiring process for school principals (Hochschild & Shen, 2014). Researchers have asked, what are some of the experiences of African American women teachers who aspire to become public school principals? (Doherty, 1999; Eller, 2008). If the job opening is in an affluent neighborhood or community, the likelihood of an African American woman being selected to lead that school is rare (Liedtka & Frey, 2017). Also, if the school had a dominant culture that was not African American, the likelihood of being considered was doubtful (Jean-Marie, 2013; Peters, 2017). Usually, after coursework, examination, and on-the-job training, the process of applying for an open school principal's position involves being interviewed by either the school district committee and or by a school building's site-based school committee. The process of applying for a school principal's position has not been consistent over the last decade. The selection process needs further study (Papa, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2002; Peters, 2017; Pregot, 2016; Turnbull, 2015).

Background of the Problem

The number of African American women teachers who have become public-

school principals is low per national and local statistics (Statistics, 2008). Several researchers have inquired into African American women teachers' perception of advancement in public education (Ash, Hodge & Connell, 2013). What were the insights and experiences of African American women teachers who have moved from the classroom to public-school principal in large school districts in urban settings? In some southwestern United States mega school districts, most potential school principal candidates must pass a pre-screener assessment. For example, in some school districts, the Haberman questionnaire is a pre-screener that is required before considering a candidate for an interview for a job opening (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). This assessment is used to predict which applicants will fail or succeed if selected for a school principal or other administrative assignment (Wallace Foundation, 2012). Some researchers observed that often unless the teacher, interested in an administrative position, receives tutoring before taking the assessment, the likelihood of entering the principal's pool and considered for a face-to-face interview is slim (Turnbull, 2015).

McManus (2017) and other researchers contend that many states have established a principal's selection process. That process was expected to distinguish qualified individuals within or outside the school district among various ethnicities or cultures who might be able to lead a school and increase student achievement (McManus, 2017; Peters, 2017; Portin, Schnider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2006). The process of selecting school principals and administrators is stringent (Burrows-McCabe, 2014; Clement, 2009). Even with strict requirements, most public-school principal openings can take several months after several interviews to fill (Burrows-McCabe, 2014).

Wallace Foundation researcher (Turnbull, 2016) noted the principal's pool is the

conduit through which most candidates must pass to be considered for a position as a school principal. One large school district used a STAR interview instrument to screen applicants for positions as the school principal (Haberman Educational Foundation, 2017). STAR is an acronym for Situation, Tasks, Action, and Results. This query consisted of questions that are presumed to summarize the work experiences of an individual. Some school districts used the STAR interview instrument (the Haberman Assessment) to qualify applicants for inclusion in the principal pool (Wallace Foundation, 2012). The Haberman was taken by potential administrator candidates once a year, and its questions may be subject to interpretation.

A team of Wallace Foundation researchers, such as Turnbull who served on the team, expounded that most eligible candidates for a school principal's position may apply after meeting the initial requirements and successful completion of the Haberman Assessment (Haberman Foundation, 2017). In districts where the Haberman Assessment is used, all candidates including women must participate in this qualifying process, if they want to advance in public school education in several urban school districts. The Haberman Assessment, utilized by one mega-urban district in the greater Houston area, may have been challenging to potential candidates (The Haberman Educational Foundation – Evaluation Tool STAR Pre-Screener, 2017). Frequently, success on this pre-screener depends on work experience and exposure to administrative decision-making processes.

Statement of the Problem

The number of African American women principals is surprisingly low (Hochschild, & Shen, 2014; Mitgang, 2003; Peters, 2017; Pregot, 2016; Roza, Celio,

Harvey, & Wishon, 2003). There is an underrepresentation of African American women principals in Texas (Texas Employed Principals Demographics, 2013-2017) and the greater Houston area (TAPR, 2014-2015). Literature shows that various mechanisms are used to predict which candidates might thrive in the position as a school principal (Clement, 2017; Lin, 2013; McEwan, 2003; Mitgang, 2003; Whitaker, 2001). Currently, several sizable southwestern US school districts have selected their principals from a pool of eligible candidates.

How the selection process for school leadership works when selecting a school principal who fits the culture and academic expectations of the district is a concern. (Ash, Hodge, & Connell, 2013; Ferrandino, 2001). There are African American lead teachers, with tenure, that meet the prerequisites and are eligible as possible candidates for a school principal; however, they may be excluded from the principal's pool due to an assessment or other factors such as gender and race. If an excellent teacher or educator was not in the principal's pool, the candidate could not be considered for most district-level positions. It appears that the selection of principals for a public school was based solely on their ability to enter the school principal's pool (Sperandio, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to examine how African American women in the greater Houston area in public education seek and procure the position of school principal by investigating their personal narratives. This study describes their qualifying process, interview process, and post-interview process. It was understandable that there were a limited number of openings for a public-school principal leadership position (Wallace Foundation, 2012). Selecting a school leader who

was accountable to the district and the state was a critical link to having a successful school, especially in urban communities (Clement, 2017; Turnbull, 2015). The prevailing question for many African American women educators was how to get an offer for a position as a school principal (Edmonson & Fisher, 2002).

The selection procedure to become a school principal appears to be a mysterious outcome (Smith & Somers, 2016). African American women teacher leaders such as department chairs may aspire to become administrators but may seem to be met with an invisible opposing force. The findings of this study will be shared, so district leaders and mentors will have a current description of 10 African American women's perceptions of the hiring process for school principals. Perhaps the testimonials of these Houston area women principals will encourage more African American women to enter the process to qualify and apply for a position as a school principal.

Research Questions

1. What were the perceptions and experiences of African American women principals hired in the greater Houston area regarding their qualifying process?
2. What were the perceptions and experiences of African American women principals hired in the greater Houston area regarding their interview process?
3. What were the perceptions and experiences of African American women principals hired in the greater Houston area regarding their post-interview process?

Brief Overview of Methodology

This qualitative study uses a descriptive approach utilizing a phenomenological study design (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002) for examining the experiences of African

American women who journeyed from the classroom into the principalship in public schools. Although their start in education and their backgrounds are different, the participants in the study have similar experiences as urban public-school administrators. Merriam (2002) said researchers concentrate on individual perceptions of reality in a set time period. Individuals interacting with the world are crucial to understanding their perceptions of the journey to enter the principal's pool. The primary focus was to understand what these women experienced and the decisions they made to advance in education.

Participants. The participants consist of 10 African American women principals identified through referrals from educators at conferences and professional development meetings. The women principals are employed by different school districts in the greater Houston area. Each of the participants possessed the certification and leadership qualities allowing them to be groomed for leadership. Participants were employed in their district as a principal after they entered the principal's pool. These women were identifiable by their district staff as being public-school principals for more than one year.

Definition of Key Terms

Unique terms are defined to support the literature review that will follow, and most of these terms are specific to educational settings; commonly used terms are not included in this list.

Adequate yearly progress: AYP is the acronym for Adequate Yearly Progress. AYP is a measurement since *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) that is used to ensure accountability in education. Public school districts in each state are evaluated annually for adequate yearly progress (AYP). School districts are required to meet enough growth

in the following areas: reading/language arts, mathematics, and either graduation rate for high schools or attendance rate for elementary and middle/junior high schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Aspiring principals: An aspiring principal is a man or woman who desires to be the principal of a school. This desire is deep-seated and is supported by preparation coursework, mentoring, and networking which should be acquired before the candidate is eligible for a principal pool or principalship (Roza, Celio, Harvey, & Wishon, 2003; Wallace Foundation, 2012).

Benchmarks: Benchmarks are tests or examinations administered uniformly in a school building, by grade level, and by content. Benchmark tests allow schools to measure, manage, and maximize student achievement. Reading and mathematics are benchmarks systematically administered to determine instructional needs by analyzing test scores, which may maximize the delivery of curriculum (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Definition of Other Terms

Gallup Survey Assessment: This Gallup Survey is Don Clifton's strengths-based approach to determine management and leadership ability in most successful organizations. The Clifton Strengths assessment is essential for helping potential candidates for administration set and achieve their goals. Each Clifton strengths theme sorts questions into one of the four following domains: strategic thinking, executing, influencing, and relationship building (<https://www.gallupstrengthscenter.com>).

Haberman Assessment: The Wallace Foundation Initiative was established in 2010 to assist filling school principal vacancies. School districts, wanting to generate a

pool of potential candidates and prepare other candidates for school leadership, use this tool to identify strong candidates. Standards with identified competencies, university partnerships, performance tasks, and evaluation tools are tenets of the criteria for this initiative (Wallace Foundation Initiative, 2012).

The domains of the Haberman describe how people and teams use their talents to work with information, make things happen, influence others, and build relationships. This questionnaire consists of approximately 50 questions, of which the application gives three possible answers. This test will evaluate knowledge and skills when it comes to teaching lower-income students. The Haberman Assessment is known as “The Star Teacher Interview” and boasts a 95% accuracy rate in predicting which potential administrators will stay and succeed and which ones will fail or quit. The components of this assessment consist of a scenario-based interview used to predict candidates’ ability to handle the administrative job. There is an emphasis on managing stress, discipline, unmotivated students, and differentiation in instruction (Haberman Educational Foundation, 2017)

High-stakes accountability: High-stakes accountability refers to the federal government monitoring the activities at the state and local level (Alvoid & Black, 2014; Balfanz, Legters, West, Weber, 2007).

Interview process: A committee or panel of district representatives may occur by levels. The first round of interviews may occur and, if the candidate is successful, they move to another cycle, and finally a third-sequence. A presentation interview may last several hours, as the candidate receives a task to complete or a panel interview with questions.

No Child Left Behind: No Child Left Behind, known by the acronym NCLB, is The Education Act of 2001. Former U.S. President George W. Bush promoted this legislation, which started a federal accounting for dollars given to the local school district for public education (United States Department of Education, 2012).

Position of Authority: Position of authority implies that the person has influence and backing to make executive decisions relative to hours of work, schedules, pay, job duties, job placements, and staff evaluations (Fullan, 2010).

Post-interview process: The school board may honor the recommendation of the school superintendent or designated person for extending a contract to the public-school candidate who has been successful with interviews and has been offered a position as a school principalship.

Principal's Pool: A group of potential administrators who are eligible to apply for a school principal position. A potential candidate has the required qualification for becoming a principal: being a licensed, experienced teacher with at least a bachelors-level degree. However, hiring officials also look for experience, credentials, and attributes demonstrating effective educational leadership (Newton & Zeitoun, 2001).

Qualifying process for public school principalship: Each public-school teacher who aspires to become a school principal must have 3-5 years of successful evaluations as a classroom teacher, the mandated university courses at the graduate level for mid-management certification, and the successful completion of the state exam for public-school principals.

Stakeholders: A stakeholder constitutes any individual or entity that might have an interest in the education of students. For example, the business community might

have an interest in hiring high school graduates. The community college or four-year university might have an interest in high school graduates who might pursue advanced study to prepare them for the workforce. Parents, students, and the school personnel desire to have graduates who are productive citizens in society, and each of these persons has an interest in the welfare of the school (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2013; Brazer, Rich & Ross, 2010).

Triangulation: Triangulation is a method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives. Patton (2002) cautions a common misconception is the goal of triangulation is to arrive at consistency across data sources or approaches. Such inconsistencies may be given the relative strengths of different methods. In Patton's view, these inconsistencies should not be weakening the evidence but should be viewed as an opportunity to uncover a more profound meaning in the data.

Trustworthiness: The research study's findings are credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable. Trustworthiness is about establishing the following four things: Credibility is how confident the qualitative researcher is in the truth of the study's findings. Transferability is the method used by the qualitative researcher to demonstrate the study's results are relevant to other contexts and to show the research study's conclusions can be related to different settings, circumstances, and situations. Confirmability is the degree of neutrality in the research. Finally, dependability is the degree to which other researchers could repeat the study and their conclusions would be consistent (<https://www.com/what-is-trustworthiness-in-qualitative-research>).

Assumptions

There were four assumptions fundamental to the study. First, this research assumed collecting interviews would provide insight into the perceptions and experiences of African American women principals who aspired to become public-school principals. Second, the researcher assumed the women principals answered the interview questions truthfully. Next, the researcher assumed the women public-school principals were in good standing with the state of Texas and their respective school districts. Finally, the researcher assumed research questions are appropriate for this qualitative study.

Significance of the Study

This study was necessary because of the astounding underrepresentation of African American women public school principals. The perceptions of these 10 African American women principals may inspire women to aspire to become public-school principals. The study was significant because the principal, the executive administrator, is deemed responsible for everything that happens in a school.

The Wallace Foundation recruiting for school leadership argues that a principal's position consists of numerous assignments. Important duties include hiring qualified teachers, collaborating with parents, and working with community leaders. Another key role identified for the executive principal is to meet federal and state standards (Meyer & Feistritz, 2003; Mitgang, 2003; Texas Education Agency, 2010h). Therefore, monitoring to ensure the core curriculum is taught and there are increases in student achievement are on-going tasks for a school principal (Portin et al.2003; Turnbull, 2016).

The school's social reputation is based on student achievement. Statistics show that schools where teachers feel supported, and school principals respected, consistently

thrive in student achievement (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010; Fullan, 2010; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Therefore, the African American woman, administrative candidate selected must be a good match for the staff, faculty, and the students (Bottoms, O'Neil, Fry, & Kill, 2003; Reeves, 2007; Turnbull, 2016). Moreover, an African American school principal increases diversity in public education.

Limitations

The focus of this research study excluded women public-school principals who were not African American and employed in the greater Houston area. Each of the school districts was similar in student population, staff size, and located in an urban setting in the greater Houston area. Participants were from elementary and secondary schools. The school districts were from the different sectors of the greater Houston area, so the participants were given pseudonyms for transparency with interviews and identity protection.

Delimitations

The delimitations for this study rested on the research goal to understand how individual lead teachers and department chairs, who expressed an interest and desire for school administration, could be included in the principal's pool. The participants in this study, African American women principals, expressed a passion for school leadership and to become a school administrator.

Positionality

After experience in private industry, I entered education, and I have observed seemingly qualified African American women who experienced difficulty entering the principal pool. The state data revealed a low representation of African American women

principals in public schools in the greater Houston area (Texas Employed Principals Demographics Report, 2017; Texas Academic Performance Report, 2017). Perhaps the stories of African American women principals who successfully earned a public school principalship position in the greater Houston area will enlighten and inspire African American women to advance to principalship.

Summary

The process of selecting the school principal in some districts is based on the potential candidates' ability to articulate expected responses on an assessment such as the Haberman Assessment, Gallup Survey, or designated instrument. The successful experiences of African American women who are school principals may help more lead teachers want to advance to a school principalship and lead a faculty to improve student achievement. Narratives of African American women principals in the greater Houston area who were hired will be investigated through their success stories. This study examined the perceptions and experiences of African American women who successfully navigated the principal selection process from the qualifying process, through the interview process, and post-interview process to become school principals (Cotton, 2003; Oplatka, 2017; Sergiovanni, 2004; Turnbull, 2016).

Chapter II

Review of Related Literature

Purpose of the Study

Fuller is among the researchers who suggested most school districts have an autonomous process for selecting a school administrator (Brown & Beckett, 2007; Fuller, Hollingsworth, & An, 2016). This study examined how African American women in the greater Houston area in public education seek and procure the position of school principal. The perceptions and experiences of successful African American women who moved from the classroom into the principalship was investigated. Investigation of the selection process examined how African American women teachers prepared to advance to a position as a school principal. Ten African American women school principals in Houston, Texas area shared their journey from pre-interview, to interview, to post-interview and received a school principal job offer.

The review of literature in this chapter focused on selection of African American women as school principals. The first section reviewed the historical background of African American women in the field of education, and the second section examined the current research regarding African American women's perceptions and experiences about advancement in academic education.

Historical Context of School Leadership

Researcher James D. Anderson noted in the South in the 1800's, public education was predominately for white children (Anderson, 1988). If there was any schooling for non-white children, that schooling was separate and not equal to that of whites (Beginnings of Black Education, 2004). White superiority wanted the African American

slaves, known as blacks, to be content to work by forced labor in the fields and continue to do domestic work. Many White plantation owners, whose economic welfare was dependent on the slavery of the African Americans, feared a rebellion against them and the rules that were common in many of the states. Many Whites did not want African Americans to learn how to read and write (Civil War Harper's Weekly, 1862). The philosophy of Whites during that time was once African Americans were educated, it would be hard to keep them as slaves (Anderson, 1988). Slaves were already passively and actively resisting the treatment of their masters, and the slave owners knew that literacy would only increase this resistance (Mitchell, 2008). After the Civil War, however, slaves were allowed to read and write (Civil War Harper's Weekly, 1862). Slaves began to be educated in masse after Abraham Lincoln's signature in 1863 on the Emancipation Proclamation (Nash, 1988).

According to Nash, the "Freedom Schools," as they were called, educated in a "separate but unequal manner" (Nash, 1988). The black schools had few books, dangerous buildings, and less paid black teachers than their counterparts at white public schools. Blacks contributed dollars in their respective states, but sometimes the monies paid for the education of the whites outside of their community (Nash, 1988)

History records 19th century black women who were teachers. There are many notable African American women of the 19th century, including Mary McLeod Bethune, who started as elementary school teachers and excelled to become school leaders (Perkins, 1990). During those days, laws in South Carolina and other states made it a crime to teach blacks to read and write. After the Civil War, once the laws permitted, the education of African Americans, known as Blacks, was a slow evolution (Weinberg,

1977). Thousands of Black teachers moved to the South and began teaching during the Reconstruction Era (Jones, 1980).

In the 19th century, only when there were shortages of men, were women able to leave farming and become schoolteachers. These school assignments were temporary, so as soon as the men returned from the war, they resumed their school positions (Weiler, 1989). “The problem of sex role stereotypes is compounded by the structural characteristics of organizations” (Jones & Montenegro, 1983, p. 232). In the early 1900's, most women teachers were unmarried. The culture did not favor married women as teachers because they might become pregnant and leave the profession (Rury, 1986). Thus, they were not taken seriously for administrative or school leadership positions. Even in the Pre-Brown Era, there were Black teachers and principals. Tillman states, "Black teachers and school principals were important role models and respected leaders in their communities. They also comprised a significant proportion of the African American community's middle-class" (Tillman, 2004, p. 44).

Some prejudices and rules may have excluded women as school administrators. A common perception of most people was that African American women were generally nurturers; becoming a teacher seemed natural but not a school principal (Peters, 2012, Robinson, 2014). Ella Flagg Young (1910) was an extraordinary woman who used the federation of teachers' union to fight for women to advance to school leadership and eventually became superintendent of the largest district in Chicago, IL (National Education Association, 1910).

Before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, African Americans did become teachers and school principals (Nash, 1988). Horsford states, "Through this lens,

or veil, one could argue that the prevalence of race and class divides in US education may aptly and uniquely equip Black women for specific leadership challenges, contexts, and circumstances” (Horsford, 2012, p. 13). Challenges to education are unique for African American women (Hughes & Dodge, 1997). The landmark court case, *Brown v. Board of Education* was intended to allow the former slaves to have access to equal education and the realization of a life allowing for the pursuit of happiness; however, in America, neither equal access nor equivalent education occurred (Black, 2012). African Americans' image seemed inferior after the 1954 "separate but equal" court decision against *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, a U.S. Supreme Court decision issued in 1896 that upheld the racial segregation of public facilities. This case made a distinction between African Americans and Caucasian being able to use the same public facilities. Tillman (2004) shared the letter written by a school administrator to university students,

If the Supreme Court should rule that segregation in the elementary grades is unconstitutional our Board will proceed on the assumption that most people in Topeka will not want to employ Negro teachers next year for White children. It is necessary for me to notify you now that your services will not be needed for next year. (Unintended Consequences, p. 280)

The Jim Crow laws mandated the segregation of public schools, public places, public transportation, and the segregation of public restrooms, public restaurants, and public drinking fountains (Kinshasa, 2006). Jim Crow laws were enforced in the South from 1877 through the 1950's. African Americans could teach in only black schools with those who shared their ethnicity (Beginnings of Black Education, 2004).

