

THE IMPACT OF BLACK WOMEN LEADERS DURING A CONSENT DECREE

BY

MYKAH RENEE LEE JACKSON

DISSERTATION

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Anjalé D. Welton, Chair
Professor Adrienne Dixson
Professor William Trent
Associate Professor Linda Sloat
Associate Professor Christopher Span

ABSTRACT

The purpose for this dissertation study is to highlight the scholarship and contributions of Black women leadership, by exploring the lived experiences of Black women in leadership positions in K-12 public schools and the community during a consent decree. Literature either overlooks Black women or categorizes them with all women. The narrative of Black women in educational research mirrors that of the aforementioned. To understand the contributions of Black women leaders to schools and communities, researchers must allow them opportunities to share their lived experiences. Counter-stories confront the discussion and viewpoints of the dominant group as they are based on real lived experiences. By hearing the counter-stories of the Black women leaders in this study, the multi-oppressions they experienced become apparent. The intersectionalities experienced by the participants in this study manifest how they defined (Self-Definition) and valued (Self-Valuation) themselves. This is an exploratory qualitative study drawn from a critical race theory approach to utilize counterstorytelling as a means to capture the participants' perspectives during their time of leadership. The interviews and documents reviews, bring to light how a consent decree focused on equity and achievement for Black students, supports the Black women leaders in establishing and upholding their identity as leaders.

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Dedication

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In Loving Memory

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Women's leadership has played an intricate role in the fabric of America's prosperity and infrastructure. However, the topic itself has been underrepresented and lacks appreciation by creators of policy and researchers (Collins, 1989, 2000; Grogan, 1999; Gasman, 2007).

Although leadership contributions have come from many sources, our current understanding of leadership is rooted in the experiences of men (Grogan, 1999). Women leadership has not received as much attention primarily due to systems that value male controlled leadership, which unfortunately suppresses and oppresses the contributions of women in leadership (Collins, 1989, 2000). This is common in education leadership. While there is an overrepresentation of women in teaching positions, there is an underrepresentation in administrative positions (Shakeshaft, 1993). There is an even greater underrepresentation of women of color in administration. More inadequate is our understanding of women of color in administration (Grogan, 1999). Emerging research has shown "their ways of leading may be as diverse as their cultural heritages but all rise directly from their own complex social and cultural histories" (Grogan, 1999, p. 524). It is therefore necessary to capture the experiences and contributions of Black women in leadership.

In spite of challenges to female leadership, some scholars are acknowledging and calling for research focused on women's leadership (Adkison, 1981; Bell 1990; Lawson, 1991; Murtadha & Watts, 2005). In the last seventy years or so, specifically in the field of education, female-centered research has been more all-encompassing. Yet women in leadership are overlooked and primarily left out of the discussion (Heck & Hallinger, 2005). Exploring gender from a broad social viewpoint, Collins (1989) concluded that, all "women share a history of patriarchal oppression through the political economy of the material conditions of sexuality and reproduction" moving beyond dividing factors of race, class, ethnicity, and religion (p. 756).

When considering the words of Kolb and Meyerson (1999) who state that gender is seen as an “axis of power, an organizing category that shapes social structure, identities and knowledge” (p. 139), one can take into account differences among women.

Various factors, most of which are deemed “barriers,” account for the systematic marginalization of women in leadership. Some of these factors include poor self-esteem or lack of confidence, lack of support, encouragement, and counseling, socialization and sex role stereotyping, preparation programs and curriculum materials, and sex discrimination in hiring and promotion (Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007). Researchers also mentioned that some factors are external to the field of education (Grogan, 1999). To a larger degree and in relation to their white counterparts, African-American women have not had scholarly opportunities to present qualities and aspects of their leadership roles (Harley, 1996; Collins 2000; Gasman, 2007). These barriers will continue to be overlooked if African-American women are not provided these opportunities.

Historical Research on Female Leadership

In efforts to better understand the research and lived experiences of African-American women in K-12 leadership positions, we must examine women’s leadership in a broader sense. Research surrounding women and leadership began in the 1970’s when, in an effort to record and acknowledge diverse forms of leadership, researchers began to explore leadership and gender more closely (Adkison, 1981; Grogan, 2000). Research focused on women in leadership began with the disciplines of history, sociology, psychology, and philosophy. While there is more research on women in leadership, it has highlighted the experiences of White females. In addition, researchers largely still focused their efforts toward male leadership roles and experiences. More alarming were the assumptions that all women shared similar experiences,

despite racial and ethnic differences (Grogan, 2000). Overall, early research on women leadership geared toward corporations and determined that women leaders who desired to be successful needed to pattern their behavior after that of males (Waring, 2003).

Known during this time was the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission's Report expressing limitations to women in leadership. The term "glass ceiling" was used prior to the 1980s to describe the limitations on "high-level female business leaders in corporate America after appearing in an article from the *Wall Street Journal*" (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009, p. 462). Although the term was first used in reference to women in the corporate sector, "since the 1980s, the Federal Government has recognized the existence of a glass ceiling which prohibited the advancement of women and people of color in the workplace" (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009, p. 462), and this was not limited to corporate America. After the involvement of the Federal Government, the term became applicable to and used as a means of describing the "discriminatory experiences of people of color" (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009, p. 462) in any work setting. The U.S. Department of Labor published a report in 1987 entitled *Workforce 2000*, bringing national attention to the makeup of the workforce. Pertinent areas of the report expressed the importance of increasing the involvement of men and women of diverse races "as contributors to the American economy" (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009, p. 462).

As a result, the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission was created through Title II of the Civil Rights Act of 1991. The Commission set out to conduct a study concerning "opportunities and artificial barriers to the advancement of women and people of color" (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009, p. 462) as they strove for high-level positions of power in corporate America. The Commission's report gave recognition to the glass ceiling being "an invisible barrier that confronts women and people of color as they approach the top of the corporate

hierarchy” (Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009, p. 462). The Commission “focused on business leaders and capital ventures in the U.S. economy” (Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009, p. 462), while the consequences of the glass ceiling experienced by women and persons of color in other sectors of society were not investigated. The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission has not conducted another extensive investigation in other sectors.

As researchers further explored women’s leadership in the 1980’s and 1990’s, the notion of women having different leadership styles than men emerged (Waring, 2003; Heck & Hallinger, 2005). In the mid-1990’s, researchers began to look more closely at various populations—in particular, women supervisors and school heads (Heck & Hallinger, 2005). This approach revealed that Black women leaders and administrators had different experiences than White women (Kimball & Sirontnik, 2000; King & Ferguson, 2001; Hite, 2004). Researchers came to the realization that women of color experienced conditions affecting them differently. As a result, it became evident that Black women in leadership have different experiences that warrant their own area of research to capture their uniqueness expressed through multiple areas (King & Ferguson, 2001). Stressors experienced by Black women that affect them differently include:

- (1) the isolation black women experience in dominant culture organizations;
- (2) the high visibility black women experience due to their race and gender and their subsequent need to make choices about public association;
- (3) the need to invest in alliance-building with the power elite;
- (4) the personal overload stemming from participation in two or more cultures (e.g., racial/ethnic culture, dominant culture);
- (5) the conflicts stemming from pressures to fulfill race and gender-role expectations in contexts that have conflicting norms and values;
- (6) the ambiguity of being in a non-traditional profession, or of having

a level of authority beyond that which is customarily expected for black women. (King & Ferguson, 2001, p. 128)

The narrative of Black women in educational leadership is synonymous to that of the broader one; literature on Black women in educational leadership requires a more critical look. In most literature on Black women, researchers have overlooked them, grouped them with all women, or studied them in association to men. For example,

Tillman (2004) observed that the “White feminist perspective” of the existing literature on African American women principals is inadequate because it obscures their experiences by grouping them under the heading “women and minorities.” These limitations result in what Tillman referred to as a “privileging of knowledge that often devalues the leadership theory and practice of African American female principals in the educational leadership discourse. (as cited in Loder-Jackson, 2008, p. 126)

In order for practices to change, the very thought processes of leadership for schooling must change. Black women are not seen as valuable, and as a result are overlooked in research. In order to demonstrate the value of Black women and their contributions to schools in leadership positions, research must approach them from a perspective that will bring their lived experiences in educational leadership to the forefront. This will allow for a more intensive view into Black women’s leadership contributions and their impact on school improvement. In addition, the conditions of schools and communities in which they work must also be taken into consideration to capture a more holistic view of the work of Black women leaders in K-12 public schools.

The fabric of society is greatly weakened because Black women have not had the opportunity in practice or research to express what they have to offer. A closer examination into

the impact of Black women's leadership on school improvement might yield profound changes in principal choice and placement to meet the needs of diverse populations.

Purpose Statement

This dissertation study will highlight the scholarship and contributions of Black women leadership, by exploring the lived experiences of Black women in leadership positions in K-12 public schools and the community. Provided that often "Black professional women are expected to take on the responsibility of fixing systems in crisis" (Omolade, 1994; Jones and Shorter-Gooden, 2003), this study will more specifically speak to the lived experiences of Black women leaders in Illinois during a consent decree. A consent decree in education is a negotiated equitable agreement between two parties situated in any level of education where the court determines to accept the agreement. For this dissertation study, consent decrees are important for the Black women participants as leaders, because it involves the court to resolve issues of equity and race, primarily for Black students, but also in the hiring and placement of Black staff.

Research Questions

- 1) How does identity impact leadership for Black women?
- 2) How does identity impact school improvement for Black women in K-12 leadership positions?
- 3) How can Black women establish their identity as leaders?

Theoretical Frameworks

Black feminist thought is important to this study because it places the experiences of Black women leaders at the center of discussion. Black feminist thought affords the intersections of oppression experienced by Black women leaders to be expressed.

The theory of intersectionality examines the interaction of multiple identifications and how those interactions are situated in and contribute to systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). In this study, intersectionality allows the interaction of multiple identifications of Black women leaders to be examined uniquely during a consent decree.

Significance of This Study

This study contributes to the broader research fields of leadership, Black women, and education policy. Theoretically, this study expands research on Black women by considering their position in leadership during an educational legal obligatory experience. Results from this study may be used to inform policy makers as they consider and create policies that address the growing gap in leadership diversity. In addition, results from this study may inform educational leaders as they foster equitable leadership practices in schools and examine the ways leadership positions are filled in education administration.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation consists of six chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction to the study. Chapter two reviews the literature on the absence of Black women in leadership and the case law surrounding issues of racial equity and consent decrees. Chapter three provides an overview of the research methodology, including the methods for data collection and analysis, and the recruiting and selection of participants. Chapter four provides the historical context of the culture and climate of the small urban community the participants of this study experienced. Chapter five shares the counter-narrative perspectives of the participants in leadership during the consent decree. Chapter six provides the summary of findings, implications, and recommendations of this study.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

In this chapter, I will first speak to women in leadership and highlight overall disparities. I then move to look at leadership within Illinois public schools specifically focusing on entry, retention, and demographics. To express the significance of the involvement of the courts, I begin with a historical look at case law emphasizing issues of race and equity. I combine my discussion of the importance of consent decrees for this study. I conclude this chapter with explanation of the theoretical framework used for this study.

Introduction

Finally, although Black women now hold leadership positions, it is disproportionate to the number of women in teaching positions (Grogan, 1999). In addition, males are still predominantly in secondary leadership positions. Historically, educational leadership positions were filled by those valued—males (Grogan, 1999). This antiquated way of leading must be shifted to move forward into a more diverse society. More importantly, leadership need not only be filled with those qualified, but rather those who are qualified with a demeanor and passion that will reach the population least served.

Women in Leadership

Research shows that there have been some gains for women administrators at the central office level and primarily as elementary principals. However, the majority of educational leaders across the country tend to be white males (Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007, p. 103). According to Shakeshaft (1999), there are seven noteworthy periods that have impacted the “ebb and flow of women into school administration” (p. 107): (a) the bureaucratization of schools, (b) the early suffrage movement, (c) the movement for equal pay and the economic depression, (d) World War II and the postwar period, (e) the cold war, (f) societal expectations

for women at odds with leadership and administration, and (g) the recent women's movement. Although women had some early success "their continued success has been hampered by forces external to education" (Grogan, 1999, p. 521).

From the 1999-2000 school year to the 2007-2008 school year, female public elementary school principals increased from 52%-59% and for secondary public schools from 22% to 29%. The statistics show that from the mid-1990's to 2000 there was a steady increase, especially in the public sector (Williams, 2013, p. 10).

In the public school systems, nationally, women are increasing in principalship positions. Yet power dynamics are still evident as women show greater numbers at the elementary level. Men and women of color represented 24% of all principals at both the secondary and elementary levels with only 5% representing appointments at secondary schools in 2003-2004 (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008)."

In that same year, African Americans, male and female, held 9.3% of school principalships in public schools (Parker & Villalpando, 2007). In the 2007-2008 school year, women principals were 52% in low-poverty and 65% in high-poverty elementary schools. Since, overall, African American and Hispanic female principals were more likely to be employed at high-poverty elementary and secondary schools when compared to their White counterparts, these percentages are significant (Bitterman, 2013).

For the same 2007-2008 school year, to add to these significant percentages, 22% of the principals in high-poverty elementary schools were African American (Bitterman, 2013). "The studies also showed that White female administrators were less likely to be appointed to high poverty schools, thereby increasing percentages of minority principal placements (Adkison, 1981; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Gooden, 2005)" (as cited by Williams, 2013, p. 11-12). The

research paints a picture of Black women administrators as beleaguered and excluded. Also, according to research Black women are more likely to involuntarily obligate to lead schools with significant academic and societal challenges. For these reasons alone research should be conducted on the impact of Black women leaders on school improvement. Given the opposition they face being female and Black, in addition to the workplace conditions they are situated in, one has to ask, what is their impact on school improvement?

The Principals in Illinois: Entry, Retention and Demographic Trends

Kathleen Sullivan Brown and Bradford R. White (2010) conducted research which focused on the characteristics of principals in three categories--demographics, experience, and academic background (p. 1-2). For the purpose of this study, I only use the section regarding principal demographics in Illinois. The findings for the principal demographics in Illinois showed an increase in the number of African American women.

Between 1990 and 2008, the percentage of women principals in Illinois doubled. Since 2005, the principalship has mostly been a female occupation (Sullivan & White, 2010). As a whole, between 2001 and 2008, 'principal corps' became somewhat more racially diverse primarily through the increase of Hispanic principals (Sullivan & White, 2010). Across the state, there are a greater percentage of minority principals than there are of teachers. Larger percentages of women and minority principals are in the elementary and middle schools in Illinois (Sullivan & White, 2010). There are very few women and minority principals at the high school level (Sullivan & White, 2010). This shows that there are still racial disparities. "The Chicago Public Schools are more likely to have women and minorities as principals than any other region of the state" (Sullivan & White, 2010, p. 1). It appears that the state of Illinois is gradually becoming more diverse in the leadership position of the principalship. However, none

of the data collected speaks to the work of Black women principals, their experiences, or their impact on school improvement.

Bradford R. White and Pooja K. Agarwal (2011) captured the most comprehensive report of Illinois principals. The Principal Report: The State of School Leadership in Illinois grounds itself in a compilation of works. The Illinois Education Research Council (IERC) at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville with support from The Joyce Foundation was able to couple the “research on principal demographics and turnover with research on principal effectiveness and a survey of current Illinois principal’s job-related beliefs and practices” (White & Agarwal, 2011, p. 1).

In the 2010-2011 school year, the IERC surveyed one out of five active public school principals, after having analyzed demographics and employment trend of over 7100 Illinois public school principals between 2001 and 2008, and statistically modeling principal impact on student achievement and teacher qualifications in over 3500 public school in Illinois. Charter schools were excluded “because their personnel are not consistently included in state records of educator employment” (White & Agarwal, 2011, p. 1).

The report illuminated trends “among Illinois principals, synthesized key findings from the research, and offered recommendations for policy, practice, and preparation to enhance principals’ ability to increase student achievement” (White & Agarwal, 2011, p. 1). Highlights from the report that are pertinent to this discussion include: principal impact on student achievement, turnover rates, diversity by gender and race in the principalship, and policy, practice and preparation.

Student achievement. Researchers found that principals have a great impact on student achievement indirectly as a result of “choosing curricula and by creating norms of school culture

and working with teachers” (White & Agarwal, 2011, p. 2). In conjunction, “a principals’ abilities to recruit, develop, and retain highly effective teachers” (White & Agarwal, 2011, p. 2) is now viewed as a way to speak to their effectiveness. Given teachers are directly connected to students more often than principals it makes sense for teacher recruitment and retention to be considered in relation to principal effectiveness. The research also shows that student achievement is associated with a principal’s prior experience as an assistant principal in their current schools (White & Agarwal, 2011). It is important for those entering administration to have an idea of what level of students they desire to work with, elementary, middle/junior high, or high school. The research also shows a connection between student achievement and a principal’s obtainment of advanced degrees at research universities (White & Agarwal, 2011). Therefore, with access to quality leadership preparation and resources, coupled with the skill-sets to analyze school level data, one is possibly more equipped for logistical matters of the principalship.

Turnover rates. Increases in principal turnover rates coincide with retirement increases of baby boomer principals. “During the 1990s, year-to-year principal retention averaged around 86%, but our data show that the retention rate has decreased to 79% in the past ten years” (White & Agarwal, 2011, p. 4). Between 2001 and 2008, retirement is the main reason for leaving principalships in Illinois. Other factors, such as district reassignments, not personal decisions to leave, played a role in nearly one-quarter of principal changes. In 2008, 25% of the principals who were 55 years or older left, while only 5% of those under 55 left (White & Agarwal, 2011, p. 4).

The retirement of baby boomers has several social, cultural, economic, and political effects on school districts in Illinois. For rising school administrators this may mean more

opportunities for available principal positions. However, with the increase of younger school leaders filling the vacancies, there will be a simultaneous increase in mobility among new principals. “Currently, only 28% of first-time principals remain in their initial post for at least six years, compared to 38% in the previous decade” (White & Agarwal, 2011, p. 4).

Diversity by gender and race. As mentioned earlier, more women and minorities are principals in Illinois. However, “as a whole, Illinois principals are a more diverse group than Illinois teachers, and their diversity is increasing while that of Illinois’ teachers is declining” (White & Agarwal, 2011, p. 6). Principals have a great responsibility to attract a diverse staff to meet the needs of their population of students. Provided current principals are more diverse, one has to ask why is staffing not as diverse? The answer to this question may rest largely with policymakers at the state level.

Despite the demographic diversity of principals in Chicago, the research also shows that outside of Chicago and in its suburbs, principals are “...still largely white and male...women have yet to assume leadership of more schools in small-town and rural Illinois” (White & Agarwal, 2011, p. 6). This, despite the fact that teacher faculties in those schools are heavily female and that large proportions of women principals surveyed preferred “working in small-town or rural schools over urban settings” (White & Agarwal, 2011, p. 6). Women still make up the majority of the teaching force “from which leaders are recruited, and...women prepare for leadership in degree programs, and aspire to the positions” (Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007, p. 103).

These findings of The Principal Report in this area blatantly highlight racial and gender dynamics of school administrators within the state of Illinois. This research also gives rise to the question of why do women, especially white women, prefer small-town or rural schools to urban

settings? In Illinois there is a higher concentration of Black principals in urban districts, and much less so in the other district types. Given this context we must understand how Black women principals who do choose to work in districts in smaller, more rural districts navigate their leadership roles when they are one of few.

Policy, practice, and preparation. Of the four areas of implications for policy, practice and preparation mentioned in White & Agarwal's (2011) report, I am interested in the last implication for this topic—support for new leaders. "IERC survey data shows that the single task at which current principals feel least effective in is training prospective principals" (White & Agarwal, 2011, p. 13). The assistant principal position may be the solution. It is an effective means for training and mentoring prospective principals.

This particular category serves as one of high importance because mentoring is necessary for rising administrators. This means that principals require proper investment, as they are needed in the investment of assistant principals (White & Agarwal, 2011). More importantly, mentoring calls for an element of intimacy, as it is a shared relationship on a personal professional level. How can one effectively mentor another if they do not know what is needed? How can one effectively mentor another if they are not equipped to do so? How can one effectively mentor another if they are not willing to do so? The notion of mentoring in administration brings to the forefront uniqueness of persons on various levels. Some of the levels include gender, race, age, etc. If not carried out authentically and effectively, mentoring is viewed as a barrier for the lack of not having it (White & Agarwal, 2011).

Barriers. Many of the studies examining women in leadership primarily focus on barriers women face in upward movement (Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007, p. 103). These barriers also include, "marriage and child-rearing as factors that continue to have

a negative impact on women's progress in their management career since management continues to be defined in male terms" (Moorosi-Mokolatsie, p. 2). Lawson (1991) speaks to the necessity to study Black women in various aspects as wives, mothers, and professionals with hopes of capturing and understanding their experiences and contributions (p. 468). What one views as a barrier may be viewed as an overcoming and uplifting story to another.

The article individually addresses barriers to women in educational leadership:

Poor self-esteem or lack of confidence; lack of aspiration or motivation; family and home responsibilities; working conditions and sex discrimination, lack of support, encouragement, and counseling, socialization and sex role stereotyping, inadequate preparation and finances for continuing training and professional development, lack of role models, sponsors, and networks, and sex discrimination in hiring and promotion.

(Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007, p. 103)

When more specifically focusing on Black women, a common barrier of the "outsider within" (Collins, 1999, p. 86) was prevalent. Black women typically learn from exposure to the inner majority, to maintain their position within the workplace despite the barriers faced. Collins (1999) wrote about how Black women used the "outsider within" method "as a standpoint where a minority employee is able to observe the private inner workings of a majority family" (p. 86). For this Collins (1999) used the example of Black women who worked in the home of Whites as "maids, nannies, or cooks" (p. 86). These women were allowed within the home, thus enabling them to learn how White people carried out business. At the same time, they were not members of the "family" and therefore were closely watched (Collins, 1999, p. 87). Although this is not extensive, it provides a glance into the potential issues of K-12 educational administration. More

importantly, it highlights issues experienced not just by all women or all administrators but specifically Black women in leadership.

Black women experience the interlocking oppression of not just race but also gender. It is imperative that their voices be heard to capture their experiences as leaders and consider their impact on school improvement. Given the interlocking oppressions they face it is important that Black women's voices be heard to understand how they navigate in their roles as school administrators during a consent decree focused on issues of race and equity. In order to understand what present political dynamics a consent decree may bring, we first must understand the history of legal actions towards racial equity in education.

Consent Decrees and the Role of the Law in Pursuit of Racial Equity in Education

A consent decree can be loosely defined as judicial decrees that express a voluntary agreement between parties to a lawsuit. Since consent decrees can be a legal means in which to address issues of racial equity in education, it is imperative to begin with case law examining the racial desegregation of public schools (Enyia, 2011). The historical social context and the involvement of the Court in the shaping and reshaping of societal views and policies in education regarding racial equity, worked together in tandem to establish systems that we have today.

The Civil Rights Act of 1875 stated that all races were entitled to equal treatment in public accommodations (Davidson, 2008). However, in 1883 the Supreme Court decided that the law did not apply to private entities or corporations. The election of 1876 marked the end of federal support for African Americans (Davidson, 2008). President Rutherford B. Hayes ran on the Republican ballot stating that he would uphold Reconstruction; however, in the face of opposition he secretly sided with the Democrats, and when he won the election, he removed all federal troops from the South (Davidson, 2008).

The end of the period of Reconstruction, 1877, meant hardship for African Americans. The effects of the decision to remove provisions established for Reconstruction of the South were terrible for African Americans and it showed in every aspect of their lives for many years to come. The laws that once set them free and afforded them the chance to exercise their rights as citizens no longer stood since they lacked federal support. In 1896, “the United States Supreme Court, in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, decided that a Louisiana law mandating separate but equal accommodations for blacks and whites on intrastate railroads was constitutional” (Davidson, 2008). This case established the well-known phrase “separate but equal.” The ruling kept them separate but it did not keep them equal. The ruling for separation in this case applied to several institutions.

New laws meant to infringe upon the rights of African Americans were quickly put in place. Poll taxes required one to pay a tax before voting. Literacy tests were required to see if one could read or write before voting. An even more blatant display of discrimination was the Grandfather clause, which allowed one to avoid literacy tests if one’s father or grandfather could vote prior to January 1, 1867 (Davidson, 2008). This clause afforded illiterate white males the opportunity to vote while excluding the majority of African Americans. The final blow came when southern states generated a system of laws requiring segregation in almost every way of life (Davidson, 2008). These laws are commonly known as Jim Crow Segregation. Jim Crow laws banned the mixing of blacks and whites. From hospitals to cemeteries, playgrounds, restaurants, and schools, they were separated. Buses, streetcars, and railroads were not exempt. The racism that emerged from slavery was well established, common and embedded in every aspect of society.

The decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) applied to various institutions including those of education. In *Plessy*, “Judge Shaw of the Massachusetts court...failed to show...that there was any reasonable relationship between racial classification and legitimate objectives of the school system; he merely asserted that school segregation was for the good of both races” (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1003). “The Court held that since the practice of separating the races had been in long-standing usage, there was no need to question the status quo.” It also held that the law yielded to social conditions (Casas, 2006), or what is known as *de facto* segregation. As a result, the Court implied that the state could stretch their authority to any sector including education. It would be over one hundred years before the separate-but-equal decision would be overturned (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1003).

In the case of *Cumming v. Richmond County Board of Education* (1899), the state used their authority to determine how separate-but-equal would function. In lieu of a shortage of funds, the school board of Richmond, Georgia made the decision to terminate the black high school and have it function as a black primary school. “The federal courts would not intervene” (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p.1004).

According to Horace Mann Bond (1948), the educational system socialized Negroes to separate themselves from whites, taking into account the separation of Negroes and whites from the once interracial educational institutions.

Elementary schools were constructed to meet the demand of the black children population of black by 1935 (Anderson, 1988, p. 181). In 1939, Negroes in the United States constituted one-tenth of the population of about 130,000,000. At that time around 30,000,000 were enrolled in educational institutions. Of that count approximately 3,000,000 of the enrolled students were Negro. At the Elementary level the Negro enrollment was 10.8 percent, at the

Secondary level 4.2 percent, and in Higher education 3.2 percent. It was found that the majority of Negroes enrolled in school were in the elementary schools. While white students were being moved to the next grade many Negro students remained in the lower levels for several years.

Despite the fact that a great number of Negroes were in school, the educational status of Negro students in general, was about 30 percent behind that of others in the country (Thompson, 1939, p. 489-490). Unlike the schools in the North, schools in the South were separate based on the law and even though the law stated that the institutions had to be separate but equal, it is well known that the state did not provide adequate facilities for Negroes. In terms of the school year for Negro students, Negro schools were a month or more shorter than the white schools within the same community. In Louisiana and South Carolina, Negro schools were up to two months shorter of the white schools within their community (Thompson, 1939, p. 493). Clearly it is evident that there were inequalities between Negro and white institutions. Separate-but-equal was a false concept.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began to “pursue racial abuse and seek judicial clarification of the limits of separate-but-equal as a legal basis for segregation. At first, the intention was to attack segregation where equal facilities were obviously inadequate or nonexistent” (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1005). The outcome of the initiative is evident in cases that followed.

Murray v. Maryland (1936). Donald Gaines Murray was rejected admittance to the University of Maryland, School of Law, on the basis of his race. Other blacks including Thurgood Marshall too were rejected for the same reason. In 1935, Marshall, with support of the NAACP, argued in favor of Murray to the Baltimore City Court, that he is as competent as his white counterparts, to attend the University’s Law School. He was rejected due to his race.

Marshall also noted that Murray could attend one of the black law schools; however, their educational systems were not as well established. Moreover, the University was violating the “separate but equal” ruling and the only alternative would be to allow Murray and other black students to attend the University of Maryland, School of Law. The Baltimore City Court sided with Murray. When in 1936 the University appealed to the Maryland Court of Appeals, it too sided in favor of Murray. Murray attended The University of Maryland Law School and graduated. (NAACP, n.d.) This was a huge milestone for the NAACP and blacks as a whole. The case proved that the state of Maryland upheld the “separate but equal” proceeding pertaining to Higher Education and the Maryland Universities Law School. Maryland was now the prototype that other cases could follow in similar proceedings.

Missouri ex rel Gaines v. Canada (1938). A similar situation occurred in the state of Missouri. In 1936, Lloyd Gaines applied to the University of Missouri Law School but was denied on the basis of his race. At the time, the State of Missouri did not have an all black law school. Therefore, the State of Missouri gave Gaines two options—wait for them to build an all black law school or they would help him pay to attend an all black law school in another state. Gaines refused to accept either of those options, decided to sue the state for admittance, and he turned to the NAACP for assistance. Marshall took on the case. By 1938, Gaines’ case made it all the way to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court sided with Gaines stating that since there were no all black law schools “in the State of Missouri, the ‘equal protection clause’ required the state to provide, within its boundaries, a legal education for Gaines” (NAACP, n.d.). Not only had the NAACP won the case for Gaines, but it was on the Supreme Court level. By 1938, the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund made two major legal strides for blacks.

Sweatt v. Painter (1950). Feeling confident from their previous victories, the NAACP continued to legally attack “sanctioned racial discrimination,” (NAACP, n.d.) and in 1946 they gained the opportunity to do so. A black man named Heman Sweatt applied to the University of Texas for admittance into their law school. Thinking that they would not have to admit Sweatt on the grounds of there being an all black law school the University quickly had another law school built for blacks on its campus. However, Sweatt argued that the education he received at the all black law school was not up to the “caliber” (NAACP, n.d.) of the white law school. When the case reached the Supreme Court in 1950, Justices decided for Sweatt unanimously, making note of the obvious inequalities between the University’s law school for whites and the rapidly constructed all black law school on the campus. This overtly revealed that separate did not mean equal, and Sweatt was admitted to the institutions white law school.

McLaurin v. Oklahoma Board of Regents of Higher Education (1950). By now, one would believe that all graduate law schools would have followed suit in admitting Black students, providing them with an adequate education, however, not all graduate law schools had done so. The University of Oklahoma thought that they could admit a Black student, George McLaurin, to their doctoral program and have him sit aside from his class and even eat at separate tables. McLaurin sued on the grounds that the treatment was uncommon to its students and that it was harming his grades. He too asked for representation by the NAACP. His case went to the United States Supreme Court and the decision for his case was yielded on the same day as Sweatt’s. The Supreme Court found that the University’s actions were negatively affecting his “ability to learn and ordered that they cease immediately” (NAACP, n.d.).

Again, and again the courts showed that separate did not mean equal. Essentially, if blacks were not able to attend white institutions with the same materials in the same

classrooms—provided the same opportunities to succeed, they were not equal. As a result, changes needed to be made educationally for black graduate students. The courts recognized and acknowledged this fact. The NAACP began to put efforts towards the importance of equal education for blacks as a whole. Ultimately this set the stage for the five separate cases known to many as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954, 1955) in which Marshall also played an essential role.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954). Five cases, cases from Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, Delaware, and Washington D.C., reached the Supreme Court and were first argued in December 1952. All of the cases combined brought forth various aspects of segregation. The Kansas case involved “permissive segregation legislation for elementary children” (northern state); the Virginia case, a “compulsory segregation law was used to segregate high school students” (upper southern state); “South Carolina represented the Deep South; and Delaware a border state.” In the Washington, D.C. case due process and congressional power was questioned. (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1006).

These several cases focused on the same topic from different geographical locations weighed heavily on the importance of the decision by the Supreme Court. The Court was aware of this fact as well and by June of 1953 “the Court issued an order setting the case for re-argument that fall and submitted a series of questions for litigants to address” (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1006). The questions asked by the Court expressed that separate-but-equal was inherently wrong. The Court asked if abolishing school segregation was the intent of Congress and the states when they passed the 14th Amendment.

Brown v. Board of Education (II) (1955). The Supreme Court called for the lower courts to uphold and implement the previous decision. The Supreme Court sought to avoid

unreasonable delays by demanding specifically that the lower courts “require that the defendants make a prompt and reasonable start toward full compliance with our May 17, 1954, ruling” (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1009). The *Brown II* decision is controversial because of its wording. The *Brown II* decision left a responsibility for the courts to act on behalf of all citizens. As a result of *Brown*, several educational institutions entered into judicially overseen consent decrees. Consent decrees sought to desegregate schools by using federal trial courts to oversee the terms of their agreement. The role of the court was deemed essential to combating segregation in educational practices.

Superfine (2010) notes since the decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 reformers have looked to the courts to promote equal educational opportunity and protect the rights of underrepresented student groups affecting educational changes. He provides several examples of the courts involvement in three areas: school desegregation, school finance, and school choice. Superfine (2010) illustrates that issues of centralization and decentralization manifested with these reforms in two prominent ways.

Superfine (2010) examines the strengths and weaknesses of the courts as a centralized and decentralized system of reform. Under the centralized system, the courts function in a command-and-control model, such as in historical desegregation cases where courts served as the primary drivers of reform (Superfine, 2010). Acting alone, assigning more specific orders, “Indeed, the courts appeared to grow weary of the difficulties they continually faced as they unsuccessfully attempted to desegregate local school systems with increasingly precise orders” (Superfine, 2010, p. 116). Failure meant the perpetuation of highly segregated schools.

As a decentralized system, the court function is similar to that of a facilitator (Superfine, 2010). Superfine (2010) found that courts have experienced success with implementation of their

decisions when there was support from the other branches of government. More recently courts have succeeded when stakeholders affected by the proceedings were allowed input in the judicial process. “Some courts have extensively employed local citizen committees to help develop school desegregation remedies, monitor implementation, improve community relations, advise the judge, and serve as mediators in resolving disputes” (Superfine, 2010, p. 120). The courts are leaning towards a more decentralized approach with an increasing understanding that there is a need for the courts to work alongside stakeholders to ensure there will be a structure in place to sustain and support the legal changes made to achieve racial equity in schools.

Green v. County School Board of New Kent County (1968). The School Board of New Kent County adopted a “freedom-of-choice” plan wherein all students, except first and eighth graders, have to choose which school they would attend each year between New Kent and Watkins schools. Students who did not choose were assigned to the school they formerly attended (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1011). “First and eighth grade pupils must affirmatively choose a school.” Again, this created a dual system of education of which *Brown I* and *Brown II* sought to overcome. The School Board had to reach a “unitary” system where there were not two separate schools. “In three years of operation not a single white child has chosen to attend Watkins school, and although 115 Negro children enrolled in New Kent school in 1967 (up from 35 in 1965 and 111 in 1966), 85% of the Negro children in the system still attend the all Negro Watkins school” (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1013). The School Board had to come up with a new plan for schooling its student population. “The Board must be required to formulate a new plan and, in light of other courses which appear open to the Board, such as zoning,...fashion steps which promise realistically to convert promptly to a system without a “white” school and a “Negro” school, but just a school...” (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p.

1013). Almost 15 years had passed since *Brown* and still there were concerns with racial discrimination and education. *Green* further supported the decision rendered in *Brown*. The discussion surrounding the demographic makeup of schools continued in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971) when it was determined that busing could be used as a method to overcome racial segregation and maintain racial balancing or racial quotas in schools where *de jure* segregation existed (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1014). Desegregation of schools “cannot be limited to the walk-in school;” therefore busing may be ordered except when “time or distance of travel is so great as to either risk the health of the children or significantly impinge on educational process” (*Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg*, 1971). Essentially, carrying out desegregation plans was not going to be an easy task however; it needed to be thought through and adjustments had to be made with all persons in mind.

Keyes v. Denver School District No. 1 (1973) and Board of Education of Oklahoma City Public Schools v. Dowell (1991). No one could be exempt during this process and this was realized in *Keyes* (1973) when it considered that the School Board actions were seen as having an influence of creating unconstitutional *de jure* segregation in a state that never had legal segregation (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1017). Although Denver, Colorado schools had never been under a constitutionally permitted racial segregation system (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1017), the use of “various techniques such as the manipulation of student attendance zones, school site selection and a neighborhood school policy, created or maintained racially or ethnically...segregated schools entitling petitioners to a decree directing desegregation of the entire school district” (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1017). *Keyes* and *Dowell* were important cases for the Supreme Court because of standards that were established for consent decrees, reiteration of the Court's authority, and the defining factors surrounding types of

segregation. In *Keyes* “the Supreme Court emphasized that the differentiating factor between *de jure* segregation and so-called *de facto* segregation is *purpose* or *intent*” (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1017). It was determined that there were purposeful practices of segregation, *de jure*, and the school district had to correct the racial imbalance in schools (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1017).

Enyia (2011) wrote, in *Dowell*, the Court held that once a “unitary” system could be established, a federal court’s desegregation order should end, even if this meant a re-segregation of schools (p. 14). The Court held that a school board need only show it had complied in “good faith” and that “the vestiges of past discrimination had been eliminated to the extent practicable (Dowell, 1991, p. 10)” (as cited by Enyia, 2011, p. 14). It is not the intent of the Court to have a specific consent decree for eternity. Yet, it should not allow for consent decrees to be lifted if the best interest of all stakeholders has not been addressed, elimination of desegregation, and signs of possible recurrence are not eradicated.

The role of the Court has been essential to the discussion of desegregation of schools—the social and class status of ethnic groups within society. Several researchers have examined the role of the Court and its obligation to all persons within society to keep the country from moving backwards to segregated schools. The courts should be reminded of its role and obligation to enhance the quality of life for all persons within the country (Hudgins, 1973, p. 83). Additionally, the court must honor historical experiences of minorities with cases involving ethnic and racial disparities. In essence, the court has a responsibility as a gatekeeper for racial equity in society to ensure the nation does not revert to former practices (Hudgins, 1973, p. 83). Hudgins’ (1973) examination of both cases reveals that issues of race and equity are important to minorities and should be to all, especially the court.