The Great Depression of the 1930's saw the gains made by women, in school administration, diminish (Weiler, 1989). Women were often perceived, due to their physical make-up, to be incapable of school leadership beyond the elementary level. Furthermore, women taught school until they married. On the other hand, men only left education to advance to a higher paying position in private industry. Specific laws forbid women to marry and teach (Shakeshaft, 1987). Additionally, Shakeshaft purported, women, if pregnant, were treated as having a condition; therefore, they were unable to clean chimneys or carry coal for heat, two tasks commonplace in 19th century rural schoolhouses. Also, some professional organizations such as the National Education Association (NEA) and Phi Delta Kappa excluded women from membership.

During World War II, men served in the military, and women resumed the roles of teaching and leading until after the war ended. Years later, after the Brown decision, education shifted from segregation to desegregation and this change created a shift in school enrollment (Carter, 2007). Now students could attend any school they chose.

Before 1954, few women were school administrators, and some states had laws that made the requirements for males different than those for women (Beilke, 1999). In a male-dominated profession, the power to lead a school was not open to Caucasian women and seldom available to African American women. Indeed, men dominated school leadership positions (Shakeshaft, 1989). The swing from male teachers to women teachers occurred during the Civil War and again during World War II because the men were away from their posts fighting in the armed services. However, this changed in the early 1900's, when women, in general, became political activists and campaigned for equal pay and the right to vote. This cultural movement, of the late 19th and early 20th

century, for women's suffrage had an indirect effect on African American women in education (Hughes & Dodge, 1997).

Post-modern education and legislation policies rule. Brown v. Board of Education opened an exit door, and many of the African American school principals were displaced (Foster, 1990; Tillman, 2004). Fifty percent of African American teachers were dismissed after the "separate but equal" court decision because many whites did not want African Americans to teach their children nor serve in educational leadership. Because of the 1955 Brown v. Board of Education ruling, school districts within the U.S. were to exercise due diligence to implement the law (Carter, 2007). From 1793 to 1955, some whites believed blacks to be ineffective in leading schools (Nash, 1988). Experts testified against blacks as school leaders and caused many to lose their positions. Black administrators were forced to work in large black schools because they were deemed deficient in their education and unable to teach or be a school leader for non-Black students (Anderson, 1988). Many retained their titles as school administrators, but had no real power or authority (Nash, 1988; Peters, 2012; Tillman, 2004).

Initially, after Brown v. Board of Education, White males dominated the top positions in schools, such as principal and assistant principal, while African American women predominately remained teachers (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Even in the 1980's, fewer women were in school as teachers and administrators than in 1905 (Shakeshaft, 1987). Decades later, as a result of federal legislation, minorities and women were included in employment opportunities.

After the Brown decision, opportunities for African American women to interview for teaching positions did not guarantee employment (Tillman, 2004). There

was a lack of confidence in teachers of color. This lack of trust and confidence in African American teachers and school principals bred an inferiority complex that seemingly persists today (Jones, 1983). As of 2006, 82% of schools are led by White principals, with 11% headed by Blacks, and 5% directed by Hispanics (The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Funding for schools directed by Blacks with predominately black student populations was disproportionate (Brown, 2005).

In the early 1800's, women frequently founded schools. From 1800 to 1899, for women, vertical leadership advancement, seemed to be rare (Nash, 1988). The Civil War and World Wars caused men to leave teaching and enlist in the army. The vacancies created a vacuum allowing women to participate as teachers and heads of schools. Usually, women who attended a divinity school or had a high society position were considered as heads of schools (Anderson, 1988).

In contrast, after Post-Brown, race and gender were considered in staffing school for public education (Sperandio, 2015). Various researchers would not validate Black women's allusions to "white privilege." Some researchers noted the differences associated with being Black and a woman in education (Wootton, 1997). Internal barriers were not imagined but structurally ingrained into the fabric of a Reconstructionist Society, post-Civil War (Blum, 2008). Therefore, opportunities for women to advance in school leadership, particularly black women, was not the norm (Wootton, 1997). After *Brown v. The Board of Education*, women began to assume leadership positions with the support of the American Federation of Teachers and other organizations (McCluskey, 1999).

Cultural Perspectives Regarding Women in Education

Merit criteria was the mechanism controlling how women advanced in education (Goldberg, 2001). The cultural view popularly held in earlier times was the “woman’s place” is in the home or that women should not compete with men (Grove & Montgomery, 1999). As a result, “very few women held administrative posts between 1820 and 1900” (Shakeshaft, 1987, 1999). Nevertheless, the Quakers hired Black teachers and administrators after the Reconstruction Period which influenced culture socially, economically and politically. The educational culture in the 21st century, since the No Child Left Behind Act, continues to experience demands by politicians and legislatures. Demographics, non-English language learners, and community or cultural preference are given top priority in a search for a school administrator (Engels, Hotton, Devos, Bouckennooghe, & Aeltermann, 2008). The culture of the school affects student enrollment and the choice of a school leader (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). The school principal should collaborate with parents, politicians, and community leaders to be successful in the community culture of the school.

Women performed the most significant duties in education, but male leaders stifled women’s aspirations (Domenico & Jones, 2007). In several cases, if the women are submissive, non-assertive, or independent, they are rewarded with minimal praise but no increase in pay (Peters, 2012; Shakeshaft, 1989). It appears that women in the field of education are not advancing at the same rate that they are in private industry (Gender and Leadership, 2006; Grove & Montgomery, 1999). Although women have 5-10 years of experience in the field of education, usually their appointment to school leadership comes after age 40 (Lunenbergh, 1991; Peters, 2012). Women are generally thought of as

nurturers rather than leaders (Gender and Leadership, 2006); Growe & Montgomery, 1999). After the school reform legislation, such as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSEA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB), women have seemingly dominated the elementary, middle, and some high school classrooms (Woody, 1996). The career of teaching has become feminized, whereas the business of administration is still male-dominant. The underrepresentation of women to their counterpart males in school administration is significant (Growe & Montgomery, 1999).

Kanter (1975) suggested that many stereotypes existed for women in education. If they participated in sports, that involved teams, seemingly the skill set for competition and management transferred to their occupation (Kanter, 1975). On the other hand, the capacity to be analytical, set emotions aside, and make hard decisions, appeared to be relegated to masculine role models, men with elite status and educational advantages (Kanter, 1975). In 1972, Title IX addressed the inequities in gender roles relative to employment discrimination (Kanter, 1975).

Wolfgang (2011) stated that Black teachers who have the same skin color as their school principal have a different relationship within the educational process. When the school principal and the staff share the same skin color and experiences, the dynamics are enhanced (Keith & Monroe, 2016; Rowland, 2008). It seems logical that the relationship between an African American school principal, in a school that is at least 33% African American, would have better test scores, due to factors not directly related to instructional delivery. The color of a school principal's skin may not be at the forefront; however, there seems to be an ancillary relationship between the principal and student achievement in urban school settings (Clement, 2017; Hrabowski & Sanders, 2014;

McManus, 2017). If a position opens or vacancy for a public-school principal occurs, usually African American women were not aware of what was available, a timeline to apply, or any pertinent information that might facilitate a pursuit to advancement into administration (Peters, 2012). Often Black women, when selected, were sent to the most desperate schools and treated like indentured servants (Nash, 1988).

There are differences in perspectives of women and men who aspire to become public-school principals. Some women become a school administrator based on personal relationships rather than credentials (Horsford, 2012). One viewpoint about women is they are emotional, concerned with managing the status quo, and relationship nurturers. A contrasting viewpoint is that men focus on the task or assignment, and all their energy and strategies are focused on being successful, regardless of relationships. Women are generally hired based on track record; in contrast, men are generally hired based on risk-taking and innovative strategies (Grove & Montgomery, 1999).

In the 1980's, less than 23% of education graduates were people of color (Patton & Jordan, 2017). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), in the 2011–12 school year, a majority of public-school principals were Caucasian (80%), while 10% were Black and 7% were Hispanic (State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In 2014, 84% of teachers in the U.S. were White, whereas the student population was African American (16%) Hispanic (24%), or Asian (5%). African American women make up approximately 13% of the U.S. population (Department of Education, 2016). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), the student-teacher diversity gap, also referred to as the demographic gap, has drawn increased attention from educators and parents over the past three decades

(Hrabowski, 2014). Some politicians may argue that personal factors, not race, prevent African Americans from advancing in their educational pursuits (Hochschild & Shen, 2014).

Male dominance of school leadership has reinforced stereotyping women as too emotional to make logical decisions (Gender and Leadership, 2006). Both men and women should acknowledge that different leadership styles occur; however, if no one is following the leader, then any edict is a futile effort (Almy, Tooley, & Trust, 2012). The school leader must have influence with the staff. If the followers perceive that the sex of the school leader is more significant than the vision, mission, goals, and objectives, then nothing else matters. Shakeshaft states, “women are overrepresented in teaching but underrepresented in administration” (Shakeshaft, 1999, p. 100). The organization must respect women as decision-makers and school leaders (Peters, 2012). To empower the principal to be a change agent, respect for new policies must come from those who would be governed by the new procedures.

School leadership can be defined as implementing a vision for an organization, creating, and developing appropriate policies (Achilles, Keedy & High, 1994). Shakeshaft and Jean-Marie noted that in modern times, women dominate in leadership at the elementary level (Jean-Marie, 2013; Peters, 2012; Shakeshaft, 1987). Black women were teachers and administrators by the 1920's, but not consultants and deans of instruction (Nash, 1988). Perhaps perception by both sexes may have been affected advancement.

Haberman pre-screener affects inclusion. The process of hiring a public-school principal, in a few greater Houston area school districts, includes taking an electronic

questionnaire (Haberman, 1995). In some districts the questionnaire is a pre-requisite to an invitation for a face-to-face interview (Haberman, 1995). This process is both inclusive and exclusive for women selected from a pool of lead teachers and other eligible candidates (Brown, 2016; Gupton & Slick, 2004; Patton & Jordan, 2017; Peters, 2012).

Many African American applicants have both the persona and resume for terrific face-to-face interviews, but the questionnaire is the determinant of who gets into the Principal's Pool Initiative (Wallace Foundation, 2012). If a star teacher is not in the principal pool, the candidate is not considered for most advanced district-level positions such as skills specialist or literacy coach (Turnbull, 2015; Wallace Foundation, 2012).

The Haberman assessment appears to serve as a gatekeeper and may impede upward mobility. This assessment can only be taken once every 12 months. The electronically generated results of the assessment are immediately known by the district human resources office and other talent search personnel. It can be disheartening to not only be unsuccessful but also to wait a whole anniversary year before the applicant can re-apply.

The objective of the assessment is to pre-screen applicants who are not a good fit to be an administrator for an urban poverty school (Haberman, 1995). The Haberman Assessment is viewed, by many, as a scientific approach to admitting potential school leaders into the principal's pool. The purpose of The Haberman Assessment is to eliminate administrator turnover. The Haberman Assessment was created by Dr. Martin Haberman, Distinguished Professor of Education at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee and has been used for over 30 years. Because this assessment screens

applicants regardless of gender, ethnicity, or social status, there are researchers for and against using the Haberman Assessment and other electronic testing. There are equally as many academicians who advocate for self-selection of potential candidates for the principal positions although this process is flawed (Bottoms, O'Neill, Fry, & Kill, 2003).

Bottoms et al. (2003) are researcher advocates for the Wallace Foundation's concept of the Haberman Star Teacher Interview Assessment. Bottoms et al. argued against relying on a self-selected pool of applicants who have the high credential but little to no talent or skills for leadership. According to Bottoms et al., many teachers strive to be school principals without being adequately trained to be assistant principals. Frequently teachers see the assistant principals as disciplinarians who are not involved with curriculum and instruction. Individual states are moving toward a comprehension evaluation process for selecting potential administrators (Bottoms, O'Neill, Fry, & Kill, 2003)

The pre-screening by the questionnaire is purported to determine which candidates have the potential of success with the most challenging students, such as those in urban schools in lower socio-economic communities (Wallace Foundation, 2012). The questionnaire consists of 50 questions with three possible answers. The instrument boasts a 95% accuracy rate for determining which teachers will stay and succeed and which ones will quit and fail (Haberman Foundation, 2012). School boards and site-based decision-making committees rely on this instrument to determine stress capacity, knowledge, and skills of the instructional leader or school principal who is responsible for student achievement of at-risk youth.

There is research that contradicts the acclaimed success of an assessment as a predictor of which school teachers or school leaders are likely to fail (Cranston, 2012). One author, Mary Clement (2009), suggested past behavior is a better predictor of success when selecting an urban school administrator. The measure of previous behavior method is known as Behavior-Based Interview, BBI. Clement argues BBI's behavioral approach to interviewing potential administrators for a position in an urban school would be an alternative to the Haberman 50 multiple-choice questionnaire format.

Some applicants do not do well on multiple-choice assessments (Clement, 2009). Portfolios, journals, other artifacts, and activities may be evidence for an alternate assessment of skills. Mary Clement suggested a resume with a cover letter, accomplishments, and any additional required pre-interview applicant paperwork should be submitted (Clement, 2009). This approach involves a personal and paper recommendation of a potential candidate for the principal pool, a pool of eligible administrators (McCray, 2007).

Barriers may affect inclusion. Selecting an administrator for urban secondary schools is not cut and dry (Mitgang, 2003). Many urban school districts choose their school principals from a pool of eligible candidates who must meet specific pre-requisites (Wallace Foundation, 2012). Access to the principal's pool process is controversial. In most school buildings there are lead teachers, specialists, and department chairs who work in the trenches making their school administrator look great, but they are not eligible for the principal's pool based on a questionnaire pre-assessment. Standards and expectations set by a local district should distinguish individuals who qualify to lead urban schools to meet federal mandates for student academic achievement (Burdette &

Schertzer, 2005; Turnbull, 2016). There are still unanswered questions as to how an African American teacher perceives moving from the classroom in an urban school towards inclusion in the principal's pool (Clement, 2017; Patton & Jordan, 2017; Peters, 2017; Smith, 2008).

Preparing Aspiring School Principals

In the 21st century, effective school leadership is paramount. Training to develop aspiring principals is not consistent across school districts (Burrows-McCabe, 2014; Wallace Foundation, 2012). School leaders are not equipped for the principalship, although university coursework and state examinations are required. Many school leaders are not ready for multiple tasks that will be their responsibility (Peters, 2008, Smith, 2008). Unfortunately, a school leaders' gender and race can eliminate them from consideration as a school principal in a specific community (Peters, 2017).

There has been much discussion of the traits needed to become a successful school administrator, but there is no clear-cut definition of what the characteristics resemble (Marzano, 2000). Selecting a school administrator is not a gut-based decision. The selection process for a potential urban school administrator should include the traits mentioned by researchers and experts in the field.

McEwan (2003), for example, had been a principal in the school for one year when her superintendent requested her to write her job description. McEwan asked 364 students in Grades 1 through 6 what they thought she did as a principal. The students described her experiences in the entire building. They saw the principal as an individual wearing various hats. Years later, McEwan wrote "10 Traits of Highly Effective Principals" to assist central administration offices and college preparation course

designers to develop a different perspective on what it takes to be an excellent administrator. The book, based on student responses and McEwan's personal experience as a school leader, identified these 10 traits of an effective school administrator: 1) communicator, 2) learning-centered, 3) an envisioner, 4) people-centered, 5) change master, 6) culture builder, 7) activator, 8) producer, 9) character builder, and 10) contributor. McEwan suggests the goal of administrative preparation is to enable school principals to pack their briefcase and set out immediately on their journey to becoming a highly effective principal (McEwan, 2003). Also, aspiring school principals must be prepared for the interview process (McManus, 2017). The interviewer may be flawed so that self-selection is not accurate. On the other hand, electronic questionnaires are objective but often allow persons to enter the principal pipeline who know how to pass the test.

High-stakes testing and school accountability. For any district to receive federal funding for education, that district must adhere to federal mandates, and the school principal, regardless of gender or ethnicity is responsible for increasing student achievement (National Center for Educational Evaluation, 2015). The U.S. Department of Education mandates that *No Child Left Behind* (2001), formerly known as the Elementary School Education Act, and currently known as Every Student Succeeds Act is implemented in each district across the nation (Borek, 2008; Pijanowski, Hewitt, & Brady, 2009). The U.S. Department of Education, a federal entity, mandates that each state must ensure that core curriculum is taught. Each school receives a report card to determine if it is meeting federal and state expectations for increasing student academic achievement.

The principal should be sensitive to the culture and the climate of the school (Martines, 2005). Outsider instructional leaders dictate what they think will increase student achievement. It seems that high-stakes testing is driving who and when a principal is hired or reassigned to a school building. Although having high-stakes assessments influence how instruction was delivered was a concern, student achievement increased as student needs are met (Marzano, 2000, 2005).

Clement (2009) suggested that questions related to past experiences give more objective responses to the myriad of skills needed for the school principal's job (McEwan, 2003). The viewpoint stated by Clement was a result of years in the private industry.

No one can be expected to have firsthand experience with all the issues of a principalship without having been a principal. So, how do you answer interview questions requiring you to explain your previous experience and work? If you have served as an assistant principal, a lead teacher, or a department or committee chair, you have gained leadership insights and experiences that you can share in an interview. Many states require internships before granting leadership certification, and your internship projects can be of tremendous help in answering questions. (Clement, 2009, p. 16)

Clement suggested internships are critical to equip an individual to be a school principal.

The author, Clement, stated help is needed for the school principalship and that an administrator cannot have previous work experience if not allowed to train for the position.

Local school boards expect the school principal to be the executive decision maker who makes decisions that concur with federal guidelines (McEwin & Greene, 2010). The scope of decisions made by the school principal is expected to impact student

achievement positively. The executive administrator, the school principal, is expected to be in the top tier when accountability ratings are posted. When the results from mandated state assessments are shared with the school district, the school principals are notified of the results, as soon as the school district receives the data. The school principal, no matter what race or gender is responsible for ensuring that the school has a first-rate report card from the state (TEA, 2010). Since the passage of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) law, the federal government monitors many schools for student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The federal government's goal of NCLB is that 100% of all students will increase academic performance with essential knowledge and skills by 2014 (McEwin & Greene, 2010; Rubin, 2011; Rush & Scherff, 2012).

Dr. William R. Holland of Rhode Island, a school superintendent, suggested that each principal applicant must have significant secondary education experience in addition to a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, and have met educational administration requirements (Holland, 2006). Holland suggests personality and an interview reveal the capacity to handle a myriad of responsibilities included in a school principal's position. Dr. Holland served as a secondary principal, doctoral program seminar advisor, commissioner of higher education, and the accreditation chair for schools in Europe and the Middle East. Interim Superintendent Dr. Holland authored, *Selecting School Leaders – Guidelines for Making Tough Decisions* published in 2006, which focused directly on the selection of school leaders

Stakeholders Considerations

All stakeholders, especially the parents, should have their voices heard regarding school changes and or policy. Parental support is so necessary to the success of a school

administrator and it is not to be taken lightly (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Although the school leader should be knowledgeable and aware of the pulse of a school function, events, and activities; a myriad of situations will arise regarding parent wishes; many decisions will call for a firm decision-maker.