Freeman v. Pitts (1992). As in the case of *Freeman v. Pitts* (1992), when courts do not uphold full implementation of a consent decree it makes way for hindrances in the process of trying to solve the issue. In *Pitts*, “the Court ruled that once a portion of a desegregation order is met, a federal court should cease efforts as to that portion and remain involved only as to those aspects of the plan that have yet to be achieved (Pitts at 249)” (as cited by Enyia, 2011, p. 14). The federal district court considered the “*Green* factors” in reaching its decision. In efforts to meet the mandate of *Brown*, the court identified elements of school systems that “must to be free from racial discrimination” (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1029). These elements, known as the “*Green* factors,” included “student attendance patterns, faculty, staff, transportation, extracurricular activities, and facilities” (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1029). District Courts were ordered to form remedies to address racial inequities among the elements in primary and secondary schools (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1029). The Court defined its role having discretion to order incremental or partial withdrawal of its supervision and control. While the Court still has jurisdiction over the consent decree it may intervene where there is still not compliance to the consent decree (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1030).

Missouri v. Jenkins (1995). This case involves an 18-year long litigation in regards to the school segregation in Kansas City, Missouri School District (KCMSD). The Federal District Court found that the State and KCMSD ran a racially segregated school system and did not eliminate the remnants of Missouri’s authorized racially segregated schools prior to 1954. As the District Court began to order remedial measures on the State to cover expenses in efforts to provide equal education opportunities. The order for increases in salary ultimately exceeded the Court's authority because it created an ‘*interdistrict* solution to an *intradistrict* problem’

(Missouri v. Jenkins, 1995). This case marked the Court's departure from broad federal court solutions to provide equal education opportunities in public schools (Missouri v. Jenkins, 1995).

Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1 (2007).

Seattle, Washington, and Louisville, Kentucky, school districts had schools that were “segregated by housing patterns not by state or school board policy. The school board policies that were contested were intended to achieve diversity defined primarily as racial balance (African-American and White) within certain bounds in each school” (Enyia, 2011). “The Court, in essence, set forth the rule that no state has any authority under the Equal Protection Clause to use race as a factor in deciding where children shall attend school” (Enyia, 2011). Admission to public schools cannot be based on race. Race can only be used for a “narrowly tailored policy to obtain diversity.” (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1034). Essentially, a public school cannot use race to classify students and then use that classification for school assignments. Ultimately, the schools sought to reach racial balancing or racial diversity without adequate reasoning for doing so (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, p. 1044).

Consent decrees in Illinois. The cases presented about the history of desegregation in American education are not exhaustive; however, the cases illustrate the involvement of the courts in desegregation and education equity cases. In addition, the cases present the challenges associated with addressing the equity issues in a way that all stakeholders are served and protected.

Although not geographically mentioned in previous cases, the state of Illinois has had several districts undergo a consent decree. Enyia (2011) discusses challenges schools face during a consent decree, or racial balancing plans, and the need for school districts under these conditions to reach a solution, which will keep them in accordance with constitutional mandates.

Enyia (2011) highlights national cases involving these issues. More importantly for this study, she also addresses three consent decrees in the state of Illinois: *People Who Care v. Rockford Board of Education*, *Champaign Unit 4 Consent Decree*, and *Coates v. Illinois State Board of Education*. Enyia (2011) notes that smaller communities experience the same effects, if not greater, as those in larger communities (p. 41-42). No matter where a consent decree takes place, the support and sustainability for effective change towards racial equity need to be established and remain. Thus, efforts to achieve racial equity need to be ongoing even once the formal consent decree process has ended.

Theoretical Frameworks

Black feminist thought is important to this study because it places the experiences of Black women leaders at the center of discussion. Black feminist thought affords the intersections of oppression experienced by Black women leaders, to be expressed. By sharing the stories of Black women in K-12 leadership positions and community, the experiences of these individuals who typically would not be included in mainstream leadership discussions become integral in hopes of determining the Black feminist thought that seeks to intentionally place Black women's experiences and ideas at the center of analysis (Collins, 2000). Black feminist thought is shaped by Black women, although it may be documented by others (Collins, 2000). Black feminist thought stands on the notion of unique understandings of Black women and their experiences which give way to them having commonalities as a group (Collins, 2000). While Black women have commonalities, the experiences of Black women along intersections that differ cause "different expressions of these common themes" (Collins, 2000, p. S16).

For this study, I will only use two major themes of Black feminist thought: (1) The Meaning of Self-Definition and Self-Valuation and (2) The Interlocking Nature of Oppression.

The meaning of self-definition and self-valuation. Self-Definition challenges the negative external stereotypical images placed on Black women. Self-Definition calls for Black women to challenge being defined by others. Self-Definition calls for Black women to question the "intentions of those with the power to define" (Collins, 2000, p. S17). Self-Valuation goes further and seeks to replace negative external stereotypical images by valuing aspects of Black womanhood that are stereotyped (Collins, 2000). By doing so, Black women challenge the ideologies used to control them.

The interlocking nature of oppression. Black women are unique because of their experiences of interlocking systems of oppression--race, class, and gender. Black women are oppressed by White males who dominate society. White women, while oppressed by their gender, are privileged by their race. Black males, while oppressed by their race, are privileged by their gender. Therefore, as it relates to Black women in K-12 leadership positions, their unique experiences must be shared. Core themes of Black feminist thought (work, family, sexual, politics, motherhood, and political activism) rest on paradigms that place emphasis on intersecting oppressions that shape the U.S. matrix of domination (Collins, 2000).

Both of these themes, *Self-Definition and Self-Valuation*, and *The Interlocking Nature of Oppression* are essential to this study.

Intersectionality. Intersectionality examines the Black women leaders across multiple intersections and furthers the discussion of intersecting oppressions to understand how they defined and valued themselves. This study hopes to show how the participants defined themselves as Black women leaders while in the face of oppression. By using these themes from Black feminist thought, this study will demonstrate the resilience of Black women as they

experience intersecting oppressions, while striving to overcome another dynamic, a consent decree, aimed to achieve racial equity for their students and school community.

Definitions: Black, women, leader, identity. For both ‘Black’ and ‘Women’, I drew from the Black feminist thought framework. Within this study I use ‘Black’ as an indicator of race and ‘Women’ as an indicator of gender. Black feminist thought places the experience of Black women at the center of discussion. Black women are the center of discussion for the dissertation.

The responsibility of education leadership within K-12 public schools typically falls under school administrators and principals. Given the context of this study, I look at the term ‘Leader’ in more of a broad sense. For this study, a ‘Leader’ could be a school administrator, principal, teacher-leader, or one who leads within the surrounding community. It was important to broaden the definition of the position of educational leader within this study to combat prescribed notions to capture the essence of the counternarratives of the participants as leaders.

Initially, I approached the study with ‘Black’ ‘Women’ as a focus for ‘Identity’. My assumption was to examine an intrapersonal perspective of identity. Likewise, my approach with adding ‘Leader’ was in efforts to examine an interpersonal perspective of identity as it relates to the Black women participants. Based on my use of Intersectionality as a framework, I approached the Black women participants in efforts to determine how they defined themselves as leaders. Intersectionality brings to light multi-dimensions of intersections that often occur simultaneously within various systems. As a researcher I took into consideration how other aspects of identity intersect with race and gender to allow for a more in-depth analysis of educational issues. This was essential to this study examining the participants as Black women leaders who served during a consent decree.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Review of Purpose and Questions

I will begin this section by reviewing the research purpose and questions. Next, I provide explanation of the methodology, research design, participants, procedures, data collection analysis, site selection, data sources and instruments. Lastly, I speak to validity, limitations, and reflection on my role as a researcher of this study.

The purpose of this study is to give voice to the experiences of Black women in K-12 leadership who served during a consent decree. I hope to discover the effect, if any, that the consent decree had on Black women in establishing their identity as leaders. In addition, I am interested in how Black women leaders impact school improvement for all students, especially Black students, during a consent decree focused on redressing district-wide racial inequities. In order to investigate these notions, I ask the three questions:

- 1) How does identity impact leadership for Black women?
- 2) How does identity impact school improvement for Black women in K-12 leadership positions?
- 3) How can Black women establish their identity as leaders?

Critical Race Theory

I argue that a consent decree focused on race and equity for Black students in addition to improving hiring practices and placement of Black staff can assist Black women in K-12 leadership as they challenge the dominant mindset surrounding issues of racial equity and establish their identity as leaders. In efforts to support my argument, I use Critical Race Theory (CRT). Rema E. Reynolds (2014) references Delpit (1985) to argue that one of the mistakes of the field of education is the means by which the dialogue of people of color has been silenced

(p.138). This methodology gives way to participants to share their stories and personal experiences as Black women in K-12 leadership during a consent decree. Critical Race Theory provides a view for explaining how race is embedded in all aspects of society and how it carries out in educational institutions. CRT looks closely at the daily interactions of persons and seeks to find the racial components in them (Byrd, 2007), as well as bring out the position of race and racism in education as a means to eliminate in differing structures "subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and national origin" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 25).

Parker and Lynn (2002) state:

CRT has three main goals: (a) to present storytelling and narratives as valid approaches through which to examine race and racism in the law and in society; (b) to argue for the eradication of racial subjugation while simultaneously recognizing that race is a social construct; and (c) to draw important relationships between race and other axes of domination. (p. 10)

In addition, CRT has five tenets: 1--it recognizes that racism is normal and is ingrained in U.S. society; 2-- challenges the dominant ideology; rejects neutrality, colorblindness, and objectivity; 3-- counter-storytelling recognizes the experiential knowledge of persons of color acknowledging that it is appropriate, legitimate, and essential to analyzing and understanding racial inequity; 4-- commits to social justice in efforts to rid of racial subordination of all minoritized groups; 5-- places both historical and contemporary contexts challenging ahistoricism (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Delgado, 1989).

CRT used as a methodological framework is a subjective tool. It invalidates claims of objectivity as the construct is subjective, challenges all notions of objectivity, and chooses

instead to be emancipatory in its premise by accepting the experiences and perceptions of the knowers—the participants themselves (Reynolds, 2014, p. 143). I focus on the tenet of counter-storytelling as the methodology for this dissertation study. Counter-storytelling is necessary for this study, because we need to hear the story, or version of the story, told by minoritized groups, not the majoritarian tale of dominant (White) ideologies. For Delgado (1989) there is a narrative or story being told but from whose perspective? Delgado (1989) emphasizes the notion of two important groups in the discussion surrounding storytelling: 1. There are “outgroups: groups whose marginality defines the boundaries of the mainstream, whose voice and perspective – whose consciousness – has been suppressed, devalued, and abnormalized” (Delgado, 1989). For this group, stories represent unity through shared experiences, understandings and meanings (Delgado, 1989). 2. The dominant group “creates its own stories, as well. The stories or narratives told by the ingroup remind it of its identity in relation to outgroups, and provide it with a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural” (Delgado, 1989). It is obvious that there are two perspectives based on Delgado’s explanation of the two groups. This then begs the question of whose story is right? In response to this notion Delgado further examines the storytelling by the two groups. For the “outgroup” (Delgado, 1989) he finds, “for many minority persons, the principal instrument of their subordination...is the prevailing *mindset* by means of which members of the dominant group justify the world as it is, that is, with whites on top and browns and blacks at the bottom” (Delgado, 1989).

Like Bell (1988), Delgado (1989) explicitly mentions the presence of a *mindset* that is prescribed to the dominant group. Ultimately, it is the *mindset* that needs to be challenged. Racism is traditional, generational, learned, and passed down. Unless the *mindset* of those in power creating and changing laws is not transformed, the “ideology – the received wisdom –

makes current social arrangements seem fair and natural” (Delgado, 1989). Knowing this, one must ask—how then can the *mindset* be changed or challenged? To this question Delgado (1989) says that the “cure is storytelling (or as I shall sometimes call it, counter-storytelling).”

Stories are important to all persons in that they explain our past, present, and future state of being. Delgado (1989) recognizes the power and importance of storytelling particularly in relation to oppression: “Stories, parables, chronicles, and narratives are powerful means for destroying mindset – the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against a background of which legal and political discourse takes place.” Most often persons are open to stories because they seem harmless and are easier to accept. “Counter-stories...can open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live” (Delgado, 1989). For a story, “there is no single true, or all-encompassing description...we participate in creating what we see in the very act of describing it” (Delgado, 1989).

Furthermore Delgado (1989) states, “much of social reality is constructed. We decide what is, and, almost simultaneously, what ought to be.” Finally, Delgado (1989) concludes that, “counterstorytelling must attack a general mindset”—not a person. One must get the listener to “suspend judgment” causing one to “alienate herself or himself...to enter into the mental set of the teller, whose view is different” (Delgado, 1989). Ultimately this causes one to reach a reflective position where one begins to question the construction of their reality (Delgado, 1989). Delgado (1989) acknowledges that one must realize that “reality is not fixed”. Our own perspective of what is truth or real is contextual.

CRT is noted for uncovering racial disparity in education. My study will focus on the voices of Black women in leadership during a consent decree using counter-storytelling. Shared

experiences allow for the construction of counterstories for analysis (Reynolds, 2014, p. 139). I use CRT to give a counter-story unveiling the unique experiences of Black women in leadership during a consent decree as they combat issues of racial equity. Counter-stories are based on real lived experiences and therefore challenge the discourse and beliefs of dominant viewpoints (Byrd, 2007, p. 10). Counter-stories that will be shared by my marginalized participants will shed light on the marginalized experiences of Black women in K-12 leadership during a consent decree and add to the body of research.

Research Design

For this study I used qualitative methods (Krathwohl, 2009) to capture the unheard experiences of Black women leaders in a K-12 public school district in Illinois during a consent decree. I did so by conducting interviews to investigate the lived experiences of my participants. This afforded me the opportunity to hear issues of identity and oppressions of race, class, gender and others (Collins, 2000) my participants have lived and experienced.

Participant and site selection. Provided the perimeters of this study being focused on Black women leaders in K-12 public schools during a consent decree, I purposely chose participants who are Black women leaders who previously served in a K-12 public school or community during a consent decree in the state of Illinois. In doing so, I used purposive sampling that included individuals and documents of a mid-size district that had gone through a consent decree to help extend my understanding (Krathwohl, 2009, p. 277). I used case law to identify locations of consent decrees in K-12 public schools for the state of Illinois. After identifying two districts, I then purposely searched for Black women who served during the consent decree in these two districts. Upon speaking with a participant who had agreed to participate in this study, I inquired about other possible participants who they may recommend. I

utilized a purposive snowball technique (Creswell, 2005). Approximately 10 Black women leaders were selected to participate in this study. According to Boyd (2001), two to 10 research participants is enough to reach saturation.

Data Sources and Instruments

I employed two sources for collecting data in this study: interviewing and district and school level documents. The time of the events in the study was historical. These two sources were sufficient enough to capture the counter-narrative of my participants. Since “triangulation is used to determine the consistency of evidence gathered from different sources of data...” (Krathwohl, 2009, p. 141), I utilized this technique to bring appropriate historical context to this study. As I combined evidence from interviews and document reviews, I increased the validity and credibility of my findings.

Interviews. I contacted participants initially via email, mail, face-to-face, telephone, or Skype. Email was preferred as participants were across the state of Illinois and located elsewhere. I used the initial contact consent script. If participants were willing to be a part of the study, they received a consent form in the mail. By conducting interviews, I discovered from my participants what they consider to be particularly important and unique about their role as Black women leaders during a consent decree (Krathwohl, 2009, p. 296). I asked open-ended questions that explored the experiences of participants before, during, and after the consent decree.

Document reviews. Since this study uncovered how a consent decree processes, the review of documents was to analyze the policies and procedures around the consent decree. Within that review of documents, a main focus was the hiring procedures for and placement of Black staff. In addition, achievement data was used to help determine the impact of participants on school and community improvement.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was grounded in the theoretical framework of Black feminist thought. Data analysis as defined by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) as “the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulate to enable you to come up with findings” (p. 159). As I examined and reexamined the data (documents and verbatim transcription), I looked for ways to code the data. “[Coding categories] of recurring facts, themes, comments, and the like selected for attention because they are likely to help explain a situation of interest” (Kathwohl, 2009, p. 314). Once established initially, new material was coded into these categories. Since I broadened my study to include community leaders, I eventually organized the data according to reoccurring themes, patterns, etc. All data was transcribed into Microsoft Word documents. Once individual interviews were coded, I looked across interviews to find themes, patterns, etc. Data was then checked for themes contextualized for Black women leadership. I held follow-up interviews where participants had the opportunity for member checking. In order for participant comfort and utmost accuracy of their perspectives, “[this] researcher [presented] the report and findings to those studied for their review and comment” (Kathwohl, 2009, p. 346). Documents were reviewed for themes, and those themes were checked across all.

Ethics

Kathwohl (2009) states that, “Ethical problems are inevitable in some qualitative research, and many ethical decisions must be made on the spot without the support of committee discussion or ethicists” (p. 287). I am responsible for maintaining confidentiality. I have received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for completion of training in the area concerning ethics (see Appendix A). This study did not disseminate any identifiable

information about the subjects beyond their place of employment during a consent decree. All participants have a pseudonym. The naming key for the participants is kept in a secure cabinet that only I have a key to and will be destroyed within 1 week of submitting the dissertation.

"Researchers and their data are not immune from subpoena. Therefore, data that might harmfully identify individuals should probably either not be collected or be quickly destroyed" (Krathwohl, 2009, p. 287). All consent forms and hard copies of documents will be stored in a locked cabinet that only I have access to. All audio files will be kept on a password protected computer and will be deleted or destroyed based on the timelines aforementioned. In any publication of this data, pseudonyms will be used. For privacy, interviews will be conducted via face-to-face, telephone, or Skype in private rooms/offices, choice of the participant, where others will not be able to overhear.

Reflexivity

As a researcher, I recognize that this study is dear to my lived experiences. I was a student in a school district that went through a consent decree. I remember living in the Manners on the North End of town and catching the school bus to take me across town to Westview Elementary School. By the time we moved to Bradley Park, I rode the bus across town to Jefferson Middle School. About halfway through first quarter my name came up on the list for Franklin Magnet Middle School. I then began to walk the tracks to school as it was closer to Bradley Park. After my mother passed in 1997, I moved with my aunt and uncle who lived on near the corner of John and Mattis. I would walk to Westview to catch the bus to Franklin. Eventually, we moved to Frank Drive. So, when I graduated from Franklin I attended Centennial (I only had to walk about four blocks to school).

My personal student data was included among those used for the original complaint. In high school, I recognized racial inequities in various ways. The most memorable difference was in my AP History class. I remember not being called on by my teacher unless it involved conversations around minorities. I remember feeling like I was not valued in that space amongst my peers. It was not until I returned to the same district to teach that I realized exactly what had taken place throughout my educational experience.

I can remember being asked questions around my philosophy of education during my teacher interview. Later in the same interview it was explained to me that we were in a consent decree and we were making strides but there was a focus in the school and district towards academic achievement, especially for Black students.

I look back now and wonder if I would have been hired without the consent decree? I was the only Black history teacher at the middle level for six years. I felt like I had to fight for respect amongst my colleagues having to prove I knew my curricula and was innovative and creative in my practices. My 7th year of teaching, a Black male was hired at another middle school to teach the same subject as I did. I was so excited to see another Black colleague in our district content meetings. However, that moment was short lived as I recall him whispering that he was, “leaving and going back to the city because, this is not the place for a Black man.” We never spoke again so I am not sure why he made the statement. I can say that I will never forget it.