A problem exists because it is difficult to move into the principal's pool in many of the metropolis areas (Lin, 2013). One mega school district in the Southwestern United States with over 200,000 students has areas of affluence and areas of poverty. Most of the student population are on free and reduced lunch and under-supported with resources. The numbers for young people affected by poverty, unemployment, crime, drug addiction, and malnutrition are increasing, as is the need for a variety of more intensive and extended social services in schools (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Low-socioeconomic neighborhoods are often a place of discouragement and the administrator and staff move to a more comfortable area of service or shut down on making any substantive accomplishment (Oplatka, 2017; Peters, 2017; Robinson, 2014).

Student achievement is a high priority in urban schools, so the administrator selected should be a good fit as an instructional leader (Borek, 2008). The selection process for an urban school administrator is an essential step in the efforts to improve student achievement. The administrative leader cannot just be a manager or supervisor of the school staff and react to the staff needs. On the other hand, leaders win followers, create change, develop power with a team of people and persuade followers to implement new ideas (Marzano, 2005).

Mentoring Aspiring African American Women for Principalship. The procedure to employ African American women as school principals needs to be explored (Brown, 2016). On the secondary level in education, the percentage of women school principals is 25% of the number of women school principals (United States Department of Education, 2016). Likewise, the number of African American administrators is less than 10% of all school principals in the United States (United States Department of Education, 2016).

The strategy for recruiting and hiring African American women as school principals should send the message that they have value and that ethnic diversity is vital to educational leadership (Jean-Marie, 2013). African American women bring different perspectives and different experiences to urban school leadership. Thus, researchers concerned about the process for selecting potential candidates for the principal pool began a study of school principalship. One renowned group of researchers who study principal selection is the Wallace Foundation. The Wallace Foundation is a center that supports the research of educational hiring practices for administrators. Many researchers have written reports for the Wallace Foundation due to receiving a grant (Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003)

Mentoring is essential. Leadership is a role that requires a mentor. Mentoring can be academic and personal (Peters, 2017). Mentorship is not always a straightforward process in grooming a star teacher to enter the principal's pool and become a school leader. Navigation of the maze of authority and power can be challenging for novice administrators. Mentors may be peers, a group of veteran school principals, or a one-to-one designated supervisor. This extension of professional development is significant in the life of a potential and veteran administrator (Burrows-McCabe, 2014; Peters, 2017).

It is so essential for the principal to be equipped to make decisions and not be hindered by multiple trials and errors (Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003). Portin, et al. conducted a study and suggested that the principal must diagnose the problem correctly and then decide how to address the need. This study conducted by Portin, et al. included 21 schools across four U.S. states. Charter, magnet, private, sectarian, and non-sectarian schools were studied. The Wallace Foundation invested millions of dollars over three years to help improve and develop leadership in schools (Portin et al., 2003). The study used interviews with school administrators and teachers to determine how they handled their finances and hiring of personnel since personnel contributes a large share of the school's budget.

Modern school administrators must be able to provide, even at the expense of a consultant, remedies for dysfunctional activities in their school. Marzano stated that schools need to work on multiple indicators simultaneously (Marzano, 2000; The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2017). It was in this context that the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a cornerstone of President Johnson's "War on Poverty" specified that the Commissioner of Education should conduct a nationwide survey of the availability of educational opportunity. The wording of the mandate revealed an assumption on the part of the Act's authors that educational opportunity was not equal for all members of American society; the Commissioner was to conduct a survey of equal opportunities in education and make a report to the President (Thornton, 2010).

Burdette and Schertzer (2005) suggested that to fill the perceived shortage of capable administrators for the principal's pool, that energy should be spent to develop leaders from within. Curriculum changes, standardized assessments, and expanded job

responsibilities are causing the applicant pool to dwindle. In many circumstances, the stress associated with being a school administrator out-weighs the rewards of serving children, parents, and the community (Burdette & Schertzer, 2005). These researchers state that local and federal policies in education need to consider more than the achievement gap among ethnicities but also should address issues of being in a transient or more global society (Clement, 2017; Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) now known as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) holds teachers K-12 accountable for how students learn and achieve (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Thus, the school principal is the executive administrative who hires and requires each teacher in his or her building to adhere to federal expectations for the core curriculum (Clement, 2017; Sperandio, 2015). As the school leader, mentorship by another principal or district trainer should be on-going in the initial year, and continuous professional development after the first year extended to the first few years (Marzano, 2005).

Networking is critical. Several university service centers study the supply and demand for administrators across the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002). According to educational statistics, larger school districts have openings more frequently due to a higher turnover rate or more positions to fill. Since the power to fill vacancies comes from the superintendent level, African American women are seldom selected. Also, African American women are scarce in secondary school principal positions (Horsford, 2012). For generations society seemingly marginalizes African American cultures and experiences (Margo, 1990; McCray, 2007). Consequently, Black women tend not to have the camaraderie of the African American

male nor other ethnicities (Brown, 2016; Peters, 2012). An advocate who champions on behalf of African American women lessens the struggle usually associated with moving from the classroom teacher to the school principal (Williams, 2015).

For many African Americans, the route to leadership may have been as a school counselor or as a curriculum specialist. African American school principals are non-traditional as society views school leadership. For so many years white middle-aged men have been at the helm of public schools. Thus, Black or African American women have been deferred or at the bottom of the totem pole as school leaders. Hooks (1984) stated, “as a group, black women are in an unusual position in this society for not only are we collectively at the bottom of the occupational ladder, but our overall social status is lower than that of any other group” (p. 144). African American women do not receive invites and are excluded from many networking meetings.

White males have dominated the positions of power, leadership as school principals up to the school superintendent (McCray, 2007). Research teams for the Wallace Foundation reported that there are more applicants than available jobs; however, schools in challenging areas did have problems attracting potential administrative applicants (Bottoms, O’Neill, Fry, & Kill, 2003). Most school principals are close to retirement age when they start, so further research is recommended (Mitgang, 2003).

Recruiting replenishes the pool. (Peters, 2012) suggests stakeholders such as parents, students, teachers, community, and administrators receive benefit from the diversity of perspectives to the curriculum and presentation of core concepts. The best fit is a consideration when recruiting for a school administrator. Thus, job openings occur as school principals seek retirement, through attrition, or job transfers. Nontraditional

leaders, namely African American women, may or may not be selected depending on the school. School culture affects where an African American woman is situated. The best fit may be subjective and dependent not only on qualifications and certifications, but also public-school principal positions may have an unspoken quota requirement (Jean Marie, 2013; Robinson, 2014). With so much emphasis on student achievement, many superintendents who are white and have experienced an influx of non-English speaking students have reservations about hiring Black women as secondary school principals (Cranston, 2012). Stereotyping frequently occurred when interviewing candidates (Moore, 2013; Patton & Jordan, 2017; Peters, 2017).

School districts across the United States are being held accountable for how they improve student achievement. In 1996, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) set the standards for which school administrators are measured (Wallace Foundation, 2017). Therefore, this study will correlate the hiring practices of several large school districts to acquiring potential public-school principals.

Recruiters look for a potential school principal that is a strong instructional leader and a manager of people (Wallace Foundation, 2012). Leaders set goals and directions for the school. On the other hand, managers merely maintain the status quo. An instructional leader is expected to promote continuing education with the staff and teachers (Marzano, 2005). The process for selecting a school administrator usually occurs in the summer months before school starts in August. An online application for district job openings commences the process to fill positions left by transfers, relocations, and retiring school principals (Wallace, 2012). The coursework, completion of an

application with references, and resume are the gateway to a process that many districts label as a principal's pool (Burdette & Schertzer, 2005).

The Southern Regional Education Board constituents label the problem of hiring persons to be school administrators from a pool of candidates as hoping for the best. Joseph Bower, a Harvard Business School professor at the Annual Leadership Forum for the Southern Regional Education Board addressed the issue of emotional detachment. Regarding principal selection and succession, he stated manager replacement consisted of test tubes; if one does not work just replace it with another test tube. Bower posits suggests, "You could summarize [the typical] approach as 'test tube development.' Put a manager in a test tube, turn up the heat, and see what you get. If you don't get what you want, get another manager, and heat another test tube (SREB, 2011). -also suggested that trial and error was typical for the manner in which educational administrators were selected for the principalship.

Other researchers suggest the principal pool is a shrinking pool of quality and quantity of applicants (Pijanowski, Hewitt, & Brady, 2009). Pijanowski et al., support researchers who state high-stakes testing and standards-based instruction are to blame for the shortage of school principals. Additionally, Pijanowski, Hewitt, and Brady (2009) identified these five areas of concern regarding recruiting and supplying the principal's pool: the low salary for responsibilities, the time investment required, the changing demands of the position, the lack of community and parent support, and the absence of public respect due to media coverage of public education. Another researcher, Lee Mitgang, wrote a report for the Wallace Foundation. The Wallace Foundation is an organization that studies criteria to strengthen policy and practice in education.

Researcher Mitgang's report examined how to attract potential administrators to the principal's pool. Mitgang's report examined the policies and practices and the recruitment and mentorship of prospective administrators.

Potential Administrators: The Principal's Pool

The hiring of a school administrator is sometimes subject to quotas. An unspoken agenda in hiring school principals is the need to reflect the student population by race (Horsford, 2012). Often, predominately white schools do not employ a person of color (Brown, 2016; Jean-Marie, 2013; Robinson, 2014). In smaller districts with a population less than 1600, the process for principal selection can generally be handled from within the district by grooming a potential candidate for an expected vacancy. However, in large metropolitan areas perception is key to what is real for the urban school. Only 1/3 of superintendents' point to teaching experience as a significant qualification for school principals and 1/5 cite a background in the curriculum as necessary (Roza et al., 2003).

Promotion occurs slowly, dependent upon retirement, relocation, or transfers, but the opportunity to apply for a school administrator has more people than slots available concurrently (Wallace Foundation, 2012). Also, few credentialed people or qualified educators want to be a principal and have prepared adequately for the job (Institute of Educational Leadership, 2000). There is approximately an average of 17 applicants for each administration position. In rural areas, the numbers are much smaller (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Besides the hurdles of being qualified and eligible, potential candidates for school administrators must possess coping strategies for standardized assessments and accountability. No Child Left Behind (2001), NCLB holds schools accountable for

meeting federal standards for student achievement. The school superintendent should ensure that each school has an active school principal. A school administrator in the urban environment should be the instructional leader who assumes the responsibility to make heroes of everyone around them while taking responsibility for creating change by implementing good ideas (Wallace Foundation, 2012).

Districts that have pockets of low-performing schools have concerns as to how to fill the principal positions. Having an adequate number of qualified applicants for administrator openings in poverty and minority neighborhoods is challenging (Hrabowski & Sanders, 2014; Reeves, 2007). There is limited information about women of color participation as school teachers or as school administrators (Nash, 1988). African American women face double discrimination, gender, and race (Brown, 2016; Patton & Jordan, 2017; Peters, 2012; Reed, 2012).

A Nation at Risk (1983) and No Child Left Behind (2001) has left an indelible mark on the way education is viewed today (Rubin, 2011). The U.S. Department of Education expects school administrators to improve student achievement with students in lower economic situations. Many urban schools have a gap between ethnicities with student achievement in core areas such as reading and mathematics (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Many school administrators are challenged to handle every situation without outside support. Evidence reveals a major disconnect between what superintendents want in new school principals and the selection criteria (Roza et al., 2003). Marzano focused on the effectiveness of schools and student learning. He alluded to school leadership as being responsible for what happens with student learning and student academic success (Marzano, 2000).

Research Studies Regarding Principal Selection

Social Cognitive Career Theory (Bandura, 1986; Lent & Hackett, 1987) is based upon the premise that school principalship is the result of behavior, personal, and environmental factors. According to these theorists, women school principals ascend from the classroom based on internal factors such as cognitive, affective, biological, and external factors such as the social environment and or career experiences. According to Echols (2006), African American women are often treated like tokens to show diversity in selection, and in many circumstances, they are invisible and working in schools located in socially and economically disadvantaged communities. Since *No Child Left Behind*, the goal is to increase the levels of student achievement; however, the administrators are left behind in schools that are in danger of being closed if the turnaround does not occur.

As opportunities arise, the first selection occurs from candidates in the principal pool. Seldom are school principals, in this vast metropolis district, hired from outside the area. As a result, encouragement to participate in the growing of school leaders, from within the system, bears investigation. Lack of role models, mentors, access, and exposure to openings hampers the advancement of African American women to move into school leadership. Some skills are only learned on the job unless the school district has an academy to train would-be school principals on the expectations and assignments associated with the job description. Vacancies may occur due to removal, transfer, retirement, or resignation. School districts recruit to fill vacancies as they occur before the start of each school year.

The separate but equal legislation of 1954, *Brown v. The Board of Education* may have affected indirectly, the practice of full inclusion and equal representation. (Nash, 1988). The physical building structure and knowledge of budgets seem to exclude certain women when a comparable male applies for the same administrative position. The duties of a principal preclude the recruitment of African American women, particularly at the secondary level of public education. The expectations of a strong-hand for the adolescents undergoing hormone imbalance makes the job appear to be more suited for the less nurturing but rather the coaching aspect of a school leader (Reed, 2012).

Summary

There is a legitimate need for practitioners to research the perspective of African American women school principals as current literature suggests. Future generations could learn how African American women have been hired as public-school principals. Literature affirms that African American women served after slavery in various positions in education (Anderson, 1988). A consistent thread among the research was that after slavery and before *Brown v. Board of Education*, it seemed favorable for black women to teach more often in North and less often in the Southern states in the United States (Shakeshaft, 1989). It seems that although education was public, a Black teacher was not allowed to teach non-black students. White women if they founded a school, could be the head mistress, but this was not always the same with women of color (Moore, 2013; Reed, 2012). Former slaves in southern states became literate, but the advancement to be school leaders was limited by the population being served. The color of skin seemed to make differences in who would advance (Peters, 2012).

During the Post-Brown Era, post-modern education and legislation policies ruled with “separate and unequal” that appeared to be the norm. African American women were displaced if the student population was non-black (Tillman, 2004). Challenges for women in education were noted by both Clement and other authors that opportunities for mentorship or networking usually excluded women in education. Cultural perspectives regarding women in education seemed to prohibit them from leading in secondary schools, a “glass ceiling” seemed to exist. Males seem to dominate the higher positions. With a clamp on these decision-making positions, many women became discouraged and settled for non-administrative positions (Shakeshaft, 1989).

In more modern times, it appears the number of individuals who may be considered for administrative positions is controlled (Mitgang 2003). Several large school districts use the Haberman pre-screener that affects inclusion in the school principals’ pool. Preparation for this assessment usually required a mentor. Other large school districts may not have an online assessment but a series of questions or behavioral tasks. In the 21st century, preparation for aspiring school principals includes high-stake testing requirements, pre-work experience with curriculum and instruction, and stakeholders’ collaboration strategies. The candidates selected from a school principals’ pool or district academy preparatory program were considered based on interviews and the recommendations of mentors.

Chapter III

Methodology

Chapter III presents an overview of the methodology used in this study to answer the research questions. This chapter includes research questions, research design, instruments, participant selection, data collection methods, data analysis, and trustworthiness. The methodology for this descriptive phenomenological study focused on the narratives of 10 African American women school principals in several large urban school districts who were successful in being hired to be public school principals. The interviews of these 10 women school principals flowed not only from normal conversation but also five semi-structured interview questions. The interview questions provided support for the research questions: (1) the qualifying process, (2) the interview process, and the (3) post interview process. The process to apply, interview, and receive a job offer were posted on the district websites and was used in this study. Also, used for this study were the curriculum vitae of the women which were published in Region IV as well as the district's school website.

Research Questions

1. What were the perceptions and experiences of African American women school principals who were hired in the greater Houston area regarding their qualifying process?
2. What were the perceptions and experiences of African American women school principals who were hired in the greater Houston area regarding their interview process?

3. What were the perceptions and experiences of African American women school principals who were hired in the greater Houston area regarding their post-interview process?

Research Design

The descriptive phenomenological study design is appropriate for this study because it described the essence of a lived phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The purpose of the study is to examine how African American women in the greater Houston area in public education seek and procure the position of school principal to convey the perceptions and experiences of a group of women school principals from the same region, same ethnicity, and similar education. Creswell stated there are five qualitative approaches and indicated when several individuals have a shared experience, the phenomenological approach is appropriate. Additionally, a phenomenological approach of research is appropriate for the description of the individuals interviewed, which was the phenomenon to be examined. The women school principals in this study were celebrated women: some with accolades on Region IV website, others on their district page, and still others by google search. These women could be defined as seemingly turnaround principals; their leadership journey from the classroom to school principal is a phenomenon to be retold. Interviews were the primary data collected and were analyzed for significant statements and the essence of the experience acquiring the position as a school principal. The interviews allowed the voices of the African American women to be presented and allows the reader to capture their experiences in context.

This study re-told the stories, developing themes chronologically for the participants in the research study. This study differed from quantitative analysis in that

the sample population for this study was smaller and described who and what happened to them (Moustakas, 1994). This qualitative study approach was appropriate to examine the perceptions and experiences of 10 individuals as subjects of the study. The proposed study research design consisted of a descriptive phenomenological study of 10 African American women school principals' narratives of their journey from classroom teacher into school administration through the school principal candidate pool.

Site Selection

This study was positioned in seven different school districts in Region IV of the Houston area. The site districts in Region IV were selected purposefully from east, west, north, and south. Pseudonyms were assigned to the site districts to de-identify the school districts and buildings. Participant school districts were thusly named: Bravo, Delta, Glover, Goliad, Valley, Teague, and Alpha. The participant school buildings by pseudonym names included Rayville High School, Houghton Middle, Valley Middle, Washington Elementary, Union Elementary, Sierra Elementary, Peabody Elementary, King Elementary, Mason Elementary and Lane Early Childhood.

The type of schools in Region IV range from affluent to at-risk poverty. The student population for the participant schools' averages about 300 for African American, about 500 for Hispanic, and less than 100 for White. Teacher population for the participant schools' averages about 15 for African American, 9 for Hispanic, and 19 for White. The overall students served in the participant schools averaged 726 students with the Asian and other populations comprising less than 1%. Participant schools' students were over 50% at-risk, over 65% economically disadvantaged, and over half of the

schools had over 20% students with limited English language skills. Each participant school had a state rating of academically acceptable or above.

Instruments

Data collection occurred using an interview protocol. The study investigated how candidates get into the principal pool and get a job offer for a school principal. Data collection included interviews, notes, human resource constraints, and participant curriculum vitae. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed. School district human resource department requirements for seven different school districts were viewed to determine requirements for teachers aspiring to become a school principal. Websites were perused to ascertain the biographies and accomplishments of the study participants. Audio tapes of the interviews, notes, curriculum vitae, and archival data were examined to describe the candidates' perceptions and experiences that they might encounter pre-interview, interview, and post-interview.

Ten African American women school principals from different school districts in the greater Houston area were interviewed individually to encourage transparency. The interviews were reviewed by the participants after the tapes were transcribed, to ascertain accuracy (member checking). The software program Dedoose was used to determine common themes among the women school principals' narratives relative to their perceptions and experiences of becoming a school principal, in the greater Houston area.

Participant Selection

The participants for the descriptive phenomenological study consisted of 10 African American women school principals who had successfully navigated the principal pool in a large, urban school district. Purposeful snowball sampling was the method used

to select participants for this research study. Creswell (2007) defined purposeful sampling as selection for a specific purpose. Ten African American women school principals were invited to participate and informed that their responses and identity would be protected with a pseudonym for this study. Levels of education range from masters to doctorate with over 10 years of education experience. No data tables included specific identifiable characteristics, to ensure the identity of the participants remained without identifiable factors. Table 3 shows the pseudonyms for 10 African American women school principals with pseudonyms for their schools and school districts.

Table 3.