Currently, I am an administrator in Champaign. My personal goal is to maintain structures that will ensure that all students receive the best possible education that we have to offer. As a Black woman administrator, researching Black women administrators, I find it rewarding to have studied my participants. What I find most interesting is that when I began researching this topic I was not an administrator, nor did I have plans to become one. However, I

found myself in my research. I now recognize that I am a keeper of equity. Being a Black woman in leadership I am responsible for listening to the voices and perspectives of my participants and presenting them accordingly.

CHAPTER 4: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Introduction

This context chapter illustrates the culture and climate of the small urban community that the participants of this study are situated in and its impact on the mindsets of persons within this community. Thus, this chapter speaks to the culture and climate of this small urban community from a counter-narrative perspective. This allows for minoritized groups to be heard rather than majoritarian viewpoints.

Too often, emphasis is placed on de jure with less on de facto processes in educational law and policy. In order to experience the power of de jure, one must place emphasis on, apply resources to, time, and efforts towards de facto legal and policy efforts. It is not enough to have something written into law. If it is not enforced, it may as well not exist. Mindsets and attitudes have their own process of time. This must be acknowledged so that the work required to enforce, support, and uphold de jure decisions can be sustained. Like Bell (1988), Delgado (1989) explicitly mentions the presence of a mindset that needs to be challenged. Racism is traditional and generational meaning that is learned and passed down. Unless the mindset of those in power creating and changing laws (policy) is transformed, the “ideology—the received tale of dominant wisdom—makes current social arrangements seem fair and natural” (Delgado, 1989, p. 2413).

More than five decades have come about since the 1954 *Brown v. the Board of Education* Supreme Court decision that banned racial segregation in the nation’s public schools. Yet, many public schools face significant racial inequity, mounting racial tension, and patterns of white flight. The latter exists because of the depth of ignored de facto practices over time. This chapter examines historical trends of the racial climate of this small urban community and its impact on the educational institutions. This small urban community included a host of African Americans

who sought accountability from a local school district. This was not a small task given the school district resided in a divided community with a history of heightened racial tension. The marginalized practices were so deeply embedded within this small urban community that efforts to address them required a Federal consent decree.

Champaign, Illinois is a small urban community connected to a neighboring city, Urbana. Champaign and Urbana are more like “twin cities”. Centrally located in the state, 135 miles south of Chicago, it is known as being the home of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Champaign has experienced racial tension for some time. The racial tension even has geographical implications. In the North End of Champaign, there are mostly Black residents. On the South End, residents are predominately white.

Racial Climate

1940s -1960s. Although Illinois law prohibited school segregation¹, some schools in Champaign-Urbana, and other communities had all-Black elementary schools in the years close to the 1954 *Brown v. The Board of Education* Supreme Court’s ruling of desegregation in the nation’s public schools. In northern Champaign, the all Black schools were Willard School and Lawhead (later Booker T. Washington) School.

Lawhead was a four-room school located at 412 E. Grove Street, C. This school was said to have been integrated in earlier years when northern Champaign was comprised of German and Italian immigrants (Wurth, 2011). However, by the late 1940s, integration resided just in five of the 17 elementary schools in Champaign-Urbana (Wurth, 2011). The populations of both

¹ Illinois Barred School Segregation [Statute] 1874: Boards of Education prohibited from excluding a child on account of color from the public schools. Penalty: Those who excluded children based on race would be fined between \$5 and \$100. Those who threatened a child from attending a public school were subject to a fine up to \$25. 1896: Prohibited school officers from excluding children from public schools on the basis of color. Penalty: \$5 to \$100. 1957: No exclusion of segregation in districts of fewer than 1,000 persons. Penalty: \$5 to \$100.

Lawhead and Willard were one hundred percent Black. The white children living within the attendance boundaries of those schools were instead sent to the all-white Columbia School located nearby (Wurth, 2011). From 1946-1948, even the neighboring University of Illinois conferenced as to the responsibility of the University for housing racial minorities (Board of Trustee Reports, 1946).

In 1948, the racial conditions of Champaign-Urbana were assessed by, The Champaign County League of Women Voters. Recognizing the racial divide in education, their report included a look into the impacts of race in schools. The result of the report showed the schools were found deficient. In particular, Willard School was noted for having poor accommodations (Wurth, 2011).

Willard had the largest class sizes in the district without the space in the classrooms to house students. The hallways served as the recreational areas on days of inclement weather. The school had no restrooms for teachers and no office for the principal. To even reach the school, several students crossed railroad tracks where there was no signal or no school official to oversee crossing (Wurth, 2011).

In 1952, the larger Booker T. Washington Elementary was built down the street, to replace Lawhead. Still, Washington was a Black school with a Black principal and teachers. In 1961, the League of Women Voters found that Champaign had the worst housing segregation for the state of Illinois. Division in the community was reflective in the schools. However, due to declining enrollment Willard School closed in 1963 (Wurth, 2011).

In Urbana, none of its elementary schools were integrated except for Hays School, which later became King School². It was divided between white and Black (Wurth, 2011). This

² The name of the school changed in the 1970s to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

changed when the “Ellis Drive Six”³ began to attend school board meetings and speak out at PTA meetings about disparities in the achievement of African American students at predominantly Black schools, compared to their white counterparts who attended predominantly white schools (University of Illinois, Honorary James Scholars). Through the efforts of Carlos and Willeta Donaldson, Paul and Shirley Hursey, Jo Ann Jackson, and Evelyn Underwood, Urbana would be the first school district in the state of Illinois to institute a desegregation program in 1966 (Wurth, 2011).

By 1968, Urbana’s elementary schools had Black and white students attending school together (Wurth, 2011). Champaign’s effort to desegregate schools would turn Booker T. Washington into a magnet school for the arts with hopes to persuade white families to send their children to schools in the predominately Black community of northern Champaign (Wurth, 2011).

1968 marked the year Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. This assassination urged students and community residents of Champaign-Urbana to impress upon the University of Illinois to enroll students from underrepresented populations on campus. Of the University’s 30,400 students in 1967, only 372 were Black (approximately 1.22%). As a result, the Special Educational Opportunities Program (Project 500) was created offering equal educational opportunities for all Illinois residents and in 1968, an additional 565 African American and Latino students were admitted to the University of Illinois (University of Illinois, n.d.). The program was poorly implemented. Miscommunication between university bureaucracy and students resulted in a protest on September 10, 1968 at the Illini Union. 240 Black students

³ Six African American neighbors who lived within four houses of each on Ellis Drive

were arrested (University of Illinois, n.d.). A Black woman leader I interviewed shares her story about the protest:

As far as my experiences with it, we were brought to campus a week before everyone else, and we stayed at [the Illinois Street Residence Halls] ISR. And people thought that's where they were going to stay. And then at the end of the week, we'd found out where we would be. And some of the students didn't have dorms. They didn't have any assignments. So even though the university had this grandiose plan, they hadn't thought it out. And so we went in support of the students who didn't have rooms or were put in places that weren't really dorm rooms, and so there were speeches. It became intense, very emotional. They asked administrators from the university to come and meet with the students. Well, after 12 o'clock we couldn't get into the buildings. So we couldn't leave the Union. Well, about 2 o'clock, I believe, they told us that we could go to our dorms. The police were there. They wanted to escort us. They escorted us right into paddy wagons. And I spent the night in jail. (Jennifer)

Desegregation was on every side in this local community. As the local K-12 schools were addressing it, so were the institutions of higher learning. Project 500 students who were arrested received representation from the National Defense League Lawyers with assistance of the NAACP. The charges were dropped and the accounts of this on their records expunged. This impacted the local community. If Black students were not able to stay in campus housing, they likely stayed in the homes of local Black families as they had done in the past (Wurth, 2017). Desegregation was an issue at every educational level in this community. As the local K-12 schools were addressing desegregation, so was the local institution of higher learning.

1970s. Racial tension was prominent in the 1970's for the country, Illinois, the communities of Champaign-Urbana and its educational institutions. The decade was primarily a continuation of the 60's in that various marginalized groups sought after equality. Statewide efforts to desegregate coupled with resistance increased racial tension. A nearby small urban community, Decatur, had 330 African American students of high school enrollment boycott their classes (Decatur, 1968).

Michael Bakalis, Illinois' then State Superintendent of Education, in his speech encouraging desegregation plans charged that Illinois schools were more segregated than schools in Mississippi (Smith, 1971). In 1971, on the lawn of Champaign Centennial High School, white students waited with weapons for buses of Black students to arrive. In the aftermath of the violence, the school closed. Two students were injured. One had a fractured skull (Kroemer, 1971). The faculty and staff at the high school blamed "the whole community" for the incident (Kroemer, 1971).

1980s. In response to a 1977 bill that granted immigrants who were in the U.S. prior to 1977 amnesty, the Klu Klux Klan marched on Washington, D.C. in November 1982. The Black Chief of Police, Maurice T. Turner Jr., urged the residents comprised of over 70 percent Black population to stay clear of the march (Milloy & Bowman, 1982). By the end of the march,

eleven police officers were injured, none seriously, in the melee, and 38 demonstrators were arrested. Before order was restored, two cars had been overturned, at least two stores had been looted and windows in several buildings, including the historic home of James Madison, had been smashed. (Gaily, 1982)

National events reflected local responses. The nation had to navigate desegregation and historical implications for minorities from the majoritarian mindset. Back in Illinois, in schools

approximately two hours north of Champaign, “25,500 minority students, largely black and Hispanic, entered high school in Chicago. Four years later only 9,500 graduated, and of those only 2,000 could read at grade level. The situation in other cities is comparable (Steel, 1992).” Only 7.8 percent of the Black and Hispanic students, who enrolled in 1980, were able to read at grade level upon graduation from high school. Graduation from high school should mean that one is ready and capable of competing or performing at collegiate level. It is obvious, that this was not the case.

Chicago Public Schools too were grappling with the discussion of desegregation. “The white population in Chicago Public Schools has fallen by 60 percent since 1970 as many white families flee the city to the suburbs or enroll their children in private schools. The Chicago Board of Education and the Justice Department sign a school desegregation consent decree (Chicagoreporter.com).” Rather than working through desegregation, addressing mindsets and historical events that had bearing on recent educational institutions, the response was “charter schools”—resegregation. Racial tension was high because there were statewide efforts to desegregate schools. Efforts to do so met resistance from white students and families.

1990s. There was so much deeply rooted racial tension within this small urban community that it would take a great response to address the great issues within. There needed to be a response to mindsets of persons who experienced racial tension. The ideological concepts surrounding race also needed to be addressed in relation to how it amplifies in the institutions that are supposed to serve the community.

In 1996, the parents of eight black elementary students filed a complaint with the United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights [OCR]. Led by community advocate, John Lee Johnson, the complaint held that Champaign Unit 4 schools’ practices were inequitable

and exclusionary to African American students. The initial complaint spoke specifically of issues of inequity African American students experienced such as and one-sided busing, overrepresentation in special education, and other educational outcomes. The parents later amended their complaint to include other system-wide discrimination in areas such as: student school assignment, discipline, tracking, and staff hiring. Pertaining to staff hiring, one Black female leader I interviewed shared how she acquired her position as a principal:

I had about 17 years as a classroom teacher. They were looking for someone with experience in the community, and I had been in the community for about 20 years. And they were also looking for someone who was able to communicate with all types of people, parents, community, school, teachers. I had the skill set at the time and it helped with the selection...I had no experience prior to that as a principal. But...the superintendent at the time took a chance. But he also took that chance at the prompting of one John Lee Johnson, who was a community advocate. I don't think I would have gotten an opportunity to be a principal in a Champaign elementary school without John Lee Johnson, who was one of the community leaders who actually filed the complaint against the District...it was his advocacy for me that really helped them select me as a principal. I don't think if I had interviewed and just put a resume in for Unit 4 School principal I ever would have been a principal in this District. But John Lee because it was so difficult for black administrators, men or women, to become principals, he advocated for me. (Shelley)

Despite having almost two decades of experience as an educator, and community member, Shelly believed that without having the advocacy of her community she would not have acquired a leadership position. Her work experience should have been enough to provide backing for her.

This particular Black community member's support with the backing of a consent decree coupled with her experience paved the way.

A Close Examination

On September 16, 1997, the District responded to complaints of the Plaintiffs by agreeing to a diversity choice-based enrollment Controlled Choice Plan. This Cambridge, Massachusetts' approach would be used to replace the former student assignment methods from 1968-1997 and those proposed in the Redistricting Plan (Potter, 2016). The Controlled Choice Plan allows families to rank their choice of schools in conjunction with an algorithm that ensures racial balance within each school (Potter, 2016). Dr. Peterkin and Michael Alves were assigned to develop the Controlled Choice Plan "containing both elements of choice and administrative procedures to insure diversity, address educational equity, and promote school reform...based on extensive community consultation and input (Sa'Da v. Board, 2002). The upcoming sections examine the findings of the Equity Audit and Climate Survey that illustrated various inequities for African American students in relation to their counterparts.

Peterkin Equity Audit

As a result of the ORC's investigation, and the filed complaint to the ORC that having similar findings, and a change in leadership for the District's superintendent, the Board of Education of Champaign School District commissioned Dr. Robert Peterkin, Director of the Urban Superintendents program at Harvard University, in August 1997 to conduct a comprehensive education equity audit in the Champaign Unit 4 School District. Mr. James Lucey, who had 15 years of teaching and administrative experience, worked alongside Dr. Peterkin to conduct the audit. At the time of Peterkin's equity audit, the district's student distribution by race and ethnicity was 62% white, 32% African American, and 6% Asian, Latino

or Native American (Peterkin, 1998). Data collected for the educational equity audit covered the school years 1992-1993 through 1996-1997. For each school year, data was collected for each school by race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. Documents and data from several areas were also used in the analysis (Peterkin, 1998).

In aggregate, the results of the educational equity audit showed Champaign Unit 4 Schools in a positive aspect. Test scores were above the national average, daily attendance was high, buildings were clean and well kept, and administration and staff appeared knowledgeable in their particular areas of responsibility. However, disaggregated and scrutinized for educational outcomes by race, results of the educational equity audit demonstrated inequities across several areas investigated between African American students and other racial student/ethnic populations in the district (Peterkin, 1998).

Overall, the educational equity audit revealed that African American students were drastically underrepresented in Gifted and Talented classes, mostly placed in Performing Arts and not Gifted and Talented (only 3% at the elementary level and largely in the Performing Arts than core instructional areas at the secondary level), over identified in Special Education to the point of disproportion (African American students are 31% of the total population for the District but are 47% of the total SpEd population), despite district efforts in annual review of the Student Code of Conduct, as it relates to suspensions, African American students were again disproportionately overrepresented (Peterkin, 1998). In addition, African American students lagged behind their white counterparts in attendance, standardized achievement test scores, and lead the District in alternative education placements and dropout rates (Peterkin, 1998). Suspensions by race and ethnicity in the 1997 school year showed that African American

students comprised 32% of the total student population while they counted for 63% of suspensions (Peterkin, 1998).

District and ORC Enter Consent Decree

The findings of the equity audit largely confirmed the concerns of the plaintiffs. As a result, in 1998, the District and the ORC agreed to enter into a consent decree that covered specific actions the school district would take in efforts to foster and ensure equal access to a quality educational experience for African American students including: a monitoring team, quarterly meetings and reports, public discussions surrounding matters of the Consent Decree, racial fairness guidelines, student discipline reform to include intervention practices, consistent review of disparities for Gifted and Talented and Special Education with hopes of ridding of disparities through use of data rather than parent/teacher recommendations, improvement of staff racial equity, diversity training and awareness for staff/teachers, and identification of additional strategies to increase parental and community involvement within District educational programs (United States Dept. of Ed., 1998).

Another aspect that was identified was that of school climate. It was determined that, “a school climate which promotes learning and success, and encourages students to support each other is essential” (United States Dept. of Ed., 1998). With hopes of addressing issues of access to quality education and the community’s perceptions of the school district’s actions in educating students, in the Agreement there was a call for a district-wide school climate study to determine the extent to which each school in the District offers a learning environment that supports all students and provides maximum opportunities for success. The climate study will include a survey of District parents designed to identify problems with District programs, as perceived by parents, and to understand reasons why parents are not able to become involved with District

activities. The climate study will be conducted with the assistance of recognized experts in the field and will include recommendations for implementing actions deemed necessary to correct any identified deficiencies. (United States Dept. of Ed., 1998)

Aber Climate Study

In the summer of 1999, Unit 4 School District made a public solicitation for proposals to design and conduct the survey for the climate study. The Planning and Implementation Committee (PIC) comprised of members of the Board of Education, parents, teachers, community members, and District administrators oversaw the process. The PIC committee selected the proposal submitted by Dr. Mark Aber, Professor of Clinical Community Psychology of the University of Illinois, to meet the demands of the Agreement (Aber, 2000).

The following summer, Dr. Aber and his research team, designed a climate survey to assess the perceptions of race relations in the Unit 4 School District and community. The survey was distributed granting participants a voluntary option. The survey also included written instructions providing the purpose for the survey along with a statement that participants did not have to answer questions that caused discomfort. The data was reported protecting respondents from identification. The questions within the survey were geared towards how respondents felt about the school climate dimensions mentioned in the Climate Study (Aber, 2000).

The survey respondents of students included 1,916 3rd-5th graders at the elementary level, 1,516 from the middle schools, and 2,195 from the high schools. In addition, there were 2,012 completed parent surveys and 814 completed staff surveys (Aber, 2000). Non-responses were found disproportionately from students and staff who felt positive about the general climate of the schools. They also held skeptical or negative views of the community equity complaint and the School District's Agreement (Aber, 2000). Based on the response section Climate Study, this

portion of the survey concluded that of the non-responses from parents, indicators are that there were four primary reasons:

- They saw the survey as biased and/or a waste of time, these people see little in the way of race problems - or see race problems as being isolated to rare individuals.
- They were highly skeptical that anything positive would come from the survey and, therefore, saw no purpose in completing it (this appeared to be a primary reason among African Americans and other parents of color).
- They did not see it as enough of a priority to take the time to complete it.
- For other reasons, they could not find the time to complete it.

The Climate Study was required to be administered by the consent decree. Given the collective number of students, staff, and parents who chose to participate, the survey and its results were not something to be overlooked or not taken seriously.

Overall, the Climate Study showed that the general perception of the schools' climate was positive. It is important to note that although a purpose for the study surrounded the perceptions of persons around the school climate and race, the School Climate Survey was not only a racial climate survey. It is also important to note that in each sample there are more whites than African Americans. When race is not considered, responses tend to be more reflective of whites. However, there are vast differences across race on most perceptions. When responses were disaggregated by race, it showed that African American perceptions differed than that of their white counterparts dramatically in more negative terms (Aber, 2000).

This finding is relevant to having the discussion of race as a factor. To remove race or overlook it, is to live in a colorblind society. Colorblindness devalues one's identity, historical reference, and negates their lived experiences. Some comments from the study speak to the perceptions of persons surrounding the lack of the relevance of race.