African American Women School Principals, Participants in Research Study

Pseudonym Name	Pseudonym District	Pseudonym School	School Level
Angelica	Bravo	Houghton	Middle
Brenda	Delta	Washington	Elementary
Catherine	Glover	Union	Elementary
Dedra	Goliad	Sierra	Elementary
Elizabeth	Delta	Rayville	High
Francis	Bravo	Peabody	Elementary
Gwen	Valley	Valley	Middle
Harriet	Delta	Lane	Early Childhood
Isabella	Teague	Kleg	Elementary
Jacquelyn	Alpha	Mason	Elementary

The consent to participate in the research study form was approved by the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB), before the research commenced. Purposeful snowball sampling was the method used to select potential African American women public-school principals in the greater Houston area. Potential participants were contacted by email with a recruitment letter and provided the Consent to Take Part in a Human Research Study Form. It was explained to the research participants that the risk was minimal and that pseudonyms would be used to protect their

identity. Subsequently, the 10 interviewees were asked questions and their responses analyzed using Dedoose to determine contradiction. The school districts selected were large enough to be used for a larger sample if needed.

A semi-structured approach with open-ended questioning occurred for the 10 women school principals individually, at separate times. The interview for each woman began with broad, open-ended questions such as “Tell me your life story. What experiences affected the decision to become a school principal?” The second part of the interview consisted of career challenges on their path to the school principalship, experiences with persons who influenced their career. Lastly, the participants were asked how they perceive their ethnicity affects their mentorship of future school principals. The interview taping was conducted in less than 45 minutes. The questions examined how these school principals navigated the hiring process and were hired as school principal, the joys of their career, and their feeling of purpose. Participant interviews were compared to look for patterns and shared themes.

Data Collection Methods

Before data collection, permission to conduct the research study was obtained through the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (Appendix B). Phenomenological research emphasizes the narratives of the lived experiences of the participants of a phenomenon. In-depth interviews, and the collection of documents such as human resource job requirements, curriculum vitae, and public-education school reports (Creswell, 2007) were sources of information for the research. The participants were highly celebrated by their respective districts, so it was easy to align verbal telephone conversations with their district curriculum vitae. This research was approved as a

descriptive phenomenological study that used 10 individual interviews of women school principals from the same region, of the same race to ask semi-structured questions.

After the consent form was received, and a commitment was made, the participant was able to pre-review the five-semi-structured interview questions. Interviews were conducted in a quiet area, free from distractions, and ideal for recording. The interviews were conducted using the approved protocol (Appendix C). The 10 interviews occurred from November 2018 to March 2019 with an average of 30 minutes, with an additional 15 minutes for the opening and closing per interview. The three research questions were aligned with the guided interview protocol. The researcher manually transcribed the data from the audio-taped interviews and reviewed the data for accuracy, with the participants.

The primary method for data collection were African American women school principals' interviews. Participant interviews opened with natural conversations and introduction of the researcher. The ice breaker opening allowed the interviewees to relax and be assured that they could share candidly without their identity being disclosed. The interview quickly moved to the interview questions moving from the background before becoming a school principal, to the qualifying process, to the interview process, and to their post-interview experiences. The second method of data collection occurred in the form of documents provided by the school district website, and the principal's curriculum vitae or career bios. Region IV documentaries corroborated the appointments, celebrations, and success for some of the school principals.

The next method of data collection began with the examination of district requirements to qualify and apply for school principal positions. Notes, recordings of interviews, and school-district documents were examined. The interviews were

transcribed from tapes manually, and the interviews were coded using Dedoose, qualitative research software, which is password protected. All transcripts were de-identified and are secure in a password protected computer. Pseudonyms were used for participants, school district, and schools.

Data Analysis Overview

To have an accurate written report of the participants lived experiences, I employed the phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2007). I employed the data analysis spiral method (Creswell, 2007). Data collected was managed through Dedoose with transcript files backup in a separate application. Notes and transcribed interviews were input into Dedoose as separate files.

Initially, I looked at the participants' strategies, behaviors, and attitudes to group the data into pods that aligned to the pre-interview, interview, and post-interview process. I employed the thematic the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data per Braun & Clarke (2006). I also looked at Creswell's spiral method to organize qualitative data (2011, p. 183). The spiral method begins with data management of the text and moving upwards concludes with a written narrative (Creswell, 2007).

I began the process of code formation which is key to qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2007, p. 51). I interpreted the qualitative data and coded it to align with the study's research questions and began a sensemaking theoretical framework. Coding the data by themes and patterns, the process of classification was accomplished. After I input each participant interview individually into Dedoose and organized the data files for coding and analysis, I spent time reading and absorbing the full transcripts, multiple times, to gain a significant understanding of the collected data. As I reviewed the

transcripts in detail, and made comments in the margin, to notate reflections. I reviewed the interpretation of the coded data to determine alignment with the research questions. After coding of the data, I began the process of categorizing segments into themes looking for patterns throughout the participant's narratives. Common themes and patterns relative to strategies to qualify for an interview, behaviors during the interview process, and attitudes post-interview process emerged from the interviews of the women school principals. I concluded the data analysis and generalized the interview narratives, which are included in Chapter 5.

Role of the Researcher

Creswell (2007) stated that researchers of qualitative studies “bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or sets of belief to the research project” (p. 15). Although the researcher's bias may influence the conduction of the research, the awareness of its potentiality should be acknowledged to the participants in the study. The researcher's perspective of African American women school principals' presence being low, is through personal observation. Researcher investigation of data revealed that most of the African American women school principals were in elementary rather than secondary schools. The number of African American women teachers in some schools may have been impressive; however, their inclusion in administration was not evidenced. The researcher used the framework of trustworthiness in the next section to diminish personal bias.

Provisions for Trustworthiness

To show the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher employed triangulation, archival data, member checking, district documents, and curriculum vitae. According to

Creswell (2007) triangulation shows data collected from multiple sources. The researcher used the data collected from notes and interviews to determine reliability and transferability of the findings. The interviewees' rich, narratives allow the readers to see the description of the study participant's actions from the classroom to the school principal. Member checking (Creswell, 2007) allows participants the opportunity to verify the dialogue that occurred with the researcher. Coding the narratives into categories to present the themes occurred based on the responses of 10 African American school principals in the greater Houston area. Feedback from the participants improved the quality of the discussion about the phenomenon.

Summary

Chapter III examines the appropriate method to use for a study of a phenomenon. A group of women are being studied to determine what happened as they aspired to advance to educational administration. The interviews were conducted with women from seven different districts in Region IV of the greater Houston area. The strategy employed was a phenomenological study which looks at the lived experiences of a single individual or describes the meaning for several individuals of a concept or phenomenon. The data collection for the study was conducted with privacy for the participants sharing with transparency their stories of advancement from classroom teacher to school principal. Archived data and curriculum vitae regarding the participant school principals and their schools were examined as well. To have an accurate report of the interviews, Dedoose computer software was used for coding and looking for patterns and themes. The role or views of the researcher did not influence the views expressed by the participants.

Chapter IV.

Findings

Introduction

The first section of this chapter presents an overview of data collected, and the second section presents an overview of data analysis for the 10 women principal participants in this research study. The third section consists of participants' introductions, followed in section four, with the themes and subthemes. Chapter V discusses the findings.

This phenomenological study was an examination of what African American women perceived and what they experienced in their journey to be a public-school principal. First, the qualifying process for public-school principals was examined using curriculum vitae, human resource district requirements, and interviews of 10 African American women school principals. Next, the interview process for each participant was examined by looking for similarities. Finally, the post-interview process was examined for the 10 African American women school principals to determine what occurred after they were interviewed. Literature is sparse relative to successful African American women school principals who move from the classroom and enter the school principal pool to exit with an offer to become an urban school principal (Jean-Marie, 2013, Peters, 2017). Adding to the body of knowledge, the narratives of women principals from different schools were selected because different school districts have different requirements for the pre-interview process, the interview process, and the post-interview process. The expectation was that a common thread would exist among all the women principals. Each of the school districts required a potential principal candidate to be a

successful classroom teacher before being considered to advance into school administration. After being a successful classroom teacher, a mentor or teacher coach who fostered teacher development recommended the next steps to advance in education.

The participants who were interviewed, although interested in education, did not see themselves as school principals at the onset. In the paragraphs that follow the narratives of each of these African American women school principals were different but had similar patterns of advancement. The following questions guided this study:

1. What were the perceptions and experiences of African American women school principals who were hired in the greater Houston area regarding their qualifying process?
2. What were the perceptions and experiences of African American women school principals who were hired in the greater Houston area regarding their interview process?
3. What were the perceptions and experiences of African American women school principals who were hired in the greater Houston area regarding their post-interview process?

Chapter IV is divided into five sections. In the first and second sections, the researcher provides a quick review of data collection and data analysis methods. In the third section, the researcher describes the research setting including participant introductions. In section four, the researcher addressed each research question by themes and subthemes, presenting research findings from the interviews, curriculum vitae, and district human resource requirements. The fifth section of Chapter IV includes an analysis and summary of the research findings. The discussion of findings in Chapter V

will include an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications for future public-school principals.

Data Collected

The data for the participants, after being collected, was compiled into tables to give a visual representation of ethnic breakdown by faculty and students' demographics for the schools in which 10 women school principals from the greater Houston area were selected to serve as public-school principals. Ten African American women principals from different school districts in the greater Houston area were invited using purposeful snowball sampling per Coyne (1997) to participate in the study. The interviews were conducted individually to ensure transparency and to protect the interviewee as they shared. The research for this study utilized semi-structured open-ended questions and did not present any mindset, assumptions, or paradigms during the opening or closing of the interviews. These women principals were allowed to interact with their individual taped interview through a review of the transcription. Accuracy of notes and close listening to the audio tapes allowed the researcher to gain insight from the interviewees' perspectives. Audio data was transcribed, de-identified and input into the qualitative research software Dedoose (www.dedoose.com).

Table 3 consists of the pseudonyms used for each of the participants. Ten African American women public-school principals from Region IV consented to participate in the research study with the understanding that their personal information would not be identifiable to the public. These women worked in the field of education and were eager to participate. For the sake of anonymity, neither their mentors, nor the interviewees are identified in this study. Table 3 shows 10 African American women school principals

from A to J. Female names were assigned to keep track of the data collected. The pseudonyms of the participants and their schools came from the alphabet in descending order. See Table 3.

The first step to school principalship begins with being a successful classroom teacher. The second table, Table 4 shows the possible pool of women who may aspire to advance from classroom teacher to school leadership. Table 4 was generated with pseudonyms but showed the actual data of the schools in which these principals served. Each of the schools is in the greater Houston area, Region IV, and the compiled data in Table 4 could be supported by the school district and the state school reports. Table 4 has been included to show ethnicity for the teachers where each of the African American women public-school principal serves. The Texas Education Agency, TEA, was a source of data as well as the school districts (Nagy, 2019).

Table 4.

Participant School Ethnic Distribution of Teachers of 2016-2017

Schools	African American	Asian	Hispanic	White	Principal
Houghton MS	14.9 (53.5%)	3 (10.7%)	2 (7.2%)	8 (28.6%)	Angelica
Washington ES	23 (44.3%)	5 (9.6%)	14 (26.9%)	7 (13.5%)	Brenda
Union ES	0 (0%)	7.2 (6.9%)	7 (16.5%)	28.2 (66.5%)	Catherine
Sierra ES	3 (4.7%)	1.9 (3%)	22.1 (34.5%)	37.2 (57.8%)	Dedra
Rayville HS	28.7 (56.4%)	2 (3.9%)	4.4 (8.7%)	13.7 (27%)	Elizabeth
Peabody ES	17.1 (89.5%)	0 (0%)	2 (10.5%)	0 (0%)	Francis
Valley MS	18.6 (32.3%)	0 (0%)	5 (8.7%)	28.8 (50%)	Gwen
Lane EC	21.9 (59.4%)	1 (22.7%)	7 (19%)	7 (19%)	Harriet
Kleg ES	11.7 (18.4%)	1 (1.6%)	13 (20.5%)	36.6 (57.9%)	Isabella
Mason	9.5 (18.8%)	1 (2%)	15 (29%)	20 (39.6%)	Jacquelyn

Note: Total number of students divided by full-time teachers = teacher equivalent units

The employment reports for Texas reveal a low number of African American women advancing from the classroom into school principalship. Half of the schools had

a more significant percentage of African American teachers such as: Houghton Middle, Washington Elementary, Rayville High, Peabody Elementary, and Lane Early Childhood. The evidence shows African American women who have the potential to qualify for public-school leadership. Seven of the 10 schools have teachers and students of the same ethnicity.

Table 5 has been included to show the profile of the student population for the schools served by these African American women principals. Again, Houghton Middle, Washington Elementary, Rayville High, Peabody Elementary, and Lane Early Childhood have a large percentage of their student population who are African American. In Kleg Elementary and Mason Elementary, the student population for African American students, is over 35%.

Table 5.

Participant Schools' Student Ethnic Distribution of 2016-2017

Schools	African American	Asian	Hispanic	White	Principal
Houghton MS	316 (54.3%)	13 (2.2%)	229 (39.3%)	11 (1.9%)	Angelica
Washington ES	315 (38.1%)	21 (2.6%)	476 (57.8%)	9 (1.1%)	Brenda
Union ES	34 (4.3%)	516 (65.2%)	56 (7.1%)	161 (20.3%)	Catherine
Sierra ES	34 (4.6%)	6 (.8%)	517 (69.7%)	170 (22.9%)	Dedra
Rayville HS	325 (49.5%)	14 (2%)	331 (46.8%)	22 (3.1%)	Elizabeth
Peabody ES	251 (77.5%)	0 (0%)	53 (16.4%)	16 (4.9%)	Francis
Valley MS	117 (10.6%)	6 (.5%)	884 (79.8%)	83 (7.5%)	Gwen
Lane EC	344 (67.9%)	2 (.4%)	139 (27.4%)	14 (2.8%)	Harriet
Kleg	387 (39.9%)	68 (7%)	421 (43.4%)	59 (6.1%)	Isabella
Mason ES	308 (43.9%)	9 (1.3%)	317 (45.2%)	60 (8.5%)	Jacquelyn

A public-school principal in the greater Houston area, of Region IV often serves student populations that are underdeveloped academically. Looking at Table 6, the researcher is sharing data for each of the 10 African American women school principals.

Table 6 shows more in-depth school profiles such as at-risk, economically disadvantaged, and limited English proficient learners.

Table 6.

Participant Schools Demographic Profile of 2016-2017

Schools	Total Population	At-Risk	Economically Disadvantaged	Limited English Proficient	Principal
Houghton MS	582	42.40%	72.30%	1.90%	Angelica
Washington ES	823	68.20%	89.20%	40.60%	Brenda
Union ES	792	27.50%	1.30%	16.30%	Catherine
Sierra ES	742	75.30%	69.00%	49.30%	Dedra
Rayville HS	708	73.60%	80.80%	9.60%	Elizabeth
Peabody ES	324	64.20%	98.50%	6.20%	Francis
Valley MS	1108	56.00%	83.10%	25.50%	Gwen
Lane EC	507	52.50%	90.70%	19.10%	Harriet
Kleg ES	971	54.40%	82.40%	23.60%	Isabella
Mason ES	702	63.40%	64.50%	22.90%	Jacquelyn

Data Analysis

In this section the data was analyzed for the perceptions and experiences of African American women who apply and are successfully hired as a public-school principal. The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to examine how African American women in the greater Houston area in public education seek and procure the position of school principal. The interview data was acquired using open-ended questions to address the research questions, emerging themes, and subthemes. Dedoose, a computer software analysis tool, allowed the color coding of the interviewee's transcripts to look for and unearth the similarities among the participants' responses.

To have an accurate reporting of the participants lived experiences, the researcher employed a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2007). The phenomenological

approach addresses the structure and essence of an event that occurs for a person or a group of people (Patton, 2002). Patton states, “A phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature and meaning of our everyday lives” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Phenomenological studies allow people to describe their experiences in their own words. The researcher explored each woman principal’s description of their experiences using the transcribed interviews to understand the background experiences which led the participants to consider school principalship. The phenomenon being studied for 10 African American women was their process to become a school principal. The researcher managed data analysis by coding the transcribed interviews categorically by major themes: qualifying process, interview process, and post-interview process. After input and organization of the data files into Dedoose, the researcher spent time reading and absorbing the full transcripts multiple times to gain a greater understanding of the collected data. As the researcher reviewed the transcripts in detail, adding comments in the margins, to notate reflections. A transcriptionist transcribed each interview verbatim.

Table 7.

Participant Grouping by Interview Quotes

Pseudonym	Qualifying Process	Advocate Essential	Educational Experience	Race & Gender	Culture & Networking
Angelica	*	*	*	*	*
Brenda	*	*	*	*	*
Catherine	*	*	*	*	*
Dedra	*	*	*	*	*
Elizabeth	*	*	*	*	*
Francis	*	*	*	*	*
Gwen	*	*	*	*	*
Harriet	*	*	*	*	*
Isabella	*	*	*	*	*
Jacquelyn	*	*	*	*	*

Regardless of the school districts located in four different directions, north, south, east and west areas of Region IV, all had a qualifying process, interview process, and post-interview process whether it was formal or informal. The subthemes were generated from transcript notes. Table 8 shows the themes and subthemes that emerged from coding the narratives of the 10 African American women public-school principals.

Table 8.

Codes and Themes

Themes	Sub-Theme	Code
Qualifying Process	Pre-interview to Qualify Process Advocates and Mentorship	Coaching Teachers Challenges
Interview Process	Work Experience Affects Selection Race & Gender May Be Barriers	Autonomy to Decide Role Assignment
Post-Interview Process	Post-interview Mentorship Matters Networking is Crucial	Self-Efficacy Impact

Research findings are represented by the codes and themes noted above. After the research question is noted, the theme will be presented, followed by a presentation of participant findings. All research findings have been presented from one participant per the theme and codes before transitioning to the next participant. This process has been repeated for each participant until each has been presented individually or in a group.

Table 9.*Participant Educational Profiles*

Pseudonym of Participants	Highest Degree Earned	Years of Educational Experience	Support System
Angelica – MS	MEd	25-30	Advocate
Brenda – ES	MEd	20-25	Advocate
Catherine – ES	Ed.D.	20-25	Mentor
Dedra	EdD	25-30	Mentor
Elizabeth – HS	Ed.D.	10-15	Advocate
Francis – ES	Ed.D.	15-20	Advocate
Gwen – MS	Ed.D.	25-30	Mentor
Harriet – PK-K	MEd	25-30	Advocate
Isabella – ES	Ed.D.	20-25	Mentor
Jacquelyn – PK-5	MEd	15-20	Mentor

Participant introductions and profiles

Pseudonyms were used for the participant names, school districts, and schools involved in the research study. The ages of the participants are rounded to the nearest 5-year mark to keep protect their identity. The pseudonyms were selected using female names and were organized alphabetically to facilitate the narratives and data associated with each participant. Six of the 10 women public-school principals interviewed have a doctorate level degree. The remaining four participants have a master’s degree and two are working on their doctoral degree. Their continuous exposure to professional development punctures the lens through which each participant shared their “voice”. Several have presented papers nationally, so their lens closely relates to the low representation of African American women principals outside of Region IV.

The researcher wants to introduce the African American women public-school principals:

Angelica. Angelica is a principal with over 25 years of educational experience. Angelica, at age 24, and straight out of college obtained certification to teach with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Secondary English and a Master's in Secondary School Administration. Within a year, Angelica moved to Houston from a southern state and considered Houston to be her home. She completed certification as a teacher and school principal, Angelica was urged to pursue administration during her internship because she was young and had no children. Angelica was assisted by great mentors, became a lead teacher, and was groomed to exhibit leadership traits.

Initially, Angelica was interested in curriculum rather than school administration. Angelica began working with curriculum as well as with programs that would increase student academic test scores. She pursued the assistant principal position at the recommendation of her supervisors. Ten years later, Angelica enrolled in coursework for educational leadership and obtained certification as a public-school administrator. After five more years, she, pursued the assistant principal position and five years later she became principal of the same school. This seems to be a rare occurrence in many school districts.

Angelica was unique because she was interviewed without her knowledge. Before her formal interview she was assessed and pushed into the principalship position. Angelica, now 45 years old, is a lead principal and able to mentor other principals.

Brenda. Brenda has over 25 years of experience in the field of education. Brenda always wanted to be a teacher, and often played school with her sister. In school, the teacher called on Brenda to help with classroom tutoring. Brenda was the “teacher’s

pet”. After she graduated from college, she started substitute teaching. This experience led her to fall in love with teaching.

Brenda enrolled in school to get her teaching certification and her principal encouraged her to apply for a skills-specialist position. Reluctantly she applied for and landed the job. She worked in this capacity for four years while working on a Masters’ Degree in Counseling. Brenda worked as a school counselor for six years before deciding to return to school for administrative certification. Brenda attended school in the district where she currently serves, so some of the top administrators were her teachers. Brenda believes the district promotes from within, so after 28 years in the district, she feels she was groomed to move up. After completion of administrative certification, she landed a job as an assistant principal. After serving as an assistant principal for five years, Brenda took over as the interim principal with the sudden departure of the principal.

An area superintendent encouraged Brenda to apply for the now vacant position as principal. She applied for the position and received the promotion. One model of leadership was Brenda’s six-grade teacher and former principal. Before Brenda accepted the position, she talked with her husband, children, sister, and friends about how their lives might change. Brenda’s mother, also, expressed her concerns, but everyone supported Brenda’s decision.

Brenda’s biggest challenge, as a new principal, was budget preparation. Brenda was principal for more than five years. Again, a former principal helped Brenda flourish, giving direction and guidance. Brenda, now 45 years old, was asked to mentor a 1st year

Hispanic principal. She does not believe that race or gender played a role, as she assisted the new principal with curriculum, staffing, and ethical concerns.

Catherine. Catherine has over 20 years in the field of education. As a child, Catherine, wanted to become a teacher. Growing up in inner city schools, teachers helping students inspired her. After graduating from high school, she attended college and majored in education. Catherine's next step was teaching and after teaching the principalship seemed like a natural progression. The major challenge for Catherine was her age. She was employed right out of college, at 22. Catherine worked for nine years as a classroom teacher, and from there she moved into the central office to work on the accountability for student assessment.

Working in administration allowed Catherine to receive her doctorate at the age of 32. Working in the central office permitted her to see the district from the top down. Catherine saw the impact of state assessments to curriculum decisions. She moved out of the state and back to the campus level to build a career as a principal. As a young administrator, she believed her age kept her from advancing quickly.

Although age was a challenge, Catherine devoted herself to learning everything that she could. Because of her desire and a thirst for learning; it was so easy to get caught up with moving forward, but she decided to stay an assistant principal longer. Catherine had the opportunity to see different campuses, experience different cultures and climates. This learning experience added tools to her toolbox. While she never doubted, she could be a principal, she made the decision to stay grounded in the position as an assistant principal, against the advice of her mentors. Now 35 years old, Catherine, believed skills and passion affect advancement, not race or gender.

During the interview, Catherine recounted that her first principal, a trusted mentor, worked with her as an assistant principal. After over 12 years in the principalship, she believes many of these individuals aided and impacted her advancement in education. As a leader, Catherine is willing to help other African American women to succeed.

Dedra. Dedra's 25 years of educational experience started in rural Texas, where she was brought up by her grandparents. In rural Texas, career knowledge is not always available. The educated people she grew up with were her teachers. Dedra decided to become a teacher and later pursued the school principalship. Many in Dedra's family were in shock when she became a school principal. She was the first African American woman school principal in her district and found it hard to be a leader in an area where people knew her so well. In rural Texas, people thought she had reached the mountaintop.

Eventually, Dedra left rural Texas and accepted an assistant principal's position in a larger school district. Dedra wanted to grow in a district where she did not know anyone. When Dedra made the transition from a rural Texas district of 2,500 students, she met people who took the time to get to know her and to hear her story. These individuals became mentors and gave her pointers on the principalship. Dedra worked for a year as an assistant principal in the new district. Her school principal, who served for twenty years, submitted her resignation and advocated for Dedra to become the school principal.

During the interview, Dedra stated, her most significant challenges were not always have people to mentor her, lean on, or model the path for school principalship.

She worked with supportive people, but they did not always understand her professional needs. People might have been willing to help but were not able to help.

At the close of the interview, Dedra, now 40 years old, stated that she hoped to be able to mentor future African American women principals so that the legacy would continue.

Elizabeth. Elizabeth has over 10 years as an educator. Her high regard for public-school principals propelled her to seek education as a career. A deputy superintendent was her mentor, and an assistant superintendent helped to shape her vision into something the district could use. She learned from her mentors what a public-school principal wants to accomplish and what the district envisions may differ. Elizabeth's career accelerated quickly from a classroom teacher to a secondary director for technology.

Elizabeth's technical expertise was so valued that the district leaders asked her to develop a plan allowing high-school student to get a diploma online. Elizabeth started a new school as the principal. She faced the challenge of condensing a five-year plan into two years. Her successful program allowed students to acquire high school credits, in addition to other work experience or college credits.

Race and age were challenges for Elizabeth. She believed the obstacles she had to overcome were covert and overt. She felt that people around her began to change and that people who had been colleagues before were no longer peers. She was younger than most of the other professionals.

Because men dominated the technology field, she had to use different strategies to lead teams. Because of her gender, she felt the need to prove herself repeatedly. As an

example, if her child became ill, she was torn between motherhood and the leadership position. Even though Elizabeth was supported by mentors and her family, she always felt pressure from her co-workers to be present. Elizabeth, now 35 years old, believed the opportunity to advance is diminished without an advocate.

Francis. Francis has a degree in Biological Sciences and over 15 years of experience in education. After her undergraduate graduation, she worked as a biology teacher and eventually taught physics and other sciences. After several years she moved up to a content specialist for secondary science and worked with feeder schools from the central office. Later, in the district office as a science program manager, Francis gained more experience working with schools at all levels. This position allowed her to work with principals and their data. Francis worked to get principals to use the right programs and systems. Her responsibilities included organizing learning sessions and helping teachers to track student growth data.

During the interview, Francis said she did not experience any obstacles due to race and gender. Francis worked with campus administrators on deficiencies in science from elementary and secondary schools. Francis was intrigued by this experience. She went on to finish her masters and focus on educational leadership. An executive principal in the district was very supportive of Francis. As a result, Francis became an assistant principal and later a principal. She worked with children at all levels and attempted to meet their needs. As an administrator, she was challenged to see situations from a teacher's viewpoint. She worked diligently to find the best system and resources, so no one was left behind. At 40 years of age, Francis found value in her experiences and was positive about mentoring other African American women for principalship positions.

Gwen. Gwen loved physical education in high school. In college, Gwen had a double major in Physical Education and Biology. Gwen's mother pushed her to become a teacher, while family and friends pushed her to reach the maximum. After moving to Texas, she became Teacher of the Month, Teacher of the Year, and in addition to her 25 years of experience, Gwen, has other notable recognitions. During the interview, Gwen commented that during this time it was difficult for some races to obtain the principalship. Gwen's record shows that as a teacher she had been fair, dedicated, and would make a great school principal.

In graduate school for mid-management certification, a professor asked Gwen to consider pursuing a doctorate degree. After her certification, she began to think differently about pursuing a doctoral degree in education. Eventually, she accepted the offer of a principalship position. Gwen's husband, family and friends were proud when she became the first school principal in their family. She became a school principal because she thought she could make a difference in the lives of children. Therefore, she became an elementary school principal, a middle school principal, and a high school principal.

Due to the graduate school professor, Gwen decided to get a doctoral degree in administration. During her interview with the researcher, Gwen said acquiring the doctoral degree opened more doors, windows, and financial increases. The current research about the number of African American principal's surprised Gwen. She did not think that race or gender affected her being considered for any position. She feels, at 55 years of age that her experiences, her accomplishments, and knowledge were significant aspects of the consideration for her current position in administration.

Harriet. Harriet grew up with cousins who were teachers. She always wanted to be in education, but she was a musician, so she became a music teacher. She loved working with children and did not want to be a principal. Harriet wanted to become a high-school choir director. She started her career as a Pre-K school teacher with daily opportunities for leadership as the team leader for grade level projects, or the designer of a master schedule, or to coordinate performances. Leadership found Harriet.

During the interview Harriet shared that there was a change in administration and the new principal asked Harriet if she had ever thought of becoming an assistant principal. Her response was no, because Harriet wanted to be close to the children. The new principal persuaded Harriet to consider the affect and the change that would occur, in the building, if she were an administrator. She thought about it and considered all the things that she was doing including leading groups of teachers and after a conversation with the new school principal, Harriet became was a magnet coordinator, a skilled specialist, and a testing coordinator while she attended graduate school.

After completing her coursework and certification Harriet became the assistant principal in the same school where she was serving. Her family probably believed more in her than she did in herself. Three years later, she became the principal at the school campus where she served. Harriet, now 45 with over 25 years in education, did not identify any obstacles due to her gender or race. Her challenge was visual, a condition that affected her eyesight and sensitivity to the sun, that may have made her appear to be different. With the aid of technology, she was able to move upwards on her campus and become the school principal.

Harriet credits her success to a principal who gave her leadership duties because she made herself available to the principal. This principal taught her the art of diffusion when working with parents and problematic situations. Harriet learned from other principals how to be the curriculum leader, the lead learner, and involve her entire leadership team in decision-making. In the principalship, Harriet has mentored graduate interns working on an administration degree.

Isabella. Isabella was inspired by her third-grade teacher, and her teacher mother. When Isabella played school with other children, she was always the principal. Isabella's family and friends expected her to become a school principal. Isabella wanted to be a teacher. The weekend after college graduation, Isabella was hired to be a classroom teacher.

Years later, Isabella became a skills specialist. She missed being in the classroom, but Isabella knew that the assistant principal could impact more classrooms. Isabella applied for several school principal positions, but hiring practices in several school districts in Region IV were diversification within their administration team which consisted of having one White, one African American, and one Hispanic. Isabella believed that her opportunity for a job offer from several schools for which she applied was affected by these practices. Isabella wanted to move up in the district that she had taught, but another district called her first.

Isabella's challenge was that each promotion was to a different school district. Isabella believed the opportunity of a job offer from several schools was affected by race quota practices. Before she went for her job interview, Isabella learned the back story for each administrative school position. During her doctoral program, Isabella commented

that several African American principals believed that race quotas influence hiring practices, for the public-school principalship.

Jacquelyn. Before deciding to become a teacher, Jacqueline was in law school. After one year of law practice, she decided to become a teacher. Initially, Jacquelyn was a special education paraprofessional, teacher, and behavioral interventionist. Later, she accepted a general education teaching position. These different roles and perspectives led her to pursue school leadership. Jacquelyn's passion was to provide a world-class experience for all students.

Jacquelyn's husband, who was in public education, and mother have been her support, in addition to having a mentor, which has been crucial. She experienced challenges as a young African American school leader, but she had a mentor, the district leaders trusted, who stood with her through the interview process. She had an advocate so that race was not a challenge, although she believes that many districts in Texas do not hire young African American women as school principals.

Jacquelyn's primary challenge has been her gender. The protective elementary school mothers, in her school, want a man to handle their son's discipline. She has had to stand alone publicly, to overcome some difficult challenges, and her mother, husband, and mentors have saved her career. She credits her husband and others for not only supporting her, but also for her strength and comfort in challenging situations. She believes that leadership can be a complicated place. Jacquelyn is transparent with the principals she mentors relative to the work and challenges of leadership. Jacquelyn has served for 11 years as a lead principal and believes her passion for providing a world-class education to all students helps her to mentor principals.

Overview of Themes

Themes and Subthemes. An analysis of the manual transcriptions of the interviews verbatim allowed themes to emerge. The interview data were categorized as: strategies for qualifying for an interview, behavior during the interview process, and the applicants' post-interviews attitude. Interviewees deployed similar strategies across the greater Houston area for a qualifying process from the classroom teacher to the principalship.

Qualifying for public-school administrative positions commence with good teacher evaluations. The potential administrator had to show a positive rating as an effective teacher such as: a clear understanding of the course taught, enthusiasm, professionalism, and creation of classroom environments allowing students to show academic progress. Next, creating an excellent good job letter, securing appropriate recommendations, and updating a curriculum vitae were uniformly required to be considered for an interview in the principalship. There was diversity among the women principals after the coursework and certification for principal were completed.

For some entering a district pool or cohort of potential principals was a prerequisite. Interviewees had similar experiences during the interview process, such as: performance of a task or a demonstration project. Often an applicant for a school principal position had to demonstrate leadership skills during a four-hour task. Afterwards a power-point presentation by the applicant followed by interview questions was used to determine eligibility for school leadership.

Similarities existed in statements that the participants' mentors and advocates supported the women principals' navigation through the interview process. Perceptions

of leadership experiences were critical factors. Activities beyond the classroom, a teaching portfolio, as well as service awards were expected to be presented during the interview process (Simien, 2002). The ability to navigate the job assigned was considered, as well as knowing the schools in the district, profile and student data.

The participants' responses to the researchers' semi-structured questions revealed their perceptions of race and gender affecting their hiring as a public-school principal. Six of the 10 did not feel that race and gender affected their being hired. Race and gender for schools observing quotas did exist. Four of the 10 commented on having strong skills, but that in their district, there were few African American women principals.

After the initial interview, often several other interview rounds occurred. Each of the women principals had a mentor who tutored them or an advocate who promoted them towards the principalship. After the final interview, job offer, and acceptance of a principalship position, the women similarly were nurtured by professional development. A mentoring cohort with a lead principal guided them through school finance and district reports. Women principals who successfully received a job offer remained in contact with their mentor/advocate. All 10 women principals agreed that advocates and mentors were essential in their hiring as well as their success after receiving a principalship assignment. The women principal participants through networking with community partners, business leaders, and other educational professionals in education enhanced their perspectives of the new school culture.

The researchers' interview questions began with the experiences that led to the participants' decision to become a school principal and included their family and friends

reactions to their pursuit of public-school principal. The process for extracting the research themes began with coding the interview transcripts and entering them into software program. The categories compiled were: Qualifying Strategies (Question 1-2, Research Question 1), Interview Behavior (Question 3, Research Question 2), and Post-Interview Attitude (Question 4-5, Research Question 3).

Natural comparisons surfaced throughout the narratives and patterns emerged from the interviews of the women principals. As the data in the research findings revealed a pattern, codes were formed. After the coding was completed, I categorized codes into themes by looking at descriptions of experiences in the lives of the participants.

The interviewees' views after the interview process were notated in the margins of the transcripts. Strategies of the participants to enter and exit a district principal pool successfully were notated in the interview transcript margins as well. Special notes to align the curriculum vitae and the research questions occurred for each participant. The major themes that surfaced from the notes made by reviewing the interviewee transcripts were: (1) pre-interview qualifying process, (2) interview process, (3) post-interview process. The sub-themes that corresponded to the research questions for the qualifying process were: (1a) pre-interview qualifying process for principalship and, (1b) mentors and advocates were essential. The sub-themes that corresponded to the research questions for the interview process were: (2a) leadership experience affects selection, and (2b) barriers may affect inclusion. The sub-themes that corresponded to the research questions for the post-interview process were: (3a) post-interview mentorship matters, and (3b) networking is crucial.

Sub-themes that emerged from an analysis of the African American women principals' interview transcripts were consistent: (1) qualifying process for principalship; (2) mentors and advocates were essential; (3) leadership experience affects selection (4) barriers affect inclusion, (5) post-interview mentorship matters and (6) networking is crucial. The race and gender of each participant met the criteria of being an African American woman. With these sub-themes I began interpretation of the coded data to determine alignment with the research questions. I concluded the data analysis by generalizing the narratives.

A consistent occurrence in the analysis of participant narratives was that each woman principal had an advocate, someone who pushed for their advancement. Each of the women, per their narratives, was in position to be mentored, and their hard work was noticed before a formal interview. One principal was pre-interviewed without her knowledge as the school district administrator was visiting her building. Several of the women were pushed and coerced by their advocate for advancement beyond classroom teacher. The advocate was cognizant of the leadership ability of these women and spoke positively to administrative supervisors in the district office. The advocates and mentors surrounded these women with positive contacts to support their development. All women were zealous about inspiring other women to become what they believed is attainable. Each of the African American women principals felt the unique opportunity to become a public-school principal in an urban setting, and no one took the appointment lightly.

The qualifying process, the actual interview phase, and the presentation of a job offer after the interview process were similar for several of the research participants.

Table 7 shows the participants grouped by their responses to the subthemes as pods to show a visual analysis of the interviewees.

Research Question 1. Qualifying Process

What are the perceptions and experiences of African American women principals who were hired in the greater Houston area regarding their qualifying process?

In the following paragraphs about the first research question, I provide the themes and subthemes that emerged from the interviewee's data. Before the participants were interviewed for the position as school principal, they shared how their background affected their educational journey. The first major theme emerging was that each woman had to qualify before applying for the job of a public-school principal. Since the process to qualify differed for the interviewee's after meeting the initial general requirements of teaching for three years, university coursework and state certification examination, the first subtheme was the candidates' qualifying process. The second subtheme was having an advocate and a mentor was essential to their being considered for an interview.

Table 10.

RQ1a. Subtheme: Qualifying Process for Principalship

Participant	Perception	Quotes from Interview
Angelica	Promoted from within without a formal interview process	Technically, I was interviewed without knowing that I was being interviewed. The district administrative visits to my building gave district supervisors the opportunity to observe me at work in my surroundings.
Catherine	Promoted by a former supervisor	I was recruited by the school district superintendent who had known me previously in another state.
Elizabeth	Promoted by association	I had taught about eight years, so initially I started with a district administrative

		position. School district principal pool candidates were required to be certified. So, I did a program for principal certification.
Harriet	Promoted from within without a formal interview process	Program directors that I had worked with as a skills specialist were on the panel. It was required that the panel see my interaction before the interview, but because I had worked with several of the interview panelists and they were familiar with my leadership.

In the following sections, I will apply the participant's data to these two themes. To understand the qualifying process for school principals, one must realize that each public-school district has requirements, in addition to the general previously mentioned qualifications, to enter a principal pool as a potential school leader. Some districts, after the university coursework and certification, still have a gatekeeper assessment, such as the Haberman or the Gallup Survey. Some districts instituted these gatekeepers in the last decade to reduce the number of candidates to interview. These pre-screener assessments were not used by school districts for four of the 10 participants.

Angelica was doing so many things before she was unknowingly drafted into the principalship. Angelica was an assistant principal who frequently served district central office personnel at her school. Thus, the district central office administrators had an opportunity to observe Angelica in her work environment. The statement below articulates the qualifying process from Angelica's perspective. Angelica described her qualifying process as she comments:

The qualifying process for me was not difficult. I was literally coerced into applying for a public-school principal position. I did not aspire to become a school principal, so at the end of an administrative visit to my building, I was

surprised that I was being considered for advancement (Angelica, November 16, 2018).

As an assistant principal, it was Angelica's responsibility to provide hospitality and accommodate whatever was needed by school principal. For Angelica, the qualifying process occurred serendipitously. There was no formal pre-screener assessment to take to qualify because her job assignments were her qualifying process. The experiential knowledge that she obtained prepared her for leadership and the district supervisors informally qualified her for the next level position.