- "Why must the skin color of a child be made such an issue? Can't each child receive the help they need and be treated the same regardless of color?"
- "My child does not see people of color in a different way. He was raised that everyone is equal."

Like Perterkins' Educational Equity Audit, Aber found that using race as a factor to disaggregate data, inequities became prevalent. The following points from the study perpetuate those findings through differences in perceptions:

- Twenty-five percent of African American staff compared to only 2% of Whites disagreed that students of all kinds are treated fairly in schools, regardless of race, social class, or how well they achieve in school.
- Thirty-four percent of African Americans compared to only 4% of Whites disagreed that discipline is administered fairly in the schools.
- Fifty-Three percent of African American staff and 49% of African American parents believe that their schools need to change to better address racial inequities. Only 6% of White staff and 7% of parents felt the same.
- On Average, African American staff (61%) and parents (48%) felt it was very important that Champaign schools both adopt curricula that embrace African American perspectives and achieve proportional representation of African Americans in various school roles (e.g. teacher, administrator) and programs (e.g. upper level or special education courses). Very few White staff (9%) or White parents (5%) perceived these qualities of desegregated schools as very important. (Aber, 2000)

The evidence of disaggregation suggest that race is relevant, persons of color have differing experiences than the majority that are real, and it is a factor that should be considered. Of all the information shared in the report, the most alarming was that it was evident there was considerable resistance to change. One teacher shares their perception about the findings of the Climate Study in the quote from the climate study:

This is a Joke! And a waste of paper and my time. Children do poorly in school because of many issues. Their parents aren't well educated and don't value education. The children are poor and live in chaotic homes. They are neglected at best and often terribly abused—by their parents—NOT THEIR TEACHERS. We are often the only good thing they have going for them. Until people start parenting their children, nothing will get any better. WHY DOESN'T THIS SCHOOL DISTRICT HAVE THE GUTS TO SAY THIS?

There were so many strong feelings to consider and address.

In April 2002, the Champaign Unit 4 School Board approved the appointment of the first African American Superintendent, Arthur Culver. Federal court monitoring was underway. The Board needed to have someone who would be willing to take on such a task. Our primary qualification was someone with a proven record in closing the achievement gap by improving achievement for all students, and someone who has a proven ability in working various segments of the community, everything we checked showed he [Arthur Culver] had those talents, according to the School Board president Scott Anderson. (Cook, 2002).

Eight months following the appointment of Superintendent Culver, Dr. Peterkin, author of the Educational Equity Audit for Champaign Unit 4 Schools and court appointed monitor of consent decree progress, returned to the court before Judge Joe Billy McDade. Dr. Peterkin presented a testimony that was saddening. African American students still faced inequities, and almost no progress was made from problems that were pointed out the previous year:

So many members of the community showed up to hear the report and testimony, courthouse employees temporarily closed the proceedings because the courtroom, holding about 100 people, was packed... "We're disheartened and frustrated," said [Carol] Ashley, Chicago attorney [for the plaintiff class African American parents]. "A year ago, we believed the consent decree would end in the best results for African-American students. The district says the right things ... but it's not complying with the decree. Our concerns go unanswered. I don't know what else I can do. There's no theory of action in this district." She said district documents and arguments about progress are misleading and its actions don't show commitment to making changes. "This process is beyond mediation, and this board is off the track," Ashley said. "Hiring a new superintendent isn't enough. The board wants to hide behind the superintendent rather than taking

responsibility. I heard (school board member) Jeff Wampler say yesterday, 'We hired Arthur Culver, and he is our theory of action.' I was shocked. He's not a theory of action."
(Cook, 2002)

Hiring of a Black Superintendent

Superintendent Culver inherited a district ripe with problems. People have this unrealistic expectation that he as a Black man will solve all of the problems within the district. He is also expected to solve the problems in a certain amount of time. He is not able to do this alone, he had to hire a team. Superintendent Culver hired persons who were qualified to carry out multiple tasks. He brought along several members for his team and hired several members for his team. This caused for mixed reviews about his leadership. While superintendents are hired to do a job and he was hired to meet the many mandates of the consent decree, it was personal for many of the participants on various levels. Although many of the participants acquired their leadership positions as a result of the consent decree, it caused many of them to shift in unexpected ways from buildings and areas that they had invested in. Trying to fulfill the requirements of the consent decree, Superintendent Culver had a job to do—let's move this structure.

June 2004

Analyzing systems and identifying necessary changes was the process by which the District was examining improvement areas according to Superintendent Culver. Superintendent Culver spoke to the use of the framework of a “strategic plan” and by using “theory of action” as a guide. Federal court Judge Joe Billy McDade noted these improvements in a report to the court, in the third hearing of the consent decree:

The United States Supreme Court ended the legal basis for segregation in our public schools...in doing so, the court recognized the value of education to our democratic

society and envisioned a future where the right to education would be available to all on equal terms...it has been a long journey to fulfill the dream set forth in Brown, a journey filled with substantial gains and fraught with frustratingly persistent problems. It is also a journey that is far from over. ...The Champaign community public school district has embarked on such a journey. ...The district has made progress...the time has come to look to the future. It now appears that the district has both a strategic plan for complying with the consent decree and the necessary information infrastructure to implement it. It's now time for the district to take its strategic vision and translate it into tangible action at the individual school and classroom levels...(Cook, 2004)

Just having a plan was an improvement. Much more work was required to carry out the plan before the consent decree would end.

Further Examination: External Factors with Internal Impacts

In the midst of the consent decree, racial demographics of the Champaign-Urbana community, were shifting. Chicago, Illinois located 129 miles north of Champaign had devastating shifts of deindustrialization and gentrification that drove out people of color in certain communities by force. Several public housing project developments near the downtown area of Chicago were demolished without adequate provisions for replacement housing. Between 1999 and 2002, approximately 23 Downtown area Chicago high rise housing projects were torn down, 2000 employees, predominately African American, were laid off and thousands of African American families were displaced (Lipman, 2004). "The 10-year, \$1.5 billion plan to demolish more than 16,000 public housing units in Chicago and subsequently relocate tens of thousands of tenants is the largest displacement of public housing in the United States. And the ripples are being felt not only in Illinois, but in neighboring states, as well" (Crane, 2005).

Among the small cities experience the influx of displaced African Americans was the twin cities of Champaign-Urbana;

Several communities in the Midwest, including central Illinois, are feeling the effects: Schools are enrolling children from the Chicago area, many of them with special needs. Police are seeing more crime with a Chicago connection. Public housing is filled, and Section 8 rental vouchers are taken, with long waiting lists for both. Social service agencies are encountering increased demand, with some agencies burning through the better part of their budgets in only about half of the budget year. (Crane, 2005)

Champaign-Urbana received displaced residents like its neighboring communities—Rantoul, Danville, and Bloomington-Normal (Crane, 2005). Like their neighbors, they were feeling the shift. In 2004, According to Urbana Police Chief Adair:

The last couple of years, we've seen an increase in aggression in the young people coming into the community...especially in those young people coming from Chicago. They're more attuned to dealing with police. Many of the people we see didn't live here a year ago...Chicago's recent effort to raze deteriorating public housing units forced many people to move to new communities where public housing is available. It's a challenge for my department...we're seeing altercations in the community, intense conflicts. And what occurs on the streets ultimately occurs in schools and homes. (Cook, 2004)

By 2006, racial and ethnic migration aligned with patterns of re-segregation began to reflect in the demographic changes and reshaping of the District student population. An ethnicity report by the Champaign School District revealed the African American student population was on a steady rise, as the White student population was steady on the decline. White students made up nearly 47 percent of the 9,342 preschool through high school students in Champaign. This was

down from 51 percent in the previous year and 64 percent in the 1992-93 school year (Dey, 2006). Since 1992-1993, Black students represented nearly 38 percent of the student population, up from 30 percent; Hispanics reflected nearly 6 percent of the student population, up from less than 1 percent, while Asians made up 9 percent, up from 4 percent.

School board members and administrators sought after substantial property tax increases to build a new elementary school to meet possible population increases. However, four elementary schools located in predominantly African American residential areas reported hundreds of empty seats (Dey, 2006). This included gifted seats that were once heavily sought after for second through fifth grades. In the words of Greg Novak, a retired librarian and union leader running for a seat on the school board in the upcoming election;

We have managed to lose a whole bunch of kids...[by a] loss of confidence in the school system by large numbers of parents...those who once did send or would have sent their children to public schools in Champaign are opting to enroll them in private schools or moving to area communities like Mahomet, St. Joseph or Tolono. (Dey, 2006)

Champaign public schools began to see a shift in its demographics as white families began to send their children to private schools. While private schools in Champaign blossomed, shifting numbers in the White student population within the Champaign Unit 4 School District were said to either “coincide with the longstanding controversy over implementation of the consent decree or the immigration of lower socioeconomic families to the area (Dey, 2006). Geographically, the consent decree for Champaign Unit 4 Schools was race spatialized. We still call it the ‘North End’ and we know who lives there.

October 2006

In his opening statement at the hearing on October 19, 2006, Judge Joe Billy McDade explained the details of the Consent Decree and what it entailed. In his statement, he shared that the District was charged with, “the denial of the state and federal constitutional and statutory rights of black students to equal educational opportunity and the elimination of racial discrimination in school assignments and educational equity issues (McDade, 2006).” The School District acknowledged that past practices may have caused impacts of inequities on the African American students within the community. Therefore, the purpose of the consent decree was to make “whole” or right past wrongs that may have led to the disadvantage of African American students.

McDade acknowledged that the School Board’s policies may have not been intentional in operation to the detriment of the District’s African American students. Other factors influencing the detriment of African American students may have been poverty, parents’ education and employment, housing patterns, parental attitudes and behavior, family size, and peer-group pressure including others (McDade, 2006).

As a result, McDade presumed the consent decree to be a litigation settlement agreement requiring a compromise of sorts to ensure established goals in the agreement are met. Testimonies shared division of perceptions among members of the community and District staff as community members, attorneys, board members, administration and staff addressed the court. The comments below express perspectives from persons at various levels regarding the consent decree:

African American parent and community activist who played a major role in legalities of the consent decree (Imani Bazzell): “We are operating in a terribly hostile climate. Living in

Champaign under the consent decree in 2006 is like being an ex-slave trying to pull ourselves up during Reconstruction. ... Judge McDade, we need your help, and most importantly your protection. We need time to implement and codify successful strategic equity interventions before the closet Klan gets hold of us and our children and tries to turn the clock back. It is that serious” (Dey, 2006).

Centennial High School Principal (Dr. Judy Wiegand): “The discussion is no longer, can we impact outcomes for our African-American students, but how can we impact outcomes for our African-American students” (Dey, 2006).

Champaign Schools Superintendent (Arthur Culver): “Every single board member, administrator and teacher breathes the consent decree daily” (Dey, 2006).

U.S. District (Judge Joe Billy McDade): “In order for the consent decree to fully bear fruit, (minority) parents must be willing to once again trust their children to the schools. And the schools must not betray that trust, but use it to involve the parents to the maximum extent in educating children” (Dey, 2006).

The failed notion of ‘trust’ would continue to ring on over the next few years.

Conflicting Mindsets: Consent Decree Approved

A second climate study was requested of Dr. Aber in 2009. It had been almost 10 years since the previous study, and the consent decree was set to expire in five months.

As one of the Black woman leaders I interviewed explained,

The two climate reports were supposed to be a comparative study, 2000 versus 2010. We were supposed to be measuring changes. We had too little participation, in the second racial climate study, we weren’t really able to do a compare/contrast because the data would have been skewed because of the lack of participation the second time around. Dr.

Aber decided to just do a second report...the second report actually was worse...some people said that's not fair because not enough people participated, but we did have enough participants to make a bona fide research study because there are parameters on that...we did have enough participation for that. (Cherika)

By the end of July 2009, a settlement agreement was reached by the school district and the plaintiffs. In addition to the lawyers for the district and the plaintiffs, Superintendent Arthur Culver, School Board President Dave Tomlinson, court monitor Robert Peterkin and Rev. Claude Shelby, Pastor of Salem Baptist Church, all participated as part of the settlement conference. Federal district court Judge Joe Billy McDade ruled to suspend the consent decree termination until he could hear and rule on a plaintiff motion to extend.

Fairness Hearing

Before the climate surveys could be distributed to all participants, returned, with data analyzed and presented in a final report, all parties agreed to a settlement in Federal District court and on November 5, 2009 the decade long consent decree expired.

Judge Joe Billy McDade: "The district has come a long way since the consent decree began in 2002, and the skepticism of some in the community is based on long memories of past transgressions rather than the past seven years of transformative progress toward a race-neutral educational environment that is mostly likely to continue..." (News-Gazette, 2009).

Being race-neutral is being colorblind. Judge McDade failed to acknowledge the importance of race and its role in the consent decree. When data was disaggregated by race, inequities manifested. That is essential to the work of those in the consent decree because inequities could then be addressed.

Plaintiff Attorney, Carol Ashley: "There is no reason the community and the school

district cannot develop and maintain a positive partnership as long as they put students' interests first. The district has to be open and receptive to community input, and the community has to continue to provide the input. Whether that's going to be a successful relationship depends on whether each party plays their role. The only way to judge that is to see what happens in the next year or two years” (News-Gazette, 2009).

Plaintiff Attorney Ashley made some valid points; (1) Keep all students interest first, (2) Continue to have open lines of communication with the community as a whole. Having these two components in place at all times will help to insure the upholding of equitable practices by those in positions of power overseeing the outcomes for all students. Results from the 2010 climate project were available to the public in January 2010.

Conclusion

Again, keeping those two factors in the forefront, through the process of time, progress can be made. Having both of those areas of focus; consider the whole child and the whole community, requires one to place emphasis on, apply resources to, time, and efforts towards *de facto*. Work surrounding mindsets and attitudes must be ongoing.

As we consider the whole child and the whole community, we must include those who were inadvertently serving as bridge-builders and servant leaders teetering on the intersectionality axis between the schools and community. Being Black, female, and a leader their efforts were monumental for both the schools and the community during the consent decree.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings from Black women leaders' interviews and document reviews, are described in this chapter. These findings address the following research questions:

1. How does identity impact leadership for Black women?
2. How does identity impact school improvement for Black women in K-12 leadership?
3. How can Black women establish their identity as leaders?

Six themes arose as a result of an analysis of interviews with Black women leaders and key document analysis. As a result of the Black women leaders sharing their experiences during a consent decree, the themes were inclusive. These six themes are: (a) community involvement; (b) calling; (c) education as opportunity; (d) all students; (e) great responsibilities; and (g) resiliency. These themes will support the findings of this dissertation.

The Role of Identity

Black women experience living in two minoritized segments of society being first, Black and second, women. Based on my use of Black feminist thought as a framework, I called the participants 'Black' and 'Women'. None of the participants expressed concerns with the use of either of those terms in relation to themselves. Within the confines of 'Black' 'Women', All of the participants in this study identified first as Black and second as women. They were aware that society views their minoritized positions in a negative light.

Having this understanding of their identity is essential to the discussion of leadership. As a researcher I took into consideration how other aspects of identity intersect with race and gender to allow for a more in-depth analysis of educational issues. This in turn lead to the crux of the counterstory that the participants in this study were focused on racial equity not matter what. I believe that this study brings to light that more educators should model after them given their

focus on racial equity. As leaders, the Black women leaders in this study constantly battled societal mindsets from without and reservations from within surrounding their race, gender, and leadership:

Are you strong enough? Are you brave enough? Are you smart enough? And then are you compassionate enough? Balancing all four of those realms. (Rhonda)

On a consistent basis, these Black women leaders recognized that they had to prove doubters wrong. Black women leaders are strong enough, brave enough, smart enough, and compassionate enough to operate and lead in an educational institution or within the community. Participants in this study shared:

You have to work twice as hard and be twice as qualified as your white counterpart, and you take twice the flack...I was always aware of my role as a Black woman, a Black principal, and a Black leader in the Champaign-Urbana community because there were so few of us [at that time]. (Shelley)

I knew I had to be better as a Black administrator. People who worked with us had a tendency to take our ideas and then use them as their own. (Rosanna)

You work more hard. You always have to be more present. You always have to be more prompt. You always have to be more meticulous. You always have to be a lot more educated. And you always have to be a lot more courageous. (Rhonda)

In addition to being Black, female, and a leader, there was yet another component—the consent decree. A consent decree in education is a negotiated equitable agreement between two parties situated in any level of education where the court determines to accept the agreement. The consent decree in this dissertation study is important for these Black women participants as leaders because it intensifies the understanding of what it means to be a Black woman leader.

Furthermore, the consent decree involved the court in efforts to resolve issues of equity and race primarily for African American students, while also addressing the hiring and placement of African American staff. For these women, because the consent decree focused on redressing racial inequities within the district, they felt the pressure was higher for them as leaders to resolve because they racially identified with the student groups most marginalized within the district. The women discuss some of the pressures they faced during the consent decree as Black women leaders:

I mean, literally, around the clock, as our whole team was, in order to get the work off the ground (Ebony).

[This]...was the consent decree years. [Up at] 2:00 in the morning, mad staff (mad at you all the time), angry parents (not understanding), kids running free, data driving your course, and you're just trying to lead someone to a destination they are not sure where it is, if they want to go, or how long it will take to get there. But you have to be encouraged and a visionary (Rhonda).

Even still, considering all these factors Black, female, and leader, during a consent decree—there is more to consider with capturing the essence of these Black women leaders who served during a consent decree. On a more personal note, these women were mothers, daughters, nieces, aunts, wives, mentors, etc., with connections to the community and the schools.

Intersectionality

Patricia Hill Collins published her oft-cited book in 1990, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, rethinking the paradigm of race, class, and gender experienced by Black women. By doing so, Collins moved from a notion of a singular system of oppression to examining the happenings within and how they intersect and

interconnect (Horsford, 2012). Collins', "matrix of domination" or interlocking systems of oppression" corresponded to a discussion by Kimberle Crenshaw one year earlier "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics."

Crenshaw, a law professor, introduced the term *intersectionality*. According to Crenshaw (1989), in order to understand the struggle of women of color, one must examine the intersection of their racial and gendered identities. In the late 1990s, legal academia known as critical race feminism (CRF), warranted a "multidimensional nature and intersection of socially constructed identities (Horsford 2012, p. 17)," to move beyond race and gender, expanding to class, religion, sexuality, and culture (Horsford, 2012). Gleaning elements from critical legal studies, critical race theory, and feminist jurisprudence, CRF contests the feminist notion that there is an essential female voice, that all women feel one way in a subject (Wing 2003, p. 7)" (as cited by Horsford, 2012).

Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated. (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139)

Intersectionality considers the nature of an individual's experiences with aspects of inequities as simultaneous rather than isolated variables. Intersectionality lends itself to a more in-depth discussion of Black women leaders who served during a consent decree. With a more thorough examination of the participants in this study, I can better understand how they defined themselves and their value.

Bridge-Builder

I examine how the intersection of race and gender, as experienced by the Black female leader, has led to her assisting as a bridge and servant for the school and community, and between the school and community through a variety of complicated contexts over the period of the consent decree.

In her essay, “This bridge called my leadership: an essay on Black women as bridge leaders in education,” Sonya Horsford, uses the term *bridge leadership* to describe how the intersection of race and gender through the lens of the Black woman leader has resulted in her serving as a bridge for others, and between others in oppressive and discriminatory contexts over time (Horsford, 2012).

Horsford (2012) acknowledges that other scholars have used the term in different ways (Tooms and Boske 2010, as cited by Horsford). Horsford (2012) continues her discussion by aligning her thinking around bridge leadership with that of Belinda Robnett’s interpretation:

[bridge leadership] refers to a grass-roots leadership approach grounded in democratic practice, community work, and social change to improve the lives of the disadvantaged and underserved. It requires the ability to traverse and negotiate difference, primarily race, gender, and class divides, by rethinking and restructuring hierarchical, top-down configurations of leadership that fail to meet the needs of people *where* there are and even worse, are unable to connect with *who* they are.

Community involvement. Given the various divides embedded within the small urban community of Champaign, atop a consent decree, the Black women leaders in this study served as bridge leaders for the community and the schools. Rebecca shares her thoughts around her work as a “bridge” between the community and the schools as a result of changes at her school

due to schools of choice. Schools of choice refers to the controlled choice memorandum in the consent decree. The controlled choice memorandum set forth a plan allowing parents, within certain parameters, to choose the school(s) their child(ren) would attend (Sa'Da v. Board, 2002).

The result was that we were gonna have a number of African-American students, attending the school that they did not have before from the north end of town. So, we had about seven buses of students coming into the school from areas in the north end of Champaign. I believe my presence, and my hiring was to help build the bridge; support the Caucasian teachers that were there who needed some professional development and capacity building, and also to work with families who were putting their children on a bus. (Rebecca)

The Black women leaders had to be adaptable; they needed to be able to identify with both the schools and the community. Rebecca continues thinking through her role as a bridge-builder to say:

The parent community, I think felt safer where they can identify with, a face that was familiar, to theirs...I had a lot of family connections...so a lot of the families who were sending their children to my school, African-American families, they knew me, my family, my relatives Champaign-Urbana is a pretty small community. So I believe that I was a bridge-builder.

Also, I can imagine that at times it is difficult to be a bridge-builder because at any given moment, the Black woman leader can lose credibility or trust on either side. The initial assumption is that one would think that with a Black woman leader's credibility or trust in question, it would contradict the findings from this interview, but it further shows the fragility

and complexity that a Black female leader teeters to maintain and navigate being a bridge-builder. Overall, most participants would agree with Rebecca's following statement:

I believe that I have families that believed that I would be fair and make decisions about their children, whether it was dealing with discipline and how that would pan out or, what kind of curriculum or pedagogical practices we would have in the school to help engage their children in the learning process.

Other participants shared examples of bridge-building without naming it:

I worked [assisted] in setting up healthcare for children, dental service for kids in the school. (Rosanna)

I was well connected with...all of the local ministries. We tried to do things with the homeless and tried to have a lot of mentoring programs for the youth. (Shelley)

...Because with the students at this particular school being majority, well, within the program, being majority African American students, and me being a member of the community, I grew up with a lot of these students and their families and their parents. So the school District trusted me, knowing that I can get results because I was so close to the families and I built relationships with them. And that's what they needed, somebody that was in there, that could connect with these families. (Ashley)

The Black women leaders in this study, understood their role as being bridge-builders to and for the schools and the community. The consent decree highlighted cultural differences and inequities that existed in the community and within the schools. Black female leadership was integral in helping to repair broken relationships or mistrust between the community and schools as a bridge and bridge-builder.

In essence, a bridge is a (1) “structure spanning and providing passage over a river, chasm, road, or the like; (2) a connecting, transitional, or intermediate route or phase between two adjacent elements, activities, conditions, or the like. Black women leaders in this study were the structure that provided passage so that a connection between the schools and community would take place. More specifically, the Black women leaders in this study were like the Arch Bridge.

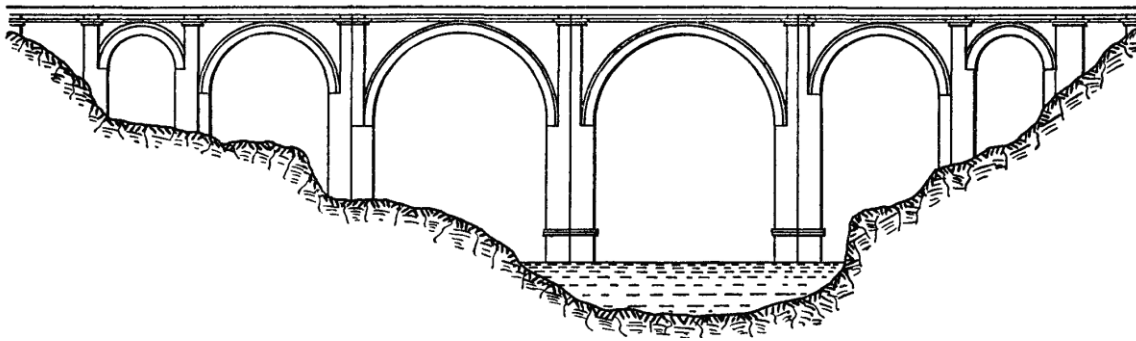


Figure 1. An example of the Stone arch bridge drawing. Reprinted from Illustration from 1911 Encyclopaedia Britannica, article Bridges. In *Wikimedia Commons*, n.d., Retrieved November 18, 2017, from https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e0/Bridges_2.png. Copyright from 12th edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica has expired in the U.S. Reprinted with permission.

The Arch Bridge supports weight without any additional support. They often have arches in succession, but the support comes from the bridge itself; every component of the arch can make up the bridge. The travel support is on the back of the arch. The design itself, allows stress to move from an area of weakness to an area of strength. The true support of the arch bridge is hidden beneath the waterline and is not visible.

Being a bridge, one carries heavy loads. Overtime, this can become burdensome without proper supports in place. Often, “Black professional women are expected to take on the responsibility of fixing systems in crisis” (Omolade, 1994; Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2003).

We [society] expect African-American people to come in and be solvers. I still feel like even me becoming a principal, even though I think it was a great honor, it’s still an

African-American principal coming in to solve a problem with the Blacks—primarily black and brown school(s)...And so then we become firefighters. And you know, perhaps it's my perception, but I don't think so. I've seen other African-American women at the helm of a school who didn't have the support and who were expected [to solve problems], in the toughest schools, which happened to be occupied by primarily African-American students. (Julia)

Although there is a passion for doing equitable work, it can become taxing and persons could experience "battle fatigue." So, in asking how these Black women leaders were able to do the work, I had to consider what sustained them.

Servant Leader

In her article, *Tempered Radicals and Servant Leaders: Black Females Persevering in the Superintendency*, Judy A. Alston, provides a description of servant leadership that is applicable to the discussion of the Black women leaders in this study. Robert Greenleaf (1970) coined the term "servant leader" in his essay, *The Servant as Leader*. Greenleaf (1970) asserts that a servant leader is "one [who] wants to serve, and serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead". In addition, the servant leader is first concerned with care for others, rather than themselves (Greenleaf, 1970).

As they have been viewed historically as the "messiah or scapegoat" for school districts (Scott, 1980) (as cited by Alston, 2005), for the Black female leaders in this study, the attributes of servant leadership are a part of them and their practice. Servant leaders focus on the development and welfare of persons and the communities to which they belong (Greenleaf, 1970). Like the superintendents in Alston's article, the Black women leaders in this study have zeal to serve as they lead ultimately to educate children. However, these Black women leaders

have something even greater than zeal that causes them to go beyond obstacles and withstand multi-oppositions.

Calling: Guiding and sustaining. For many of the Black women leaders in this study, their faith in God sustained them as they took on other persons' pain, anger, and frustration. Often realizing that ill feelings were not geared towards them, while having to deal with internal thoughts and feelings invoked by serving in a dual capacity being a part of the school and community. That is not even considering any additional happenings they may have had going on in their own lives and families. Not all of the Black women leaders are of the same faith. However, many of them in some shape, form, or fashion mentioned their faith:

We were trying to make this work for the kids and I just never took my eyes off the prize.

Really the only way you can justify, even justify in your mind why you are doing this type of work, you have to have a laser like focus and a love for what you do and know that God is with you. Champaign is tough and the racism is real. It's not just there. Lots of work but, if I had to do it all over again I would because I'd do it for kids. (Ebony)

I don't know how you can do this job without faith. (Shelley)

I know who keeps and guides me. (Rhonda)

I'm very anchored in my faith and so I, I just remember being a principal and praying my way through that whole entire thing. I mean, every day. My faith is really strong and I've learned that, it has taught me who I am. And this is where you can draw your strength from, and you know, this is where you, get back up. It was hard yesterday, but we got more to do. (Julia)

These Black female leaders relied on their faith for strength, guidance, and a peace to carry them through every obstacle. Their faith experience was personal. Their faith is an internal

guide that simultaneously is their being, gives reason for their existence and purpose for connecting with others in relationship, while being the inspiration for their novelty (Alston, 2005). Their faith serves as their foundation as they take on the wiles that each day presents (Alston, 2005).

Like Alston's participants, the Black women leaders in this study followed the call and stood in proxy for students while encouraging them, their families, and the community to move forward as they moved towards self-growth as a leader. Their faith allowed them to stand, make bold decisions, and have courageous conversations around student achievement.

Eighty percent of teachers didn't think our students could be successful. Eighty percent. So I began to address the staff—the staff's attitude towards the children that they were teaching (from a survey by the University of Illinois). (Shelley)

I was able to incorporate deficit areas into the evaluation process...some things they were not doing...I felt that even though the consent decree required a lot of work, it was needed, and sometimes, it may have been because, teachers didn't want to do the extra work. But once we started the collaboration periods discussing students as a grade level, and looking at all students in a grade level, and making the teachers responsible for all students at that particular grade level, it became a mindset, that this is how we're going to provide or implement the best educational program possible for all students. (Jennifer)

Being Black women leaders in the face of a consent decree while serving to bridge the community and the schools, there had to be a strong force upholding them as they carried on to create successful schools for all children. In this work, these leaders were challenging majoritarian mindsets that were historically embedded within the community and schools. This work required much effort and continues today.

Altruistic-Bridge Leadership

And she [Black woman] had nothing to fall back on; not maleness, not whiteness, not ladyhood, not anything. And out of the profound desolation of her reality she may well have invented herself. (Morrison 1971, 63)

As a result of reaching an understanding of why and how the Black female leaders in this study carried out their work, I present a new theoretical framework, the Altruistic-Bridge Leadership.

Altruistic-bridge leadership describes one who unselfishly serves for persons who otherwise do not have a voice. An altruistic-bridge leader seeks to build capacity in all persons who possess deficiencies by closing the gap between educational and cultural gap by those accustomed to the opportunity and those that are experiencing it for the first time.

- Is involved in community service.
- Has to be a visionary.
- Believes in the equity for all students.
- Must facilitate learning.
- Is sustained by their faith; relationship with God.

Black Women's Identity as Leaders and School Improvement

Education as opportunity. Education has been seen as a means to a better way of life for quite some time. Education means access to opportunity. For Blacks, historically, this has not been a reality due to being kept out of spaces of learning and not being provided adequate resources for an equitable education. The Black women leaders in this study understand the historical contexts surrounding African Americans and education. This understanding around Blacks and education too is a part of their identity.

I am a first generation college student in my family, on both sides. Nobody ever thought college was possible or viable for us and so having come and been the first, ...I knew had to set ablaze or trail of success for those who followed. (Shelley)

When I started college, my mother didn't have any college, but my dad had some college. (Julia)

I just feel I've always had a passion to learn and to read, and I always knew I was going to be a teacher...I was the first in my immediate family to go to school [college], but I proved to them [family] you can be poor and still get a college education. (Jennifer)

I was the first of my siblings to go to college. My father had some college and my mother had some college. I was the first girl of my siblings to graduate from college. (Ashley)

It rocked my world that I had to pick cotton. If you've ever seen a cotton ball, it ain't no joke. When you pull the cotton out of that thing, it cut your hand, and you had to wipe the blood off. Didn't get it on the cotton. You kept on stepping. And I knew there had to be something better. And I said, "Lord, if it's your will, it will be done. Get me out of here..." I graduated number one in my high school class...and graduated Magna Cum Laude [from college]. (Sierra)

Even if the participants did not personally experience difficulties with their education, they could identify with the parameters of the consent decree addressing findings of inequities of Black students in relation to their counterparts. "Prior to the early 1900s, it was illegal for Blacks to learn to read, write, and attend school (Lerner, 1972; Shakeshaft, 1989), whereas White women (even those who were not daughters of wealthy landowners) of all backgrounds were able to attend school" (as cited by Alston, 2005).

Black women in leadership express a lasting obligation to educate African American

children and believe in their ability to succeed academically, and they do this while still striving to uplift the communities they serve (Lomotey, 1993; Gooden, 2005) (as cited by Williams, 2013, p. 82). Black female administrators will thrive because their approach reaches all students and particularly Black children because of a vested interest in them.

All students. When considering all children, participants seemed to also speak of equity. It almost appeared as though they had to provide justification in instances when they spoke solely about Blacks students.

I operated from the philosophy that no one should ever have to tell us to do us right. If I sit all my kids at the table. They're Black, White, Brown, Yellow. ...And mom is not going to overfeed... [some] kids and leave [others] at the table. A mom is not going to overfeed her other kids and leave them at the table starving. You are going to make sure that everybody gets to eat. And the one who needs some extra bread, you're going to give them some extra bread because you don't want to lose them. I think that's my philosophy because I was also able to see that, not just from being a Black female, but also being a mom and a person. So I loved all my students. (Rhonda)

In this comment, Rhonda showed her unselfish nature for the betterment of all students. This mindset directed her decision-making and practices as a leader. Ebony recounts her thinking from a district standpoint:

A lot of time, people don't understand that when you take on a role at the district level, you don't get to pick and choose which kids you support. You've gotta support all kids. So if you have one group of kids not performing, you have a moral and legal obligation to ensure that you do whatever you can to get those students up to performing. That's the tension that occurs in communities when you have your majority population doing really

well—White population. And then you have other groups that are not doing well.

...Then you have to do something about it. Part of working with the community is first of all communicating what you are attempting to do and why it's important that you do it. And why it's important that it's done in a hurry, accelerated. Everything has to be accelerated because you're playing catch up. And then helping the community understand that just because I am putting more funds and money into helping this group of students, I'm not taking anything away from you. Because equity is not the same thing for everybody. And so you've gotta do and focus your attention on supporting the kids so that you have high level of performance by all kids. (Ebony)

In order for Black women leaders to meet the demands of the consent decree, they had to have an equitable lens. It was not until data was disaggregated that inequities were discovered for African-American students in the District's Equity Audit. In addition, data collection was ongoing during the consent decree with a focus on all subgroups while collectively looking at the entire student body. In essence, this was a success of having the consent decree because it forced all leaders to adopt an equitable lens.

Education Debt—Ladson Billings

Gloria Ladson-Billings, in her work *From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools*, acknowledges that the U.S. has an education debt when considering the experiences of minoritized groups and the lack of equitable educational experiences afforded them historically, economically, socio-politically, morally, and I would add socioemotionally. To emphasize this notion, Ladson-Billings cites a quote from Randall Robinson (2000):

No Nation can enslave a race of people for hundreds of years, set them free bedraggled and penniless, pit them, without assistance in a hostile environment, against privileged victimizers, and then reasonably expect the gap between the heirs of the two groups to narrow. Lines, begun parallel and left alone, can never touch.

Ladson-Billings assert that in order for efforts to be effective in closing the achievement gap, we must address the education debt. She suggests reasons to why the education debt must be addressed: (1) the impact the debt has on present education progress, (2) the value of understanding the debt in relation to education research findings, and (3) the potential for forging a better educational future. It is important to note that for one to address the education debt, one must acknowledge race, racial experiences, and differences. By doing so, inequities become prevalent. The Black female leaders who served during the consent decree recognized the education debt because they too were a part of that narrative.

The consent decree acknowledged the education debt to a large degree. The consent decree illustrated that leaders should be reflective in their practices as it pertains to all students. In reflection or practices, inadequacies or inequitable practices that arise should be addressed. Thus, education itself should always be evolving. Mandates, and policies over it should always be evolving with all students in mind.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) During the Consent Decree

During the time of the consent decree there was yet another component. In 2002, President George W. Bush issued the No Child Left Behind law (NCLB) in efforts to hold schools accountable for student outcomes. NCLB updated the Elementary and Secondary Act. NCLB, “sought to advance American competitiveness and close the achievement gap between poor and minority students and their more advantaged peers” (Klein, 2015). NCLB

predominately placed an emphasis on student outcomes in reading and math. It had a huge “impact on teaching, learning, and school improvement” (Klein, 2015). It caused extreme controversy. The District was not only responding to national education issues, it had to address local education issues simultaneously. One Black woman leader shares her recollection of this:

[We] met with people to help them understand what was going on, [was] not just in Champaign but, this was what NCLB was [a national education law]. In fact...this whole notion was new to everybody...There were drawbacks to NCLB as we know it, but for the first time in Illinois, people, teachers, principals, were looking at the data of all kids and not looking at the overall performance but, “Okay, how did my White kids do? How did my Black kids do? How did my Latino kids do? How did my low-income kids do?” And that was an awakening, which was exciting too. Because then, once you are able to understand black and white, then you know you need to do something different in order to help all kids achieve...” (Ebony)

Although, NCLB brought on more challenges and complicated the process due to having to unpack for the community what it meant in relation to all students and educators’ practices, it came at a timely manner in supporting efforts of the consent decree in placing emphasis on the achievement of subgroups as well as the collective student body.

NCLB called for accountability atop accountability for everyone regarding all student outcomes. This intensified the work that needed to be done. One Black female leader shares her experiences during this time.

Even though we were under the consent decree, we really didn’t start district-wide plans on how to tackle or implement the consent decree until about 2002. And that was when the Culver administration started. That’s when we had to come up with school-wide

plans to address the different parts of the consent decree and how we would implement the different, things in the consent decree that had been agreed to by the district and all the plaintiffs. It was then that I remember getting many, many reports discipline and academics...we had to come up with school improvement plans district-wide...we were doing things to address student learning and how to accelerate academics...issues of attendance, discipline, and academics. (Jennifer)

Jennifer continues by speaking to each component of the school improvement plan and its focus for each:

So the attendance we had to work on, how to get students to school on time, to improve the attendance rates, especially African-American students, and as far as the discipline, how working to help teachers understand students, African-American students, and how to deal with African-American students that come from a different culture...so we were continuously putting plans in place and making sure that strategies were put in place to help students learn...I can remember before, working with teachers on extended learning plans...most children, if they didn't turn in homework then they just got a zero, and then the grades were just whatever the grades were. But once we started the school-wide initiative to promote learning that everyone was learning, then we started putting things in place to help students who were struggling. (Jennifer)

Due to the consent decree, there was a huge emphasis on Black students and how they fared in relation to all students. In addition, there was the understanding that all students and their outcomes mattered.