Angelica did not have to do what other assistant principals may have experienced to qualify for advancement to a school principal. Her work experience and expertise were visible as district personnel visited her building and observed her serving her building principal. There was no formal assessment and the political apparatus was that she served district supervisors who might be on a hiring panel if she were being considered for a school principal assignment

Brenda's qualifying process differed from Angelica because her process to interview for a school principal took longer. Brenda made this career change, as her memories from childhood play emerged. Brenda reminisced and described how she became involved in public education:

Friends and sorority members kept telling me that I should be a teacher, so although I had majored in radio, TV and film, I started substitute teaching. This experience led me to be a classroom teacher. Later I was encouraged to pursue and apply for a skills specialist position. Even after acquiring a master's degree in counseling, I returned to school for administrative certification. The qualifying process for me facilitated by supervisors and mentors who advocated for me (Brenda, November 16, 2018).

Brenda had a love for working with students from childhood. It was evident to her friends that she belonged in education. She started as a classroom teacher. Once Brenda started as a teacher, she progressed to other roles. She became a skills specialist and later started graduate courses to be certified as a counselor. Serving in these roles made Brenda distinguishable to her supervisors. Similar to Angelica, Brenda working with her supervisors and mentors informally began the process of qualifying for school principal candidacy.

Catherine, like Angelica and Brenda, had a mentor at the district level. Catherine began her career in another state. She was a principal who followed her mentor two years later to a new district in a new state. Catherine's mentor was a school superintendent and would be invaluable with her qualifying for a position as a public-school principal. Catherine had worked in the central office for her school district in the student accountability department, but she wanted to have an impact on student achievement. She moved back to the campus level and started a career as a school administrator. As a seated principal, Catherine felt the need to grow and learn, so she agreed to follow her former supervisor, and became an assistant principal in a new state. Catherine recounted her arrival to a new state and her experiences with the qualifying process:

I was recruited by the school district superintendent who had known me previously in a northeastern state. This person had been a mentor for me and knew of my qualifications. All aspiring principals are required to take the online Gallup Principal Insight Inventory as part of the application process to determine their strengths and the best area for their skill set to be employed (Catherine, November 26, 2018).

The district superintendent who had known Catherine prior to his move to a southern state kept in contact with Catherine. This mentor and former supervisor of Catherine knew she was qualified for a principal position in his district and he invited her to apply for the position. Similar to Angelica and Brenda, Catherine's mentor advocated for her being hired as a school principal, but she delayed accepting a principalship for a few years.

Although young and employed straight out of college, Catherine was adamant about staying in one place long enough to grow and learn. She had a desire and thirst to move upward but resisted the urging of her supervisor and mentors and remained an assistant principal for several years. She believed just watching, sitting, and listening to her mentors gave her the insight that she needed to make critical administrative decisions. Later, Catherine was a seated principal, but she decided the process steps and time-could best attain the necessary attributes with a new set of people, curriculum, and responsibilities.

The findings for the Angelica, Brenda, and Catherine reveal that each was pre-qualified without a formal interview to move to the next level. The statements of these first three women shows their passion for serving children. Angelica served her principal and the district guests who were frequently in her building. Brenda was living a reality that was not child play with her younger sisters and her students, and Catherine although urged to transfer to another state, chose to stay at the assistant principal level for several years. Each of these women made sacrifices as they pursued their passion. Another interviewee, Dedra qualified in a different manner.

Another interviewee, Dedra qualified, differently as she moved from another region into Region IV. She surprised her family when she decided to move from her rural town to the big city. Propelled by her leadership instincts, Dedra, felt a need to be financially resourceful to provide for her daughter. She knew with her background and knowledge that leadership would give her more leverage economically; she saw becoming a degreed professional educator as an achievable goal. Dedra commented on her qualifying process:

You work your way up into leadership. It is unlikely that a classroom teacher will apply and become a principal without the stairsteps. There are different avenues to getting to the principalship, but you must pave your way there. All assignments have to do with being successful where you are (Dedra, February 5, 2019).

Dedra argues that it is unlikely for a classroom teacher or an individual transferring from outside her district to become a school principal without having steps that pave the way. Every assignment no matter what it is a stairstep that shows the individual's willingness to do what it takes to become a school leader. Dedra's narrative revealed her willingness to leave a rural community as a principal outside of Region IV and begin the process as an assistant principal in a larger district. To get her foot in the door, in a new district that promoted from within Dedra qualified with her credentials and worked her way back. The qualifying process for Dedra and Catherine were similar, but different from Angelica and Brenda. Angelica and Brenda were assistant principals in their district and moved into the principalship. In contrast, Dedra and Catherine accepted assistant principal jobs to qualify for the school principalship in a new district, even though they transferred as school principals from another district

The path to qualification for public-school principal was different for interviewee Elizabeth from Angelica, Brenda, Catherine, and Dedra. Elizabeth entered education straight out of college. She moved quickly from a classroom teacher to a district office position, an assistant principal, and to school principal. Elizabeth shared her experiences:

I had taught about eight years, so initially I started with a district administrative position. School district principal's pool candidates were required to be certified. I did a year in a program for the principal certification (Elizabeth, November 27, 2018).

Elizabeth moved quickly after college and a district administrative position into the principal's pool. Usually, a college graduate moved after 3 successful years as a classroom teacher into a skills specialist slot like Brenda or an assistant principal position like Angelica. However, Elizabeth moved into a district administrative position first and afterwards completed one-year principal certification,

Elizabeth always admired public-school principals. Her career moved forward due to her technology expertise. Soon after college and teaching in a public school, she earned a district-level secondary position. She began her unique qualifying process, before becoming a school principal. Technology was the vehicle that overcame all barriers, regardless of race, gender, or age.

Francis, the sixth interviewee, had similar experiences to Elizabeth. Francis and Elizabeth differed from Angelica, Brenda, and Catherine because they did not enter the administrative pool directly. Francis began her career in education working with principals as a science program director. Francis was working with science deficiencies in the district region to support teachers in the schools and was intrigued by public-school

principals, so she earned her Master of Educational Leadership. Frances shared her perspective:

Initially, I was in the principal's pool, and then an online 80-110 question assessment had to be passed. The successful completion of this screener assessment allowed me to remain as a candidate in the principal's pool (Francis, December 6, 2018).

Francis explains she was in the principal's pool, but she had to successfully pass a pre-screener to remain in the principal's pool. It seemed that the requirements were changing to qualify for a school principal position. The data findings reveal that Francis and Elizabeth both initially took district administrative positions.

Francis worked with student assessment and wanted to fix the deficits with student achievement skill-sets, which eventually moved her along the path to a school administrator. Both Francis and Elizabeth were pre-qualified by their exhibition of leadership skills. As building instructional leaders, Elizabeth, with technology, met a need to implement a curriculum and Francis, with science, met a need to put into practice. Both entered the qualifying process based on district positions which differs from how Angelica, Brenda, and Catherine entered the principal's pool.

The data for, the seventh interviewee, shows Gwen moved as a seated principal from another state to Region IV. Each of the seated principals, Gwen, Catherine, and Dedra were accustomed to general qualifications. Each district has its requirements such as online assessments or personality surveys, and others have 3-tiers of interviews for candidates. Gwen articulates her qualifying experience:

Gwen resided in Region IV and moved to her home state and then back into Region IV. The data revealed her experiences to qualify began as a teacher of

excellence, and advanced becoming an elementary school, middle school, and high school principal. The findings of the data show similarities with other candidates who moved into Region IV, with the exception that Gwen qualified without any formal district assessments. Gwen stated:

The qualifications in the district where I was twice before moving to another state, those qualifications were certification in mid-management, and you had to be successful in classroom management. You had to have a working knowledge of curriculum. You had to know how to budget, how to direct personnel, how to engage personnel in discussion, and to be sure those teachers were able to handle classroom management. Other than the degree and taking the state exam, I did not have to take any other assessments. After we took the exam, the all-day exam. There was an oral exam to qualify me and then a written comprehensive exam. We wrote basically all day. This was at the university and I never had to do other assessments at the district level (Gwen, February 17, 2019).

Gwen began her educational career with a mid-management degree. She took the state exam but did not have to take any other formal assessments. The certification exam for the mid-management degree was all day and afterwards, potential administrators had to complete an oral exam and afterwards she took a written comprehensive exam. The working knowledge expectations relative to classroom management, curriculum, and school budgeting, however, the state exam was the only assessment. Gwen's experience to qualify by a state assessment was different from Angelica, Brenda, Catherine, Dedra, Elizabeth, and Francis probably due to her starting her educational career a decade before them.

The eighth of the ten participant interviewees, Harriet, entered the principal's pool similar to Angelica and Brenda. Harriet did not have a formal district assessment like Gwen to pass to be enter the principal's pool. Harriet resided in the greater Houston area,

working with special populations for several decades before she was encouraged to qualify for the principalship. Harriet stated:

There was no formal assessment to apply; I just applied with the proper documents, and certifications and credentials were intact. There was no test to take. You submit your documentation through e-portal for human resources, your resume, your leadership experiences, answering questions about your leadership philosophy. From there a screening with the assistant superintendent and if you were selected to go to a panel (Harriet, February 20, 2019).

Harriet recounted how she qualified for an interview. She submitted her resume, leadership experiences, and answered questions about her philosophy. She was screened by an assistant principal and selected to go do a panel. Harriet submitted her proof of her certification, documents, and credentials through the electronic human resources application.

Diversity occurred among districts and half used a gatekeeper or a pre-screener to qualify candidates to get into a principal pool for consideration for an interview. The findings of the data reveal that no gatekeeper assessment occurred in the qualifying process for Angelica, Gwen, or Harriet. These three participants, from three different public-school districts in the greater Houston area were eligible to enter the interview process. Qualification by university coursework and state exam were adequate to meet the district requirements. Isabella and Jacquelyn, in Region IV, similarly did not have any gatekeeper assessment in the qualifying process other than the general qualifications for every public-school principal.

Subtheme 1b. Mentors and advocates were essential. Several of the African American women principals knew that they were coachable, competent teachers, and strategic in their approach to student achievement; yet, they did not see themselves in the

role of public-school principal. The qualifying process, although not very difficult, was not embraced by several of the women principals immediately. The five participants in the table below are highlighted because they emphasized how their mentor served as an advocate for them during the qualifying process for the principalship. The remaining five participants of the study admitted their mentors' contribution to their career took place after the qualifying process.

Table 11.

RQ1b: Subtheme: Mentors and Advocates were Essential

Participant	Perception	Quotes from Interview
Angelica	Advocates are essential	I was coerced to pursue the principalship by my supervisors who saw something in me that I did not see in myself.
Brenda	Advocates and mentors are essential	The qualifying process for me was facilitated by supervisors and mentors who advocated for me.
Catherine	Advocates and mentors are essential	The superintendent who had been a mentor for me and knew my qualifications.
Elizabeth	Mentors are essential	I had the opportunity for a year to shadow other principals. It was like an internship. I worked during school hours and after school hours with other principals to understand the dynamics of the role.
Gwen	Mentors are essential	Some of the university professors advised the female teachers to become a primary principal first.

Table 11 shows five participants, Angelica, Brenda, Catherine, Elizabeth, and Gwen who spoke adamantly about a mentor-mentee relationship. These five women transitioned from the classroom with the help of a district level advocate. The first interviewee, Angelica, mentors were district personnel visiting the building where she was the assistant principal. Doing her assignments and beyond with passion, Angelica

distinguished herself from her peers. So, one district advocate interviewed Angelica without her knowledge and urged her to pursue the principalship. Angelica stated: “I was coerced to pursue the principalship by my supervisors who saw something in me that I did not see in myself”. Another participant, Brenda, believed the process to qualify was more relaxed because she had people advocating for her. Brenda stated that the process to qualify was less stressful because had people advocating for her. Brenda reminisced: “The qualifying process for me was facilitated by supervisors and mentors who advocated for me”. Another participant, Catherine, was mentored by a public-school superintendent. Her mentor moved to another state but kept in contact. Catherine said: “The superintendent who had been a mentor for me knew my qualifications and advocated for me”. Elizabeth also had district-level mentorship. Her skill set was unique and propelled her forward rapidly. Elizabeth stated: “Soon after college and teaching in a public school, a district-level secondary position was awarded to me and technology was the vehicle that surpassed any barriers”. Gwen similarly being teacher of the year and other noticeable accolades, was approached by her university professors to pursue advancement in education. Gwen recounted: “Some of the university professors advise the female teachers to become a primary principal first”. Even, though Gwen had other aspirations, she followed the advice of her mentors who became her advocates.

The data findings reveal that mentorship is essential and Angelica, Brenda, Catherine, and Elizabeth had strong advocates to support not only the qualifying process as a mentor, but also the advocacy of sponsorship for the potential public-school administrator. Angelica and Elizabeth were encouraged by their mentors because they were young without children to apply for the assistant principal’s position. Angelica did

not see herself as an administrator, so she was coerced into applying and doing what was necessary to be certified. On the other hand, Brenda and Gwen had a family who agreed with the recommendations of their advocate regarding their educational career. A strong push by the advocate for each of these women landed them in the position as a principal.

Research Question 2. Interview Process

What are the perceptions and experiences of African American women principals who were hired in the greater Houston area regarding their interview process?

The following paragraphs discuss the second research question and provide the themes and subthemes that emerged from the interviewee's data.

Major Theme 2. Interview Process

The second significant theme emerging from the data for each of the women principals was the interview process. Two subthemes emerged first, leadership experience affects inclusion and second, barriers may affect inclusion. The participants' responses to the research question differ due to diverse interview processes in different districts. For example, some participants had presented at district workshops or worked on district projects, so they were informally interviewed. Others had the traditional 1- 3 rounds of interviews to select a principal.

Subtheme 2a. Leadership experience affects inclusion. Most of the participants had been lead teachers in their school building. Lead teachers were willing to go beyond their job descriptions because of their passion for making a difference with children. They distinguished themselves by serving on district projects, which gave them exposure and helped secure their principalship interview. The four participants selected emphasized that their district-level experience differentiated them, which facilitated being

selected for the interview. The remaining six participants did not have the same exposure before their interview.

Table 12.

RQ2a: Subtheme: Leadership Experience Affects Inclusion

Participant	Perception	Quotes from interview
Catherine	Work with superintendent enhanced skills	The school district superintendent had worked together previously.
Gwen	Superintendent made excellent teachers aware of positions that were open	One of my superintendents of instruction, ... helped direct me to some of the areas that were open.
Harriet	Work on district projects has benefits	Several on the interview panel were people that I had worked with on different district projects.
Isabella	Work on district projects gave me needed experience	The interview process was easy, because of my prior experience in another school district. I had worked on district projects and attended professional development conferences.

Table 12 shows Catherine, Gwen, Harriet, and Isabella had prior work experience that set them apart from their colleagues. Catherine said: “This superintendent who had relocated to Houston was aware of my skills and knowing my aspirations invited me to come to Houston”. Gwen was from a family of educators, so the nuances of the profession were aided by generations of knowledge in education. Gwen’s perception was that superintendents noticed excellent teachers with effective classroom management, among other skills. Gwen said: “One of my superintendents of instruction helped direct me to some of the areas that were open”. For Harriet and Isabella distinguishable prior experiences awarded them the opportunity to work on district projects and be invited to

attend professional development conferences. For example, Isabella said: “The interview process was easy, because of my prior experience in another school district”. The data findings reveal that because of district exposure and notable prior experiences, these women were considered for multiple advanced positions, with or without a formal panel interview.

Subtheme 2b. Barriers may affect inclusion. Barriers for this study was defined as those attitudes and behaviors that affect how a person perceives themselves in comparison to others. Race and gender are double entities that each of the African American women public-school principals, in the greater Houston, area may have experienced. In many careers, race and gender may be a barrier in the interview process.

All participants were asked if they perceived or experienced bias pertaining to gender as criteria in their selection for an interview. The responses varied with less than half of the 10 respondents saying that they did not perceive or experience race and gender bias. Most of the participants felt that race and gender was a non-issue.

In the following table, four women principals show Brenda, Dedra, Gwen, and Jacquelyn, as representatives of the 10 women principals. These four women were selected because each had a different, but deeply held perspective on race and gender in their interview selection process. The six women, not included in this table, did not believe their race and gender was significant in their selection for an interview.

Table 13.*RQ2b: Subtheme: Barriers May Affect Inclusion*

Principal	Perception	Quotes from Interview
Brenda	Participant did not believe that race nor gender affected her interview.	The experiences of principals hired in my district from my perspective is great, regardless of race. I have not experienced racism.
Dedra	The incentive to become a principal is not very large.	There are not many African American women in my district to apply for a school principal. The district is predominately non-African American. We have over 30 elementary schools with 3 African American school principals.
Gwen	Small number of African American women principals	There was only one African American applying and I happen to be one of two at that time.
Jacquelyn	Values the contribution regardless of race to education	My prayer was that people did not see my gender or race through the interview process. My hope was that they see a partner valuable to their organization.

The findings from the interview data reveals that race and gender, for seven of the women principals, affected the opportunity to be invited to have an interview. Brenda, who stated: “The experiences of principals hired in my district from my perspective is great, regardless of race. I have not experienced racism”. Dedra added: “The district is predominantly non-African American. We have over 30 elementary schools with three African American school principals”. Another participant, Gwen, recounted: “There was only one African American applying, and I happened to be one of two, at that time”. The fourth participant, in Table 13, Jacquelyn, said: “My prayer was that people did not see

my gender or race through the interview process. My hope was that they see a partner valuable to their organization”.

Seven participants were adamant in their position that their race nor gender hindered their career advancement in education. In contrast, three of the women principals, who traveled extensively on national levels in education, perspectives were different. Table 13 shows the diversity of perception for these women from different districts in Region IV. It is also interesting to note that four of the 10 women principals served in districts that were predominately non-African American relative to student and or teacher population. There was a universal pattern for all 10 African American women principals without regard for the location in Region IV. It is also interesting to note that four of the ten women principals served in districts that were predominately non-African American relative to student and or teacher population. There was a concern for all ten African American women principals without regard to the location in Region IV.

Research Question 3. Post-Interview Process

What are the perceptions and experiences of African American women principals who were hired in the greater Houston area regarding the post-interview process?

In the following paragraphs about the third research. This section begins after the participants had a successful interview and received a job offer, their perceptions and experiences of the whole process. For some, the job offered was an assignment to a different school. Without the support of a sound network system, the participants agreed they would not have been successful.

Major Theme 3. Post-Interview Process

Two subthemes that developed after reviewing the interview tapes were: post-interview mentorships matter and networking is crucial. Another primary theme emerging was the mentorship in post-interview process for a public-school principal assigned to a different school and learning the culture of a new campus. The first subtheme dealt with the participants' perceptions and experiences with mentorship for school community culture. While a second subtheme was the perceptions expressed by the participants regarding the need to network and continue professional development' otherwise success as a public-school principal becomes limited. Subthemes occurred relative to the post-interview process because school and community culture and the need for on-going professional development and support defined how the principal would lead. The subthemes that developed after reviewing the interview tapes were: post-interview mentorship matters, and networking is crucial.

The three participants in the table below were selected for analysis because they emphasized that their job offer was directly related to the culture of the student population. The remaining eight participants who were not included in this analysis admitted that after the interview process, they were given a job offer assignment, where the mentorship and a network support system were already established.

Table 14.*RQ3a: Subtheme: Post-Interview Mentorship Matters*

Principal	Perception	Quotes from Interview
Elizabeth	Technology expertise paves the way to a faster promotion and fits the contemporary society.	I was moved into a principal's position due to my technological expertise. The school that I served needed a school leader to implement technology and develop a plan.
Gwen	Establish a culture that promotes advancement for teachers.	I have been able to encourage several teachers to apply for public school administration. Some of them were teachers that I was fortunate to have on my staff.
Isabella	Principalship is a "right fit" not just filling a position.	I found out that they had interviewed several African Americans. They were not just looking to fill the box, but they were looking for someone who would fit the needs of the student population.