“Opportunity Preparedness Deficit”

There was heavy emphasis placed on the work that needed to be done concerning the consent decree. This largely rested on the shoulders of Black women leaders. Although the consent decree brought awareness and called for responses, everyone was not equipped to respond. Everyone did not understand what was required to address inequities and the work that is required to insure inequities and inequitable practices are checked.

The consent decree presented an “opportunity” to address ills within the education system, however, Black women leaders had to “prepare” and equip the Black community throughout this process as to how to respond to maintain equitable practices. One Black woman leader expresses this dynamic.

I had to extend myself into helping people understand, who are not educators, what the work was. So it slowed me down, too. But it was a part difficult for the community. And I am talking about the African-American community, in particular, to understand that you only have a window of opportunity to get the work done. (Ebony)

Black women leaders had to work to build bridges of access to understanding of the level of an opportunity that was afforded. Another Black woman leader recalls a time when she assisted with an opportunity in relation to the Gifted program in the district.

I agreed to put a Gifted program in our school...I received push back from...community leaders saying, “how dare you bring White Gifted children to the North End and tell our children they are not Gifted; and we don’t have any in the Gifted program.” And they were right to a certain degree. I worked with...the director of Gifted at the time, and we had to figure out a way to find and identify Black children who were Gifted also...we identified 12 African-American kids in this District that blew the lid off the testing. So

we identified 9...There were 28 white parents on the waiting list...they all declined a seat...we began with those students...[the following year] some of the parents decided to come. They still weren't the White families...they did not come because of the work that we did revising the testing, that was the thing that ultimately—Peterkin who was over the [auditing of the] consent decree [used] to help the District get out of the consent decree. It was that the Gifted numbers had changed. (Shelley)

Shelley gave credit to being able to do work with a community leader who was persistent in providing opportunities for Black students in Gifted programs. The participants had to get extremely close to remedy some of these problems. White Champaign was so committed and felt strongly about the Gifted program, that there was a structure of how you get in to it, there is a structure of how you continue within, there is a structure as to who should be hired as a teacher. It was clear that no one should deviate that even though you will place it in the heart of the Black community, in at least three locations. It was impossible for any student within a four-mile radius to get into those programs. This was a challenge for the Black women leaders. Imagine as a principal seeing this occur and not having any power in this moment to combat the hegemony—structure. It was moments like these that the Black women leaders saw their powerlessness in the effort to move the structure. However, despite their feelings, the consent decree says you have to break through this structure. This example speaks to the agentic power to the participants within this study.

In relation to alternative placements, Sierra shares how she supported students in their transition back to their home school.

The school comprised mostly of minority students, and I had a problem with that. So I worked with the school staff that was there. I said, “We will return as many of these

students to their home schools as possible.” In that year, I returned 17 students to their home school. I visited the home schools...I visited the home schools to make sure my students, my kids, were operating as I knew that they could. I not only visited. I made sure we had documented information on each student. If I caught one of my students misbehaving, I would pull them out [and speak with them]...to make sure they realize this is an opportunity for you to return to your home school and to graduate from your home school...And [it was] rare that I did not check in with the students on Monday and on Friday.

The support that Sierra provided her students was in addition to parental support, counselors, and their home school administrators. Ashley ultimately sums up this portion as she recounts her thinking around the consent decree, its meaning, and her involvement as a Black female leader:

Once the consent decree came, we were made aware that there really was a problem and now we’ve got to fix it. Before we knew of the problem and we did the best we can but it wasn’t in the forefront and during the consent decree that awareness was right there. Like “Look!” This is what the consent decree is about. We’ve got to make sure we can follow the consent decree. But it was not just doing it because [of] the consent decree...but, to make sure steps are set in motion for after the consent decree, so we won’t fall back into that consent decree [mindset], prior to the consent decree—like, yeah we know there’s a problem, but nothing is being done.

The work that these Black women leaders oversaw were primarily highlighted in the consent decree as areas of having inequities. If for nothing more, facilitating discussions to bridge understanding around the work of the consent decree and what was needed from an involvement standpoint of the community. Where they saw opportunity preparedness deficits, they worked to

fill in the voids. They did so with the mindset of maintaining systems to not return to the majoritarian mindset surrounding the consent decree. The opportunities, combined with resources, along with the Black women leaders greatly impacted in all students, staff, and community throughout the consent decree.

Great Responsibility

The chart below shows areas of consent decree mandates, how the district responded, and who led the work. This information was gathered from the interviews with the Black women leaders or documents. The table considers specific times during the consent decree. Dates were not included for protection of participants. The roles and responsibilities may have varied over the span of the consent decree depending on staff expertise.

Table 1: Components of the Controlled Choice Plan and Educational Equity Plan in relation to Black Female Leaders

Consent Decree Mandate Area	District Response	What Still Exists
Parent Information Centers	Family Information Center	X
Application and Assignment	-Controlled Choice -Community Forums -Visits to elementary schools	X
Magnet Schools	Garden Hills (PYP), Booker T. Washington (STEM) Academy, Stratton (Micro Society)	X
Community Involvement	Planning Implementation Committee (PIC)/Education Equity Excellence Committee (EEE)	X
Plan for Stratton Elementary School	-Magnet Focus -21 st Century Learning Center/Partnerships	(21 st Century Learning Center returning)
Climate and Discipline	-Support students transitioning back from alternative placement	X
Special and Gifted Education Programs	-Refined Gifted Testing	

Table 1 (cont.)

Student Performance	-Advancement Via Individual Determination (A.V.I.D.) -Content Specialists -Grade Reporting -Professional Learning Community (PLC)	X
Hiring and Staff Placement and Retention	-New Teachers Mentor/Coordinators -Cultural Sensitivity in Practices -Minority Teachers Advisory Retention Committee	X

The above chart shows how intricate Black female leaders were to the completion of the necessary work outlined in the consent decree.

How Black Women Establish Their Identity as a Leader

For this section, I chose to use parts of Rhonda's story about how she established herself as a Black woman leader. Her story was similar to several of my participants and their experience with establishing themselves as leaders. I tried to break it down in parts to provide some context around it. Although this is Rhonda's story, many of the participants, including myself, can in some way identify with her story. In response to the question, "How did you establish yourself as a Black female leader?" Rhonda began by stating:

I think that I struggled with that for a while...Sometimes I tried to create unique spaces to show my leadership. It was more driven from passion than really trying to be a leader...And so then [as a result of some experiences] I started saying to myself, okay, how am I going to move into admin because my power is limited right here. So at that point, I went back to school to get my 75 to start moving myself as a leader...redefining myself in my own space...So some of it was about parents, students, the 75 was about me

being able to be repositioned, and the work I produced while pursuing the 75 was about moving my building forward...So I think that it was situational leadership a little bit but I had to figure out...is that gonna be something that's gonna make me feel good or is that going to be a move towards establishing myself as a leader. (Rhonda)

In hearing her story, I thought of the component of servant leadership where the participants served first and one then there came a time when they decided to lead. I have come to find that with the notion of leadership itself and a person considering being a leader, there must be a point when one decides to be a leader. Also, in making this choice, one then has to make conscious decisions to make strategic moves. Rhonda continues:

I applied for some things right there in that space [her school at that time]. But ironically, I did not get the job because there was another guy...he's white. He was doing things a little differently. He had not put in the time with the parents. He had not done things that were benefiting our school. He came in from another school, he drove a fancy car, and looked like an administrator. He had networked. And as a Black leader, I did not understand the power of getting my name out there and networking.

Here, Rhonda speaks to the need for an aspiring leader to think broadly, not solely keeping a building focus. Having a broader focus would increase the probability of having more broad interactions across the district.

People in that space [her school at that time] knew me. People beyond that space didn't. So I was gathering community and parent support and buy-in...I had not figured out how to grab the attention of the structural people that were in control of helping me move. Though I believe God is in control of everything anyway...I wasn't bold enough or mature enough to start getting on district committees, but I did start getting out of that

space and start applying out. Coming in as a non-traditional underrepresented leader, most of us don't know that. So all of those nice wonderful things that you are doing your community loves it. But unless they have a voice with those who are in charge of hiring, you've got to move out of your space. You've got to sometimes self-advocate and say, "Hey, me right here. I'm ready." (Rhonda)

Black women leaders need to be sure to broaden their network base. This is to be sure that their leadership has an opportunity to see their skillset and value. This will couple with their community work. This is asking Black women leaders in essence to do additional work. The road to leadership requires guidance or essentially mentoring. Not only in aspiring to be a leader but also while serving as a leader. Black women leaders often abide by the notion of 'lifting as we climb.'

Ella Louise Bell (1990) writes about the experiences of seventy-one, career-oriented Black women, in her work on *The bicultural life experience of career-oriented black women*, in relation to climbing the organizational hierarchy and finds:

There are few, if any, role models they can emulate or turn to for support. It may be especially difficult for them to find sponsors who will open doors to new opportunities, or mentors who can provide guidance for moving up the organizational hierarchy.

Without powerful advocates, the women often find themselves omitted from important organizational networks and isolated from people who can help hone their professional skills. Consequently, they are forced to navigate uncharted waters when seeking ways to fulfill their career goals. (p. 460)

It appeared that many of the participants grounded their value in their community efforts. However, when the community itself is not valued or recognized by those in power, efforts of

Black women leaders within the community are not viewed as valuable. This is primarily the case because for Whites, their community existed within the schools and was a part of the schools. For Blacks, the community existed outside of the school system. Thus, Black women leaders should seek to incorporate central office staff with community efforts. They will illuminate the value of school and community relations, the work of Black female leaders, and provide opportunities for the cultural identity of schools to become more diverse.

Hiring. Several of the participants, not all, expressed that they were hired in the Champaign School District or in a leadership position primarily as a result of the consent decree:

I became a principal as a result of the consent decree. And of course, as Black administrator, you have twice the work of your counterpart. (Shelley)

My experiences qualified me for my position during the consent decree...the role of going into the [position]...I had to go in with what my vision was based on what the district had [need of].” (Rosanna)

I was hired as a result of the consent decree. (Ebony)

I feel that...as a result of the consent decree I was moved...to anchor administratively...[another building]. (Sierra)

I believe that there was a commitment to ensuring that there was more diversity reflected at the administrative level. So as a result of the consent decree, I believe that, I was hired not just solely based on the fact that there was a consent decree in place, but I think there was a commitment to hiring more administrators that reflected the student population, and on merit as well. So I believe it’s that, the experience of actually just having the opportunity...happened in part because of the consent decree. (Rebecca)

The consent decree provided opportunities for Black women leaders due to its focus on equity and achievement for Black students. The consent decree also placed a focus on hiring and staff placement and retention by articulating that it aimed to “seek to achieve a substantial level of racial diversity of certified and classified staff District-wide and at each level in order to facilitate educational equity” (Sa’Da v. Board, 2002). The consent decree placed an emphasis on and encouraged diversity, in efforts to support the overall goal of working to achieve equity and academic achievement for Black students.

All in all, whilst doing the work for students and striving to obtain leadership positions, Black women leaders showed resilience. This work was not completed overnight. At the core, the consent decree lasted for ten years. Their positions during this time were resilient.

Sacrifices. At the end of the day, the Black women leaders were mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters. The participants still had to see to their own homes, children, and families. When considering this notion, I received various accounts on how their personal lives were impacted by their commitment and contributions. Due to the gravity of the effects on their personal lives, the intimate details of their individual situations will be left unspecified.

Conclusion

The consent decree brought about awareness. In doing *de facto* work in efforts to change mindsets, the awareness must remain. This allows the focus of the work to stay at the forefront. The consent decree marked an evolution in education. It declared, “This is now the status quo—equity and achievement for all students. Let’s build from here.” The work around shifting mindsets must be ongoing.

The Black women leaders played a major role during the consent decree by serving as Altruistic-bridge leaders between the schools and community. Efforts were made to open lines of

communication, support families, support staff, support infrastructure adjustments, and educational law initiatives around equity and achievement for all students. Richard Delgado (1989) speaks to storytelling in relation to community-building.

Most who write about storytelling focus on its community-building functions: stories build consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and deeper, more vital ethics. Counterstories, with challenge the received wisdom, do that as well. They can open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live. They enrich imagination and teach that by combining elements from the story and current reality, we may construct a new world richer than either alone. (p. 2415)

Ultimately, the reason for this study is to hear the counterstories of the Black women leaders, so that we can move towards a discussion about creating a more rich narrative. This is not to say that conversations will be easy. They may be challenging to have. However, they must take place in efforts to continue the work of equity and achievement for all [students].

CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH DISCUSSION

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine the experiences of Black female leaders during a consent decree, its impact on their identity as leaders, and their impact on school improvement. This chapter provides a summary of the overall findings in this dissertation study. I provide theoretical implications, future policy, research and practice implications, and recommendations. I conclude this section with a summary of the overall dissertation. My research questions do not include the words ‘consent decree’. However, my protocols included the words ‘consent decree’. The findings of this dissertation take the consent decree into consideration.

Research Question 1: How Does Identity Impact Leadership for Black Women? (Precious Lord Take My Hand)

The Black women leaders in this study constantly battled external societal mindsets and reservations from within their own community/culture surrounding their race, gender, and leadership.

Race and gender. When it came to identity for the participants in this study: they first viewed themselves as Black. This was not to say that they did not recognize the multiplicity of their identity; however, they found that from a societal standpoint, their race was typically recognized or addressed first. From a racial standpoint, they were perceived to be unworthy of being a leader or obtaining and flourishing within the leadership capacity. In addition, from a gender standpoint they appeared to not be capable of being a leader or obtaining a leadership position. I will separate the terms ‘Race’ and ‘Gender’ to further move the discussion forward. Unfortunately, the participants were not able to do so; though, it wasn’t for a lack of trying.

Despite acknowledging how others view them in separation, the participants had to navigate how to live in both simultaneously daily.

Race. Though Race is a socially constructed term, it has real implications for minoritized groups. Race was constructed to maintain divides that create and sustain the majority and majoritarian views. The construction of Race implies meaning for the groups within its structure; White and other. In order for the majority or majoritarian views to exist, the others must be suppressed to sustain the aforementioned divides. It is within the realm of constant suppression (i.e. ongoing micro-aggressions) that the participants of this study exist.

Gender. The other component, Gender, presents its own specific divides. Women are viewed as being “lesser” to males on various levels. As a result, efforts to deliver the necessary assertiveness are interpreted as aggressive or masculine in nature. In turn, now the dichotomy of interjecting certain aspects of masculinity creates the stereotype of women being caretakers or overly maternal.

Race, Gender, Leader. The Black woman dwells in a place where she seeks to overcome historical stereotypes of: (1) the mammy—being inferior and a servant (2) the angry Black woman.

When I was first hired as an administrator, people were like, “She’s too nice,” because they wanted me to scream.... But I had to go back and get myself in check to say, ‘I’m not gonna holler to prove something to somebody else.’ (Rhonda)

For this study, the participants underwent the constant battle of debunking the stereotypes while trailblazing a leadership role in an uncharted territory. Many of the participants in the study spoke of the need to challenge historical stereotypes across perspectives—Black, female, and as leaders. Several participants found they were overlooked, overworked, their innovations were

plagiarized, or they were expected to maintain the school climate, while seen as incapable of leading. As a result, participants expressed having to be creative in navigating while creating avenues to show their abilities. This often came in conjunction with community support. Several participants expressed having experiences comprised in King & Ferguson's (2001) list of stressors for black women leaders:

The isolation black women experience in dominant culture organizations; (2) the high visibility black women experience due to their race and gender and their subsequent need to make choices about public association; (3) the need to invest in alliance-building with the power elite; (4) the personal overload stemming from participation in two or more cultures (e.g., racial/ethnic culture, dominant culture); (5) the conflicts stemming from pressures to fulfill race and gender-role expectations in contexts that have conflicting norms and values; (6) the ambiguity of being in a non-traditional profession, or of having a level of authority beyond that which is customarily expected for black women. (p. 128)

In summary, all the participants shared common thoughts about identifying first, by race and second, gender. During the times participants referenced their leadership experiences, which typically highlighted race and gender, they spoke of the negative impacts of race and the effects due to their gender second. Because of their unique lens, Black women are more likely to be involuntarily obligated to lead schools with significant academic and societal challenges, and with the "catch 22" conundrum of their position - several of the participants spoke of isolation. All participants acknowledged that the work surrounding the consent decree was still difficult; and acknowledged that they would go through the consent decree again because they were doing the work for students. One participant did consider her own children after her response:

I was in that building every day: Working, planning, working, working. I lost two daughters to teenage pregnancy because I was a single parent; I was not at home; I was attending other people's children and neglecting my own. And that was a price and in retrospect if I did it again, I wouldn't sacrifice my daughters—I would not. (Shelley)

Research Question 2: How Does Identity Impact School Improvement for Black Women in K-12 Leadership Positions? (How I Got Over)

Black women in leadership express a lasting obligation to educate African American children and believe in their ability to succeed academically, and they do this while still striving to uplift the communities they serve (Lomotey, 1993; Gooden, 2005) (as cited by Williams, 2013, p. 82). Black female administrators will thrive because their approach reaches all students, particularly Black children because of a vested interest in them and the culture. Black women leaders understand the lack of education that comes with being a part of the experience of Black children. This impacts their leadership for all students:

I felt like when you look at students, you look at your children [and] you understand a lot of the strife in the access and opportunity, and the lack thereof. You also understand how hard it is for a Black woman to move forward, because she's also the mule.... We didn't have a lot of Black male principals. (Rhonda)

While I did not share school achievement scores, I was able to capture aspects of the participants' leadership that speaks to their impact on school improvement. One major aspect of the leadership of all the participants in this study was their involvement with the community. Their connection to the community crossed cultural differences. The participants in this study were connected to the local churches, businesses, and the University. Participants either attended a local K-12 public school, had children or extended family that attended the schools. Several

participants even served on various local community committees. The participants were invested in the community.

When considering Black students in schools, Black women leaders often incorporated enriched community Arts programming to enhance cultural experiences for all students. In addition, (when possible) they were sure to encourage community members to participate in mentoring programs for students. Working with adults, participants served as liaisons between the community and schools by assisting in facilitation of conversations and discussions around equity. Participants also worked to inform educators and the defendants about conversations around *mindset* in response to deficit thinking and student achievement for all students. Moreover, the participants enlightened minoritized groups to the inner workings of the societal educational and cultural status quo.

In summary, the Black female participants in this study infused aspects of their culture within their approach as leaders, bridge-builders, and ambassadors of educational equity. The consent decree gave way to shine light on the necessary retooling for an equitable educational experience. The consent decree set out to address inequities for African-American students. Doing this work required persons who were able to interpolate the needed processes to bridge the gap between the schools and community. In their roles, the Black female participants had a responsibility to the schools and community. They served in a dual capacity. The Black women leaders had access to the schools and community, and they were the integral component for completing the directives of the consent decree.

This work required great sacrifice due to them having to navigate the lack of trust in the Black community with the schools to educate their Black children, as well as having to navigate the awareness of mindset associated with the educating of Black students.