Subtheme 3a. Post-interview mentorship matters. The participant responses data related to this research question was that each of the research participants with mentorship were expected to make a difference. Culture is defined as inclusive of the customs, achievements, social institutions, beliefs, and norms for a community or group of people. The culture for a school community is the pervasive beliefs, customs, and or perceived needs for student achievement (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009).

Elizabeth was promoted because the district wanted to change the culture of almost a thousand high school at-risk students. Elizabeth was invited by her mentor to apply to become a school principal because there was a need for technology integration into the district curriculum. The district, with secondary campuses in a lower socio-economic area, wanted to serve the student population with technology so students could complete high school away from the school building. Elizabeth's expertise paved the

way for this promotion. Elizabeth articulated: “I was moved into a principal position due to my technological expertise. The school I served needed a school leader to implement technology and develop a plan”. Another participant, Gwen, impacted her district by creating a culture promoting the advancement of teachers. The district where Gwen served had a low number of African American women who aspired to advance in education. Gwen encouraged teachers to apply to become public-school administrators. Gwen reminisced: “I have been able to encourage several teachers to apply for public-school administration. Some of them were teachers that I was fortunate to have on my staff”. Another participant perspective was revealed by Isabella, a turn-around principal who says:

The Principalship is about a “right fit” not just filling a position. I found out that they had interviewed several African American. They were not just looking to fill the box, but they were looking for someone who would fit the needs of the student population.

The findings of the data for these three women show that the cultural perspectives were dependent on the need for each school. Other participants such as Harriet and Jacquelyn started at entry level positions with mentorships that affected school culture with the special populations. Harriet articulated: “I have worked for years in a supportive role for several early childhood principals”. Jacquelyn stated: “Serving as a paraprofessional in special education, I learned different roles and different perspectives of educational leadership”. The analysis show that cultural perspectives were varied per the customs, achievement, social needs prevalent with a specific school within the school district.

Subtheme 3b - Networking is crucial. Networking is a process that fosters the exchange of information and ideas among individuals or groups that share a common interest (Kamler, 2006).

Table 15 contains responses from five participants who were selected because they emphasized the benefits of networking after the post-interview process for the principalship. The remaining five participants admitted that their networking relationships with mentors and other educators occurred before the initial interview process.

Table 15.

RQ3b: Subtheme: Networking is Crucial

Principal	Perception	Quotes from Interview
Angelica	Networking to be able to guide others is critical	After being hired to an assistant principal and later a principal in the same school, I became aware of the desire to guide others and sacrificially work for the advancement of staff and students.
Brenda	Principal cohorts are necessary.	The most obstacles that I encountered were learning all the requirements of a public-school principal. Principals work as a cohort and receive training relative to school finance, the budget, instructional practices, and other skills that principals need.
Catherine	Networking is critical.	I had participated in a principal cohort in another state. At the time that I was offered a position, there was no formal academy for principals in the district.
Dedra	Successful principals surround themselves with a good support system.	The principals that are successful surround themselves around a good support system. Without a good support system, you will not be successful.
Jacquelyn	Identify your support team.	We put pressure on ourselves to be perfect. Things get a lot better once we identify our support team.

Subtheme 3b. Networking is crucial. Education by association flourishes when educational support groups collaborate outside of formal settings. Unanimously the 10 African American women public-school principals admitted that networking is the lifeline of being successful. Angelica stated: “After becoming an assistant principal and later a principal in the same school, I became aware of the desire to guide others and sacrificially work for the advancement of staff and students”. Networking is necessary, according to Brenda, who believes in principal cohorts. Brenda articulated: “Principals work as a cohort and receive training relative to school finance, the budget, instructional practices, and other skills that principals need”. Another participant, Catherine, reminisced about how networking and keeping contacts allowed her to move from a district in one state to a district in another state. Catherine stated: “At the time that I was offered a position, there was no formal academy for principals in the district. I had participated in a principal cohort in another state”. Catherine was burdened with learning how things operate in a new district and a new state. So, it is understandable that while Catherine, was urged to apply for a principalship in her new state. Even with a mentor, Catherine decided to stay closer to the classroom longer, despite the recommendation of her peers. Dedra said: “The principals that are successful surround themselves with a good support system”. Jacquelyn sums the networking is essential by stating: “I believe that we put a tremendous amount of pressure on ourselves to be perfect. Things get a lot better once we identify our support system.”

The findings from the participants’ data reveal although each participant wanted to be the change agent and gain momentum from networking. Each principal wanted to make a difference in the education of children, so networking with a cohort or similar

professionals was vital for them. Additionally, the research participants expressed a commitment and desire to network and mentor other African American women to become school principals so that the legacy would continue.

Conclusion

Some situations influence the selection of an individual for school leadership. Do questions exist as to how do African American teachers perceive the process to move into the principal's pool?

One major theme emerged from each of the three research questions, the applicants were prepared by a qualifying process and by their advocates. The participants successfully maneuvered the application and the qualifying process without incident. Some districts required an online assessment or designated screener which served as a gatekeeper to pre-qualify candidates before an invitation was extended to interview.

The findings in the second research question the experiences differed due to working on district projects with the same people who would be evaluating them for the principal position. Some of the participants due to their experience and having a strong advocate discovered the interview process to be easy.

In answer to the third research question the participants' acknowledged the need for networking with a mentor and recognized the need for district support. The participants were all appreciative of the people who mentored them, and in turn they want to do the same for African American women who aspire to public-school principalship. Chapter 5 will discuss the interviews, curriculum vitae of the participants, and the school district human resource departments' requirements for aspiring school principals.

Chapter V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how African American women in the greater Houston area in public education seek and procure the position of school principal. Although this study differed in methodology compared to past research, the findings still align. As literature review suggests, researchers, such as Peter-Hawkins (2017), consider African American women as “non-traditional” cohorts (Milner, 2009, p. 68). Non-traditional cohorts of persons are people identifying as non-White. Non-traditional women experience challenges in career advancement that may be affected by their race and gender. Literature review also suggests some researchers with the Wallace Foundation, such as Turnbull (2015), Roza (2003), and Doherty (1999), attest leadership attributes contributed to the selection of school principals, not race and gender. According to literature of some researchers, in contrast, Jean-Marie (2013) and Shakescraft (1989) argue that African American women have a unique perspective in the pipeline to school principalship. Literature reveals African American women principals are underrepresented in public education in the United States (Banks, 1995; Brown, 2016; Cranston, 2012). The historical account suggests legislative decisions may have affected the underrepresentation (Gordon, Taylor-Backor, & Croteau, 2017; Hochschild, & Shen, 2014; Kinshasa, 2006).

African American women after *Brown vs Board of Education* became school leaders predominately in schools of their ethnicity (Nash, 1988). In contemporary times, African American women have become school principals and higher positions in educational administration; however, statistics reveal the number of these women in

leadership is surprisingly low (Hughes, & Dodge, 1997; Keith, & Monroe, 2016; McDaniel, DiPrete, Buchmann, & Shwed, 2011). Texas Employed Principals' Report (2013-2017) supports the idea that there is underrepresentation of African American women school principals. The findings of this study can contribute to the knowledge relative to the unique challenges African American women face when seeking the position of school principal.

This descriptive study aligns with research on how African American women aspire to become a public-school principal in a large metropolis (Bloom, & Erlandson, 2003; Domenico, & Jones, 2007; Horsford, 2017). This research study examined the success stories of African American women principals who navigated the qualifying process, the interview process, and post-interview to obtain a job offer for an urban school in Houston. These women's narratives intend to encourage other African American women to advance in public education.

The study indicated the percentage of African American women principals is low in comparison to the number of principalship jobs in the Greater Houston area. These findings support research on the low ratios of African American women principals, such as Bloom and Erlandson (2003) and Reed (2012). Several of the school districts had few African Americans in their student population and seemed to be in an affluent section of the greater Houston area. The challenge revealed in participant interview statements was that few African American women make it into a principal's pool and eventually become an assistant principal. Approximately half of the participants felt the variables of race and gender appeared not to obstruct their selection from the pool or the districts' decision to grant them a job offer; however, half of the participants did associate issues of race and

gender to difficulties in their efforts to become school leaders. This specific finding supports what was found in the literature of Horsford (2012), who suggests that African American women need a bridge to advance in education since desegregation. A common thread within each participants' statement was the asset of mentorship. As was cited in the findings, these women principals' mentors advocated for them to be promoted. Key findings also reveal that gender appears less of a factor with elementary school principalship, yet, remains a factor for placement as a secondary school principal (Grove & Montgomery, 1999; Smith, 2008).

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I will interpret the findings of my study in comparison to the literature review, specifying in what ways the findings substantiate, invalidate or enhance knowledge. The following research questions guided this study.

1. What were the perceptions and experiences of African American women school principals who were hired in the greater Houston area regarding their qualifying process?
2. What were the perceptions and experiences of African American women school principals who were hired in the greater Houston area regarding their interview process?
3. What were the perceptions and experiences of African American women school principals who were hired in the greater Houston area regarding their post-interview process?

The results of the study revealed two emergent themes for each research question. An interpretation of the findings for each theme will be presented in chronological order.

Research Question One. The Qualifying Process

The following themes and subthemes surfaced in the answering of Research Question 1. This research question investigated the perceptions of the qualifying process for the African American women principals who were hired in the greater Houston area. The major theme for the first research question consisted of the qualifying process for classroom teachers aspiring to become a school principal in the greater Houston area. My research supports what is found in literature with Shakeshaft (1998), and Tillman (2004) relative to African American women's experiences with qualifying for public school principalship. Shakeshaft (1998) argued women are often marginalized in educational administration in favor of males with experience. Often males spend less time in the classroom, qualify because of their gender, and advance into administration faster than females of any race. Kanter (1977) reveals the male style of leadership which is task oriented in contrast to the female nurturer which seemingly allows men to advance faster with less classroom experience. Tillman (2004) argued and the participants agreed regardless of their race, gender, and economic status, the principalship was an attainable goal. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics show few women (in overall percentage) attain principalship (National Center for Educational Statistics (2010). The narratives of several participants suggested that if job opening was for a secondary position such as high school principal, rarely was a woman selected. Two subthemes emerged from the participants' data: (a) there is a qualifying process for principalship, and (b) advocates and mentors were essential.

The qualifying process for principalship. My research supports Gupton and Slick's (1996) research stating how women of color are treated in the process of

qualifying for the principalship which fuels the underrepresentation of women who qualify for administrative positions. In their work they reveal the stories of successful women in administration and how they got there. The participants' data, similar to Gupton and Slick's (1996) successful women administrators, reveal their willingness to do assignments beyond their job description. District assignments allowed participants to be noticed by their supervisors as candidates for school leadership. Data from my study also showed relationships between mentors, district personnel, and aspiring leaders enhanced chances of qualifying for potential jobs and eventually included in the principal's pool. Participants described working on projects with district personnel prior to being selected for the principal pool. The data showed participants were available, teachable, and were amenable to accept assignments beyond the scope of their job descriptions as candidates. After meeting their educational requirements of being certified as a principal candidate several participants experienced different processes to qualify for school leadership. Most participants were asked to take the Haberman, Gallup Survey, as well as a number of other pre-screeners during the qualifying process. During their service as classroom teachers, few participants considered seeking a school principal position. Half the women participants delayed pursuit of principalship due to lack of confidence in their performance on a pre-screener. Pre-screeners may disqualify a potential administrator for an interview and may prevent entry into a school administrator pool. African American women potential school administration candidates need mentors to help prepare them for entry into an administrator pool (Horsford, 2012).

Mentors and advocates were essential. My research findings align to other researchers such as Achilles, Keely, and High (1994) who state relationships with

mentors are essential. Another researcher, Doherty (1999) suggested mentors are necessary in the development of school principals. The literature aligned to the women participants' narratives of the role mentors and advocates in advancement. The women research participants in my study expressed that mentors and advocates helped them navigate some of the difficulties in the qualifying process. Specifically, the participants described how mentors helped them to think through situations and advocated for them by creating opportunities for them to advance in their career. The work experiences of these women caused them to be noticed by their peers and their supervisors.

Sometimes a district staff person, with influence, advocated for the grooming of these women. Several participants advanced in the greater Houston area after moving from a small town. One participant's family was shocked because they felt she had already reached the pinnacle by being principal in a small town. However, when she relocated to Houston, she was willing to take an assistant principal position to obtain the knowledge needed to get her foot in the door. Another participant moved from out-of-state to the Houston area and, although encouraged to apply for a school principal position, elected to wait for two years and study with a mentor. Each of the women principals had a strong advocate who either pushed or coerced them to qualify and enter the principal's pool. All women participants had mentors or a group of mentors who favored their advancement in education. Advocates may have buffered the prejudices that some African American women face who desire to become a school principal.

Research Question Two. The Interview Process

The question investigated the perceptions of African American women principals of the interview process. Women principals in the greater Houston area from seven

different school districts consistently expressed that the experiences of the interview process were fair. One participant suggested that the challenges and the lack of an advocate put several women educators at a disadvantage for advancement which supports researcher (Cranston, 2012). The emergent themes of the interview process defined by these African American women, were they were noticed because of their work experience, regardless of their race and gender. Two subthemes emerged: (a) leadership experience affects inclusion and, (b) barriers may affect inclusion.

Leadership experience affects inclusion. Participants exposed to leadership experiences explained these opportunities help them thrive during the interview process, and thus propelled them into educational administration. As literature suggests districts should seek to develop leaders from within (Burdette & Schertzer, 2005). Another researcher Gabriel & Farmer (2009) argued for growing new leaders. The ability to demonstrate and show evidence of effective leadership was essential to participants being selected to join the principals' pool of candidates. Bottoms et al. (2003) present six strategies to prepare good principals with leadership experience, including: 1) criteria and methods to choose high-quality candidates for leadership preparation; 2) redesign preparation curriculum, instruction, and student achievement; 3) have real-world training, 4) link licensure to performance; 5) move accomplished teachers into leadership positions,; and 6) use state academies to develop leadership teams. The participants in this study credited their mentors and advocates for creating opportunities to learn leadership traits. Mentors understand the educational system can support future leaders who aspire to advance in education. Literature reviewed reveal mentorship includes understanding how leaders are groomed and selected to advance in education and hinges

on how district supervisors perceive a prospective candidate for the principalship (Bottoms, O'Neill, Fry, & Kill, 2003; Burdette & Schertzer, 2005; Gabriel & Farmer, 2009).

During the interview process a principal candidate is given an opportunity to demonstrate their leadership style, experience, and acumen. Participants credited their mentors with knowing how to thrive during the interview process. Potential administrators arrive at the interview early, make eye-contact, perform an array of tasks, but the deciding factor is proof they are an effective leader. Initially, certain characteristics are viewed such as: 1) educational philosophy, 2) knowing district pertinent data, and 3) being able to discuss the district's vision (Fuller, Hollingworth, & An, 2016) Fuller, et. al (2016) argued the odds of employment for Blacks and Latinos was lower than Whites for the principalship. Fuller worked in Texas for several decades with preparation programs and placement of school principals, examining the hiring practices of schools in Austin and Houston. The odds for the placement of African American women as a principal was low and women seemed to remain in the school principal pool longer than their male counterparts (McManus, 2017).

Barriers may affect inclusion. My research supports literature and findings that, besides leadership experience, factors such as race and gender may affect inclusion in the principal pool (Banks, 1955; Brown, 2016; Doughty, 1980). Race and gender according to researcher James Banks (1995) depends on the views of person designated to hire administrators. In Banks (1995) research studies of race and gender it is suggests African Americans have had to struggle to be recognized as legitimate. A few participants noted school quotas relative to race and gender may have impacted their interview (Grove &

Montgomery, 1999; Horsford, 2012). Growe and Montgomery (1999) state African American women believe they had to be twice as good and better than others with the same aspirations. My analysis is that the advocate (or mentor) was a buffer to this anxiety pertaining to race and gender and was significant to a candidate obtaining a principalship position.

Participants in my study responded to critical questions about their placement journey. Two of the participants said schools where there were at least one African American and one Hispanic administrator already in place it was highly unlikely the third administrator being hired would be an African American woman. Several participants suggested they faced this particular dilemma and thus were not hired. Race and gender as a barrier affecting the advancement of teachers from the classroom to school principals need further study.

Research Question Three. Post-Interview Process

The following paragraphs are about the third research question. What are the perceptions and experiences of African American women principals who were hired in the greater Houston area concerning the post-interview process? This section commences with the participant's perceptions and experiences after receiving a job offer. Without the support of a sound network system, the participants agreed they would not have been successful.

Two subthemes emerged: (a) post-interview mentorship matters and (b) networking was crucial. The findings support literature and extend knowledge about the benefits of mentorship and networking (cite the literature to which you are referring). The first subtheme dealt with the participant's perceptions and experiences was that post-

interview mentorship matters. A second theme aligned with literature (Howard-Vital, 1989) was the need to network and continue professional development; otherwise success as a public-school principal becomes limited. Subthemes occurred relative to the post-interview process because of the need to work with school and community culture and the need for on-going professional development.

Post-interview mentorship matters. Perceptions and experiences expressed by the women principals in my study suggested the post-interview and job offer processes occurred without respect to their race and gender. Long (2005) suggests, African American principals have more credentials, more teaching experience, and participate in more learning academies with mentors. The key finding aligned to literature was mentorship matters. The recurrent theme was that a mentor was pivotal to participants' success as they exited the principal pool and acquired a position. This finding is in line and concurs with contemporary research (Peters, 2017; Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008). The findings indicate the participants had support of a mentor to buffer the qualifying, interviewing, and hiring process for public-school administrators. The mentors guided the African American women proteges and the advocates' word of recommendation carried weight with the district office. Participants' lived experiences influenced their strategies to approach advancement into administration. Sperandio (2015), Burrows-McCade (2014) and Brazer, Rich, & Ross (2010) suggest that collaboration and networking are stepping stones to leadership. Strategies such as collaboration, networking, and professional development allowed the participants in my study to be noticed. Willingness to serve their supervisor and help their school principal prepared the research participant women with distinguishable work experiences.

Networking is crucial. This study investigated the narratives for the networking that occurred for the participant African American women as public-school principals. This study adds knowledge to the field of education as to networking and people skills that come into play as a school principal is hired to lead a successful school (Brown, 2016; Cotton, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2004). Although half of the participants interviewed did not think that race and gender impacted their being hired as public-school principals in an urban school setting, literature reviewed suggests African American women do not experience the same treatment as African American men (Grove, & Montgomery, 1999; Holland, 2006; Horsfield, 2012). Moreover, literature reviewed refuted the perceptions that race and gender are irrelevant in hiring a public school principal. African American men are more likely to be hired as a principal at either the elementary or secondary level (Jean-Marie, 2013), while women are more likely to be hired predominately as elementary school principals (Gender and Leadership, (2006).

There are events that happened during the journey of these African American women participants that align to literature reviewed regarding networking as crucial when aspiring to a higher position in education (cite literature you are referring to). For some of the participants their experiences in the school principal candidates' pool were unique, without a mentor the participant may have been unsuccessful. Thoughts and reflections of each of the women were expressed candidly and with enthusiasm. Each participant was open to mentor another African American female with aspirations to enter the principals' pool (Burdette, & Schertzer, 2005; Doherty, 1999; Gasser & Shaffer, 2014).

Limitations, of the Study

There were 10 participants included in this study representative of a small snowball sample. The number of participants prevents the generalization of this study's findings. This study focused on participants that were African American women principals, a small subset of the principals' population in the greater Houston area. The women principal participants represented different school districts and different schools. The findings may not be generalized to the national level, but data from this study does speak to how African American women experience the challenges associated with the hiring process.

Implication for Future Research

The findings of my research study for research question one, the qualifying process, revealed (1a) each district had a qualifying process for principalship and (1b) mentors and advocates were essential to groom a candidate for the principal's pool. The findings for research question two, the interview process, revealed (2a) leadership experience affects inclusion and (2b) barriers such as race and gender may or may not affect inclusion in urban settings. The findings for research question three, the post-interview process, revealed (3a) post-mentorship mattered and (3b) networking is crucial. Mentors and advocates are essential to the qualifying process, selection for leadership experiences, and to help the mentee to overcome barriers that may exist, in the urban settings. As African American women principals, the mentors and advocates will support the school leader to navigate the principalship process to qualify, interview, and post-interview. This research that concurs with Brown (2005), Gupton & Slick (1996), and Horsford (2012) provides evidence to support the idea that more African American

women are capable of being school principals with the help of mentors. The perspectives and experiences the research study participants shared should inform future principal candidates. The pre-screener such as the Haberman and Gallup Survey was precursory for the interview and post-interview process in several districts of Region IV.

Implications for future research should consider if the numbers of African American women who enter the principal pool is affected by the pre-screener. Some potential leaders have taken university classes, passed three final exams, and passed a state examination for certification. It would be interesting to see if an alternate or if the elimination of an online multiple-choice assessment would support an increase to the number of African American women applying, interviewing, and receiving a principal position.

Another implication for future research to track using a data base that can be shared among districts with Region IV the number of African American women who apply for school principal. Contact with several district human resources revealed that applications are filed and no accounting for race breakdown of who applies and who is hired. Research on the diversity with school leadership update statistics that would refute or confirm that there is a low representation of African American women aspiring to become school principals.

Additionally, research with Region IV districts with similar demographics who select candidates for the principal's pool with and without a pre-screener.

Implications for Future Practice

School districts in the greater Houston area could reference these findings when seeking to prepare future school leaders. The qualifying process, the advocates and

mentorships, the prior leadership experiences, barriers and networking experiences were consistent from district to district. Seven districts in the greater Houston area were represented by the narratives of the women principals interviewed. Each district did not use the same qualifying process, but each used a pre-screener to select potential candidates for the district principal pool and academy. Several used the Gallup Survey, another used the Haberman, and others used piloted questionnaires to select candidates, male or female that might fit their job performance requirements.

The findings indicate that more support is needed between the qualifying process and the interview process. More mentorship relative to the necessary skill-sets to be successful during an interview need to be available before a teacher applies to enter the principal pool. Once principals enter the role in their building, there may be questions that they do not know to ask; therefore, mentors may need to be more accessible. Of course, on-going trainings after being hired as a school principal are critical and should be engaging and effective.

Implications for future practice should include formal leadership assignments and experiences for department chairs or lead teachers who aspire to advance in education. Some districts have talent research and acquisitions in place to locate and promote aspiring principals, but more cohort mentorship with leadership development would support future school leaders. Mentorship, networking, leadership experiences and advocate relationships matter and are essential in the pre-interview, interview, and post-interview process.

Recommendations:

Based on the findings of this study, I present four recommendations:

1. The findings of this study generated data highlighting that while the principalship is attainable, it can be difficult to procure a job as a school leader without the support of key mentors. As a result, I recommend an increase in the number of mentors and advocates who recruit, develop, and support competent teachers to earn their principal certification. Lead teachers need mentors that prepare them to exhibit skills that show school leadership. Mentors support potential candidates' pathways to administration.
2. Research question two findings from this study reveal for research question two revealed prior leadership experience helped. I recommend mentors and professional development specialists establish mentee cohorts to assist with the acquisition of leadership skill sets. I recommend extending invitations and consideration to all aspiring principals.
3. Findings from interviewee conversations of this study indicate more women may be interested in the public-school principalship but lack networking skills to procure a mentor. As a result, I recommend an increase of professional development and networking opportunities for competent teachers who aspire to advance. I recommend establishing mentorship relationships pre-interview, interview and post-interview. Networking after being hired is important. Principals must surround themselves with a good support system, and this can be accomplished through state and local networking relationships.
4. This study contained a small sample size of 10 participants. As a result, I recommend conducting research on a greater sample size of African American women principals from multiple districts. Additionally, I also recommend

future research compare the greater Houston area to other cities with similar demographics.

Conclusion

This chapter included a descriptive phenomenological study analysis, based on research questions. Investigating the narratives of African America women principals' in the greater Houston area revealed how the participants qualified, interviewed, and were hired. The analysis aligned with literature how African American women qualify to interview, interview, and exit post-interview with a job offer. This study examined African American women experiences in the greater Houston area in public education for research question (1a) pre-interview qualifications, and (1b) mentors and advocates as essential. Next, research question (2a) aligned with literature that experience affects inclusion in the principal pool and (2b) other barriers including race and gender may affect inclusion for an interview. Finally, the third research question aligned with literature reviewed (3a) post-interview mentorship matters, and (3b) networking is essential.

The findings of this study align to literature reviewed that in each district, there is a responsibility to recruit, mentor, and provide every school with a school leader who is empowered to increase student achievement (Wallace Foundation 2012). The research participant school districts and the participant women principals and their schools are situated in suburban and urban areas of the greater Houston area. The findings from my study supported state employment data which shows a low representation for African American women school principals (Statistics, 2008; United States Department of Education, 2016). The findings from this study reveal a need for

future study of ways to encourage more women to consider the principalship. The findings are the results of multiple districts within the greater Houston area.

The findings of this study present information to support future African American women school principals. The perspectives and experiences shared by the 10 women principals should enhance the educational leadership community regarding perceptions of women of color who aspire to advance in education. Due to a gap in literature on the path to school principalship from the perspective of African American women, three questions were addressed: how to qualify, interview, and procure employment as a school principal.

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Appendices

- A. Recruitment Letter
- B. Consent Form (HRP502a)
- C. Protocol (HRP 503)

Appendix A. Recruitment Letter**RESEARCH RECRUITMENT LETTER**

Principal Investigator: Deborah Fields Harris

281-450-3912 cell/text

E-mail: d.fieldsharris@att.net

Research Title: TEN AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT IN
PUBLIC EDUCATION: HOUSTON AREA PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear African American Woman Principal:

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (DELPS) degree program at the University of Houston, Central in Houston, Texas. My faculty sponsor is Dr. Bradley Carpenter my dissertation chairperson. I am conducting a study on career path experiences as perceived by African American woman school principals.

The primary purpose of my study is to examine the experiences of African American

women who apply, journey through the principal selection process and are hired to be a school principal. Current literature is sparse about African American women as school principals. The objective is that more women will be encouraged to advance from the classroom to school principal.

This letter is a follow-up to your interest and the possibility of you participating in interviews. I am inviting you to participate in this study, and I trust that you will recognize the unique contribution you can make with your narrative of your journey from the classroom to school principal. Your participation is completely voluntary and does not include compensation.

This research study has been reviewed by the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB). After IRB approvals you will be asked if you are interested in the study to sign a consent form to participate. The research study will consist of taped interviews via skype, telephone, or face-to-face which will last about one hour. I would like to reserve the right for a follow-up interview, if necessary.

Once the interviews have been transcribed, you will have the opportunity to review the transcripts for accuracy. This review will grant you the opportunity to confirm my data including direct quotations and summarized data. The dissertation will be reviewed by the three (3) members of my dissertation committee prior to final publication. It is feasible that portions of this research project may appear in educational publications and/or related presentations.

Measures of confidentiality will be maintained throughout this process. No names will be reported or disclosed, however each participant will be able to choose a pseudonym for extra security. The anticipated risks of this study are minimal, if any at all. If you have additional questions regarding your participation in this study, please feel free to contact me or my faculty advisor, Dr. Bradley Carpenter (phone – 713-743-8868); e-mail bcarpenter2@uh.edu).

I sincerely hope that you will agree to participate in this exciting project highlighting the African American woman school principal and allowing her to expand her presence in the field of educational research. I fully recognize the many demands requiring your time, and I thank you in advance for your attention and support. I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Deborah Fields Harris, Doctoral Candidate

Appendix B. IRB Consent to Participate

Title of research study:

TEN AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION:
HOUSTON AREA PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Principal Investigator: Deborah Fields Harris, Dissertation Researcher

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Bradley Carpenter, Ph.D.

Why am I being invited to take part in a research study?

You are being invited to take part in this research study because this is a phenomenological study of African American women who have taken the path from classroom teacher to school principal. This research is unfunded.

What should I know about a research study?

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide and can ask questions at any time during the study.

Why is this research being done?

A problem exists due to the underrepresentation of African American women school principals. The Department of Education (2016), National Center for Educational Statistics (2015-2016), and the Texas Education Agency (2010) show what diversity looks like in public education reveal race and gender for school principals. This phenomenological study examines the narratives of women school principals.

There are unanswered questions as to how an African American female perceives advancement from classroom teacher to school principal in an urban Houston setting. The objective is to share the journey of these principals and to encourage more women teachers to advance from the classroom to school principal.

How long will the research last?

We expect that you will be in this research study for an individual interview of 45-60 minutes.

How many people will be studied? Ten African American women school principals will be interviewed individually about their path from classroom teacher to school principal. To protect the careers of the participants a pseudonym will be generated for each participant. A transcription of the notes and tapes will be available for the interviewee(s) to review to ascertain accuracy of responses.

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

The individual video-tapings will occur with the principal investigator/doctoral candidate. A voice/or camcorder will be used for taping the responses of the research participants (women principals) to five semi-structured, open-ended questions. The reason for the tape is to gain full essence of the verbal and non-verbal responses. Transparency is key as this qualitative data will serve to enlighten mentors of future school administrators. Tape will be stored on a flash drive for three years at a secure location after the dissertation is finalized and the degree awarded.

This research study includes the following component(s) where we plan to audio record/video record/photograph of you as the research subject:

I agree to be [audio recorded/video recorded/photographed] during the research study. I agree that the [audio recording/video recording)/photographs] can be used in publication/presentations.

I do not agree that the [audio recording/video recording)/photographs] can be used in publication/presentations.

I do not agree to be [audio recorded/video recorded/photographed] during the research study.

[A participant may still participate if they do not agree to be audio recorded/video recorded/photographed]

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

You can choose not to take part in the research and it will not be held against you. Choosing not to take part will involve no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

You can leave the research at any time it will not be held against you.

If you decide to leave the research, contact the investigator in writing (d.fieldsharris@att.net) so that the investigator can withdraw you as a participant from the study.

If you stop being in the research, already collected data will be removed from the study record.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

There are no foreseeable risks related to the procedures conducted as part of this study. A pseudonym will be generated for each woman principal. Your participation in this study aids future research and adds to the body of knowledge about African American women school principals.

There are no physical risk or economics risks to the participant (woman principal). The unfunded research consists of interviewee responses to open-ended questions that relate the path the interviewee/research participant took to reach the position of school principal. Privacy is being provided by pseudonyms and a location for the interview that is not on a school campus. Taking part in the research study adds no cost to the participant, the subject of the human research study.

Will I get anything for being in this study?

There is no monetary compensation or award for participating in this study. The main benefit is the satisfaction that your responses will give current information for future research to build upon.

Will being in this study help me in any way?

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. This study will give your testimony of the challenges, joys and purpose of being a school principal. Your testimony from your perspective will help to guide others who desire to advance to school principal positions.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Your taking part in this project is anonymous, and information you provide cannot be linked to your identity.

Each research participant/subject's name will be paired with a code number and pseudonym, which will appear on all written study materials. The list pairing the subject's name to the assigned code number will be kept separate from these materials. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and other representatives of this organization, as well as collaborating institutions and federal agencies that oversee human subjects research. The information may be used without revealing your identity.

We may publish the results of this research. However, unless otherwise detailed in this document, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential.

Can I be removed from the research without my OK?

We will tell you about any new information that may affect your health, welfare, or choice to stay in the research. Due to the nature of this phenomenological study, removal from the research by the researcher is not an option.

What else do I need to know?

The results of the research may be shared after the study is finalized. The data will be stored at in a password protected digital format for three years, after the study is completed and the degree awarded.

Who can I talk to?

If you have questions or concerns

This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may also talk to them at (713) 743-9204 or cphs@central.uh.edu if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Signature Block for Capable Adult Your signature documents your consent to take part in this research.

Appendix C. Interview Protocol

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Deborah Fields Harris
 Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
 (281) 450-3912
 d.fieldsharris@att.net

Title of the Study:

TEN AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION:
 HOUSTON PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

1.0 Objectives

The objective of this study is to add to the sparse body of knowledge relative to the selection and recruitment process for school principals. The purpose is to encourage more African American women to aspire to become a school principal. This study will examine 10 African American women's narratives about their journey from classroom teacher to school principal in the Houston area.

2.0 Background

Qualitative research about African American women school administrators is sparse. This study can add to the body of knowledge and bring an awareness to the underrepresentation of African American women who advance to school principal positions (Jean-Marie, 2013; Peters, 2017; Robinson, 2014).

Qualitative research aims to make sense of a phenomenon from the participant's perspective and attempts to create meaning and understanding (Merriam, 2002). The training for the selection of this phenomenological study consist of several research methodology experts (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002; Trochim & Donnelly, 2007). So, a phenomenological methodology was appropriate for these African American women principals to share their narratives about career advancement in public education in urban settings.

3.0 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

- The phenomenological study includes only African American women principals. The experiences of African American school principals are unique, so Latino and White female school principals are not included.
- Ten African American women school principals with 5-10 years of experience in the urban Houston area, the 4th largest city in the United States, from different school districts will be invited to be subjects in this study.

- African American women principals will share their narratives individually (transparency) so that credibility can occur.

4.0 Vulnerable Populations

N/A

5.0 Number of Subjects

This is a single-site phenomenological study that includes African American women school principals from different districts from the same region (Houston). Each of the African American women have been school principals for more than three years. The subjects to be interviewed, analyzed, and transcribed is manageable. Ten African American women principals will be interviewed.

6.0 Recruitment Methods

Only African American women who have been school principals will be considered as potential participants. Purposeful sampling will be utilized to identify and select participants for this study.

After an initial conversation, a recruitment letter will be sent to each of the potential participants as a follow-up to confirm their interest in the research project. No one will be coerced to participate, nor will anyone be offered a reward.

After obtaining consent from the University of Houston's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and with the consent of these participants, interviews will be conducted.

7.0 Multi-Site Research Communication

N/A.

8.0 Study Timelines

The timeline for the study will consist of the following occurrences: 10 separate 60- minute interviews for each of the women principals. Timeline involves seven days (420 minutes) or one week for interviews. The expectation of the tasks after the interview will consist of a four-day turnaround for the participants to verify the audio-video taped interview contents. Next, two days will be allocated to transcribe and code the narratives of the women principals. The analysis for common themes will be conducted by computer academic research software or third-party. The timeline for the interviews, transcriptions, and analysis involves two and one-half weeks. The time estimates are flexible.

9.0 Study Endpoints

N/A

10.0 Procedures Involved

Qualitative research aims to make sense of a phenomenon from the participant's perspective and attempts to create meaning and understanding (Merriam, 2002, p.6). The training for this phenomenological study consists of Creswell (2007), Moustakas (1994) and Yin (2014). So,

a phenomenological study methodology is appropriate for these women principals to share their narratives. Their narratives will contribute to a sparse body of knowledge about hiring practices in urban settings.

This study design is a phenomenological study that takes the personal narratives of 10 African American women who were hired as school principals. This qualitative study collects data using structured, open-ended interview questions. Individual interviews via skype, telephone or face-to-face interviews will be conducted. The narratives of the African American principals will describe their perceptions of their career path to school principalship. This descriptive phenomenon will be coded and analyzed for common themes. Levels of education and years of experience will be provided in a separate table. Purposeful sampling will be utilized to identify and select participants for this study.

After obtaining consent from the University of Houston's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and with the consent of these participants, interviews will be conducted.

Step 1, after receiving IRB approval and securing consent to participate by the interviewees, the participants will be interviewed for 60 minutes in a setting free of noise and distractions. The narratives of the African American principals will describe their career path to school principalship. Step 2, women school principals will verify the transcripts of the audio/video recordings. Step 3, electronic software will be used to verify the responses of the participants relative to the research question and common themes. These steps should triangulate the interviews conducted for this phenomenological research study. Archival data from the national, state, and local education agencies about women principals will be included as well. Pseudonyms for the school districts will be used. Also, pseudonyms for the participants will be generated to encourage transparency.

11.0 Setting

Interviews may be conducted via skype, telephone, or face-to-face with the subjects at a location without noise or distractions such as a library. Pseudonyms for the participants will be generated to encourage transparency.

12.0 Drugs or Devices

N/A

13.0 Risks to Subjects

N/A

14.0 Potential Benefits to Subjects

N/A

15.0 Provisions to Monitor Data to Ensure the Safety of Subjects

All data collected from the interviews will be coded with pseudonyms in place of the subjects' name to provide protection for the African American women principals' careers in education. The safety concerns regarding the subjects' narratives is minimal. The data will be stored digitally at a designated location in mp3 or mp4 format on a flash drive.

16.0 Withdrawal of Subjects

No subjects will be withdrawn without their consent.

17.0 Costs/Payments to Subjects

N/A

18.0 Compensation for Research-Related Injury

N/A

19.0 Confidentiality

Pseudonyms for the school districts will be used and pseudonyms for the participants will be generated as well to protect their identity and to encourage transparency. The audio-video tapes of interviews of the subjects will be stored digitally in mp3 or mp4 format on a password protected computer. These tapes may be destroyed three years after the dissertation study is complete and the doctoral candidate degree is awarded.

20.0 Provisions to Protect the Privacy Interests of Subjects

The privacy interest of the subjects with provisions to protect will be addressed in the consent to participate in the research study form HRP502a. Only the IRB University of Houston committee members may have access to subjects' questions, responses and procedures.

21.0 Informed Consent Process

The informed consent process will commence after the Institutional Review Board approves the research study. Initially after IRB approvals, an email recruitment letter will be sent to be the prospective subject. If the prospective subject is interested, an overview of the process and what to expect will be explained. The waiting period between informing the prospect and receiving a response will be seven days.

All the subjects who return the recruitment letter will be notified that the Institutional Review Board has approved this project. Next, each subject will be given a consent agreement form, HRP502a, with the wording that they will be participating in the research study without coercion, without compensation or rewards, that their participation will be voluntary, and will be advised of their right to withdraw from the study. Also, the contact information of the faculty sponsor and principal investigator will be provided for questions and concerns.

22.0 Process to Document Consent in Writing

I will use “TEMPLATE CONSENT DOCUMENT (HRP-502a)” to create the consent document.

23.0 HIPAA

N/A.

24.0 FERPA

N/A

25.0 Data Management

Data will be collected from the subjects using individual interviews. Pseudonyms will replace their real names, notes, and interview tapes. The data after collected will be analyzed with software that analyzes descriptions of phenomenon that will categorize similar themes that occur with the subjects’ interview responses.

The principal investigator will be responsible for the collection, transmission, delivery of data collection if necessary to the IRB committee or designated person in the college of education. Only the dissertation thesis chair and the co-chair besides the IRB committee members will have access to the raw data.

A copy of the data in mp3 or mp4 format will be stored on a flash drive. A copy of the data will be stored digitally on a flash drive for at least three years following completion of the research and the degree awarded.

26.0 Specimen Use and Banking

N/A

27.0 Community-Based Participatory Research

N/A

28.0 Sharing of Results with Subjects

N/A

29.0 Resources

- Interviewee (s)
- Interview protocol
- Interview questions
- Audio tape
- Camcorder /visual taping
- Library or conference room

- Transcription of interviews of the subjects
- Decoding of narratives for analysis to ascertain similar themes

30.0 Additional Approvals

N/A