The plaintiff class was wanting things to happen like overnight. I said, ‘Well, these things didn’t get to where they are overnight.’ So, we gotta really, strategically work for implementation because you can’t go in on one hand and just charge people up and say, ‘You gotta do this, this, this, and this.’ But at the same time, you’ve got to be able to realistically work to get buy-in, to help move the organization in the right way to accomplish the goal. So, we were constantly mitigating that. (Ebony)

The consent decree brought about an awareness of educational inequities for Black students based on disaggregated data by race from the Educational Equity Audit and an explicit display of mindset in the Climate Study Survey.

[In the comments section on the survey] some of the comments were racist. They [teachers] were very negative in terms of their images of Black students and how they saw Black student issues. A lot of them blamed parents. It became a blame game. (Cherika)

The consent decree meant that persons had to act on the awareness. The Black women leaders were needed in the schools and the community. Most of the participants responded in one of two ways in response to the question, “How was your role as a Black woman leader integral to community’s/district’s/school’s [based on applicable role during] response to the consent decree?”

I think my perspective on the work was critical, being an African-American woman, being and African-American administrator, one of few.... Using all of the experiences that I had, I don’t think that the momentum and success that we had would have been the same without the experiences that I brought to the table. (Ebony)

Another participant shares her response to the same question:

I was there to ensure that everyone was playing by the same rules. That the playing field was level. I was there to support teachers, building their capacity to work with children who were very different from children they were used to working with. I felt like I was a bridge-builder to support families [the parents]. To bring in their programs and create as school climate and culture that was conducive to everybody learning.... That the treatment or discipline was gonna be equitable as well. (Rebecca)

The participants acknowledged the importance of their lived experience(s) to their contributions during the consent decree in these aforementioned responses. The understanding of their contributions was not contingent upon their resolve around when or how they acquired their positions. Some participants almost appeared to have a sense of pride in knowing that they did not obtain their position because of the consent decree. This is not to say that they expressed thoughts of being better than anyone else. Nor did I find that their experience as a Black woman leader during the consent decree differed from other participants. However, many of the participants attributed obtaining their positions as a result of the consent decree (2002) addressing the “hiring and staff placement and retention” (p. 15).

Rebecca’s response captures the essence of the majority of participants:

As a result of the consent decree, I believe I was able to attend to the principal shift of being leader. I don’t think that if we didn’t have the consent decree, if there wasn’t special attention being paid to the need for diversity and the needs for the opportunity, or color, there would not have been a shift, where those shifts could be made.

Simply put, the Black female participants in this study kept all students and their achievement as their focal point.

Research Question 3: How Can Black Women Establish Their Identity as Leaders? (Eyes on The Prize)

When considering the participants and how they established themselves as leaders, I cannot recall anyone differing from Rhonda's story shared in segments in chapter 5. All of the participants' experience with establishing themselves as a leader, or aspiring to become a leader, fell in one of three categories: (1) had community support and were appointed during the consent decree, (2) they had a supervisor who suggested they pursue leadership because they saw something in them [their work in the school or community showed promise], or (3) they had someone who they followed closely after as they observed their work.

None of the participants directly stated that they had a mentor. Only two participants alluded to having someone they followed closely after. The majority of the participants either had community support and were appointed during the consent decree, or had a supervisor who suggested they go into leadership. E. L. Bell (1990) states, "There are few, if any, role models they can emulate or turn to for support" (p. 460). Ultimately, all the participants met the necessary requirements to obtain their positions.

At some point, all the participants seemed to reach a point when they began to question the effectiveness of their movement in leadership. They reached a point of awareness and became intentional in their steps in no matter the path they chose. The participants were unpacking the notion of leadership or their positions while serving to bridge the schools and community.

I think that I struggled with that for a while.... Sometimes I tried to create unique spaces to show my leadership. It was more driven from passion than really trying to be a leader.... And so then [as a result of some experiences] I started saying to myself, okay,

how am I going to move into admin because my power is limited right here. So at that point, I went back to school to get my 75 to start moving myself as a leader...redefining myself in my own space.... So some of it was about parents, students, the 75 was about me being able to be repositioned, and the work I produced while pursuing the 75 was about moving my building forward.... So I think that it was situational leadership a little bit but I had to figure out...is that gonna be something that's gonna make me feel good or is that going to be a move towards establishing myself as a leader. (Rhonda)

Rhonda shares that Black female leaders (or aspiring) need to find spaces to network. These spaces are situated outside of their buildings where their work or evidence of their abilities are predominantly concentrated. Rhonda continues by noting that the previous notion should be considered due to members of the communities that Black women leaders serve, do not have a voice among those persons over hiring.

Several participants expressed being overlooked for leadership positions. Considering Rhonda's notion of networking, if the participants are not heard of (have not been seen) after being heavily involved in their community over lengthy periods of time, there were mindset issues around hiring. The participants were not 'seen' because the spaces they operated in, students they worked with, community they served were not deemed valuable. This points back to Rhonda's conversation around networking efforts surrounding committees overseen by central office staff where Black women leaders can be seen. Value is placed on Central office.

In summary, what was shared through interviews is that Black women leaders typically end up in leadership out of service. This speaks to conversations in chapter 5 around servant leadership where there is a point of awareness to serve from the standpoint as a leader. Many of the participants lacked mentorship in attempting to progress in leadership. In addition, several

participants expressed being overlooked for leadership positions. Participants must find ways to operate in spaces deemed valuable by those with authority who oversee hiring for leadership positions. This seems inauthentic to the ways of the Black female leaders in this study.

Theoretical Implications

Black feminist theory. For this study, Black Feminist Theory (BFT) was essential. At its core, BFT places the experiences of Black females at the center of discussion. BFT closely examines race, class, and gender. While I intentionally examined race and gender earlier in this discussion, I also indirectly referenced class when considering the position of the participants in this study.

Class. The participants in this study were able to exist in two differing realms (1) school and (2) community. This was the case because the participants were deemed credible in both spaces to some extent. The participants were able to identify in both spaces. They possessed the knowledge of and lived experiences with both entities. Both entities (school and community) are intertwined if not in practice, surely through ideology. Given the history of the small urban community, the relationship of school and community must always be addressed. In the case of this study, the participants had access and possessed authority to provide access. Thus, the participants served as a bridge to, for, and between the school and community (Horsford, 2012). When class is considered the conversation becomes more intensified surrounding the relevance of the participants to the consent decree and has implications for the necessary work beyond its expiration.

Intersectionality. Intersectionality is essential to this discussion as well. Intersectionality allows for examination of intersectional ties across axis of intersections. With this study some

key examples of intersectionality were expressed through the participants faith, work and home dynamics, and historical educational experiences.

Faith. The participants in this study took on the pain, anger, and frustration of others while doing this work. This was atop their own constant battle of societal mindsets from without and reservations from within surrounding their race, gender, and leadership. One can only imagine the cycles of battle fatigue the participants in this study experienced simultaneously from without and within.

The participants in this study expressed that their faith is what sustained them. They often referenced praying daily, and ultimately, their faith was their guide and sustenance. This discussion intersects the work of participants as bridge-builders. Their faith held them up as they carried out the work necessary to serve the school and community. This intersection was discussed in chapter 5 taking the combined bridge-building work of participants with the servant leadership aspect of participants. This lead to viewing the participants now as altruistic-bridge leaders. It was impossible to see the participants carrying out the work necessary for the school and community during the consent decree without knowing where their diligence and unselfish nature came from. I now attribute it to the combination of their faith and strong connection to serving. This creates a willingness to continue despite adversity on behalf of others. The participants in this study were altruistic-bridge leaders.

Work and home dynamics. As the participants served as altruistic-bridge leaders devoting an insurmountable amount of time to the schools and community, what was the impact as they ultimately were providing for their homes. For the protection of the participants, I chose not to place a major emphasis on this area going into intimate details. I briefly mentioned one

instance earlier in this chapter to show one example of the extent of their devotion to the work necessary during the consent decree.

I would be remiss if I did not at least reference the personal sacrifices that the participants in this study made. I want to be clear that I challenge the thinking of my participant Shelley. Shelley viewed her sacrifice as neglect. Like a few other participants, Shelley was single and worked to provide for her children. This should not be viewed as neglect.

What about the aspect of children seeing their parents going to work, believing in education. What about considering that even in their work, the participants were making provisions for even their own children who attended the schools and lived in the community. What about considering this one example as not being the fault of the participant. Rather, viewing the historical systematic accounts of destruction of the Black family. This is yet another intersection that Black women leaders encountered as they serve; overcoming the stereotype of neglect in their role of mothering as a professional—an educator. This discussion led me to my final major intersectionality viewing the historical educational experience of the participants in this study.

Historical educational experience. The cultural connections coupled with the educational experiences of the participants yielded another mindset. Despite adversity, the participants in this study experienced societal success in educational institutions of higher learning. These experiences of success provided access to their leadership positions. It is important to note that even prior to having the opportunity to serve in an official ‘titled’ leadership position, the educational experience provided access to the participants.

Having the experience of gaining access from an institution of higher learning, often through struggle, instilled a specific mindset within the participant. Their lived educational

experience intersects with the historical educational experience of African-Americans. This leads to a mindset of resilience. Their mindset springing from their resilience infiltrated and eventually evolved their perspective on the philosophy of education and equity for all students. Their resilience encompassed hope that other minoritized groups can do the same—opposite of deficit thinking. Examining the participants in this study through intersectionality takes me back to my original notion of this study with a deeper understanding.

Self-Definition. The participants in this study defined themselves through their work. Their work shows them as altruistic-bridge leading from a place of passion filled with historical understandings of who they are as they seek to lift as they climb.

Self-Valuation. Similarly, the participants in this study defined their value through their work. The Black women leaders in this study find value in assisting the schools and community they work with and live in. They find value in helping others through an uplifting disposition, and seek to find and value the interest of others to assist in their efforts to uplift. The ways in which Black women leaders define themselves and define their value causes others to challenge their mindset about them as leaders and their mindset about practices as leaders.

Implications and Recommendations

Policy. Women still make up the majority of the teaching force “from which leaders are recruited, and...women prepare for leadership in degree programs, and aspire to the positions” (Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007, p. 103). If it is a known fact of who the persons entering education as professionals are, we (as those affected by their successes and failures) must invest more into them as leaders. Reaching this notion should be of great importance because as educators, we should always be progressing for the future. The future of education is diverse. As a result, our thinking around leaders should become diverse to meet the

needs of diverse populations and thinkers. Small urban communities should also be considered in this way, this discussion is not just for major urban communities.

Research. The participants in this study bring more light to the need of researchers to examine the leadership qualities of Black women to better understand their impact on school improvement. Researchers should also consider other notions of giftedness as it relates to the Arts and how minoritized groups use them as a way of expression. This examination may present findings around student engagement or educational outcomes, as to how minoritized groups use the Arts to express their understanding. Lastly, how does the connection between diverse leaders and community involvement in schools from an Arts perspective, impact student outcomes for diverse population.

Practice and mentoring. This category serves as one of high importance because mentoring is necessary for rising administrators. This means that principals require proper investment, as they are needed in the investment of assistant principals (White & Agarwal, 2011). The notion of mentoring in administration brings to the forefront uniqueness of persons on various levels. Some of the levels include gender, race, age, etc. If not carried out authentically and effectively, mentoring is viewed as a barrier for the lack of not having it (White & Agarwal, 2011).

Leaders should not only consider having a mentor, but also being a mentor. At all times, leaders should have someone who they look up to and someone who is looking up to them. This will work towards continuing systems of mentoring for future leaders.

Intentional Steps. With mentoring in place, Black women leaders can be supported by having more intentional steps on their journey as leaders. This will help offset various barriers

that Black women leaders face and particularly the barrier of networking. Potential opportunities to be viewed as leaders and connected to leaders, should be identified for future leaders.

Conclusion

I argue, that a consent decree focused on race and equity for Black students in addition to improving hiring practices and placement of Black staff, can assist Black women in K-12 leadership as they challenge the dominant mindset around issues of racial equity and establish their identity as leaders. Counter-storytelling debunks a narrative about a mainstream narrative about people who are marginalized and about educational opportunities and equity. These stories counter the master narratives about Black women school leaders and educational equity.

However, the implementation of a consent decree should not be a necessary educational practice to be carried out; nor should it require a consent decree to see an increase in diverse leadership. There should always be a focus on diverse staffing.

All students should be able to see representations of themselves within schools. All students should be exposed to diverse leaders. Students contribute in different ways to the learning environment. Diversity within schools allows students to be able to address diversity in the real world. As a result, programs to support diverse learners should always be in place. In addition, parents should be informed. Therefore, the spaces and programming dedicated to parents should always be in place, easily accessible, and proactively encouraged. If we are not preparing students to be successful citizens, we are preparing them for another system not geared towards a growth mindset.

Participants and the consent decree. There has always been a longstanding value and understanding within the African-American experience, that one has to be able to perform the task assigned and do it twice as good as their counterpart in order to gain recognition. In

addition, there is also the understanding that as an African-American, there are not many opportunities for a second chance. Both of these notions are largely attached to race rather than gender. However, these are the understandings that were embedded in all of the Black women participants within this study. Compound that with a consent decree, and compound that with gender and the added internal pressures of the Black community as well as the external pressures. This mixture created an insurmountable situation for this population that is unrealistic. It is undeniable, that the positionality and identity that was maintained by these women during this moment was nothing short of a miracle because the average person would have crumbled and quit.

One participant (Shelley), upon obtaining her leadership position, expressed that there were so few Black women leaders in positions at the time that she “could not disappoint them.” One can imagine, that she felt pressure because she finally had an opportunity and could not ruin it; nor could she mess it up. Those who had come before her (Hester Suggs, Erma Bridgewater, Deloris Henry) who had worked so hard to establish themselves and their reputations not only for their children, families, and community. So, even outside of the expectations of those who were within the schools, she could not let the legacy of the Black women leaders who had come before her fall.

One component that I heard time and time again was that there were many times when the participants “did the work” but did not get the recognition. The beauty of it is, that they “did not care so long as it benefited the students.” What I found to be truly important to the participants was that they desired to implement programs that would benefit students in the short and long-term. They sought to create sustainable systems. They understood that although the consent decree required immediate responses, the outcomes of the work would need a lasting

effect. This was largely due to the fact that work involving the shifting of mindsets takes time. While they engaged in creating systems and certain activities to benefit all students focusing on African-American students, which was the intent of the consent decree, they constantly faced a hegemony structure that did not afford them to take root.

Nikole Hannah-Jones, an essayist, wrote an article in The New York Times, called *The Resegregation of Jefferson County* (2017). Known for her speaking to issues of racial injustice, Jones illustrates how, “It was, to a large degree the geographic organization of Southern states that made court-ordered school desegregation there successful.” (Hannah-Jones, 2017) In most of the southern states they have county districts where here we have school districts. “By 2005, Jefferson County was divided into 12 distinct and vastly disparate school systems, many of them either heavily black or heavily white, making the school-district boundaries there among the most segregated in the nation.” (Hannah-Jones, 2017) Essentially, what they were trying to do is create a brand-new county to segregate students in the school community. So now, “it is district lines that maintain segregation.” (Hannah-Jones, 2017) This in itself was problematic primarily for the fact that, “Succession supporters had argued that their tax dollars should go to educate their own children instead of children who lived outside their community, that their shared responsibility stretched no further than the arbitrary borders of their town.” (Hannah-Jones, 2017) This was despite the fact that for most of its history, the black taxpayers funded white schools that even their own children were not able to attend. (Hannah-Jones, 2017)

What I found to be the most relevant point of the article is that Jones recognized that no matter how much litigation has taken place in those specific school communities, those who are opposed to the processes’ for more equitable or accessible school experiences will create all kinds of new considerations to avoid going through that process. This was huge because for my

participants, I found that part of the frustrations that I was able to gather is that they were frustrated with people not wanting to go through the process for reconciliation. As a result, the consent decree itself brought additional stressors for participants due to having to meet the ongoing requirements of the consent decree from a technical sense; as well as having to address the adaptive work to challenge the dominant mindset around issues of racial equity and establish their identity as leaders challenging societal stereotypes. The reconciliation process is intense, it calls for difficult conversations and persons willing to ‘do the work’ to benefit others who may not look like them. The reconciliation process also calls for all stakeholders to remain. There has since been a decrease in the White population within the school district, while there has been an increase in the alternative school model: Countryside, Next Generation etc. These spaces can keep them from the increase in diversity in the community. This exacerbates the consent decree because you do not have children coming to one common space to learn about each other. Segregated spaces perpetuate the same racial habits that cause our society problems.

The university and the schools. It is important to note the rise of the Asian and Latino community within these changing demographics. This also causes leaders to consider who should be in the schools, its teachers and administrators. This is important as it disrupts the binary discussion and brings to light the increase in graduate international students who bring their children into the fold of public education within this community.

Black women’s voices throughout history. The view, opinion, and experience of Black women should be listened and paid attention to. Ninety-four percent of Black women voted for Hillary Clinton (Williams, 2016). Ninety-eight percent of Black women Alabamians voted against Roy Moore (White, 2017). Black women have been making wise decisions in America for a long time. Unfortunately, no one wants to listen to them because there are the dual

dynamics of race and gender. This group often has very good insight as to how you can solve problems without litigation and yet, there is no one there who wants to really listen to them. This population usually has a very good sense of what is going on and how things can be solved for the better because they start from a lens of equity and of opportunity. This is not just a unique characteristic to my participants. This is wonderful and remarkable characteristic to possess but also a terrible loneliness. It is very difficult to have a position of authority and still cannot exercise that wisdom. Black women have always been at the forefront but pushed to the back.

Conclusion of the matter. It is easy to look in one direction of the consent decree and say that it failed because of the lack of change statistically for African-American student academic outcomes. Yet, another aspect to acknowledge is that the foundation has been laid to ensure the kind of outcomes that we want to see. The harsh reality is that those systems and supports require more time and consistent ongoing support. Therefore, again I say, in equity work there must be consistent and ongoing efforts around shifting mindsets. It will require support from the top down as well as the bottom up. An action plan for retention must be in place.

Reflexivity in conclusion. Just to hear their stories was an honor. I firmly say that I stand on the shoulders of giants. I am only here because of the work that they did. I was hired because of the consent decree as well. I am a part of the community as well. Many of my participants were in positions during the time when I was in school or I would see them in the community. I never imagined that they were experiencing what they expressed. I strive daily even the more to ensure that I keep and help foster in others an equitable lens for all students in all that I do.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTORS

Shelley

One who strives to connect the school and community. Shelley brings the community into the schools through community service efforts and research initiatives for professional development. Shelley seeks to make positive change for students by impacting the adults who work with them. Shelley is a servant leader. Shelley puts structures in place that will have a lasting effect. She does so through an equitable lens.

Ebony

A transformational leader focused on making an organization better than when she finds it. Despite resistance her role is to get others to see kids who they work with every day, differently. A part of her goal is to shift the paradigm and change the mindset about underserved children. Ebony is someone who has an equitable lens for all students but particularly the underserved kids (African-American, low-income, Latina/o, Second Language Learners, etc.). Ebony possess a strong sense of accountability for herself and others. Ebony and her team always think about what can be done versus what has been done already.

Rosanna

She is the epitome of a bridge leader in her efforts to connect the community and the school. Rosanna serves the community on an intimate and broad level. Through an equitable lens, she upholds a high sense of accountability for those who work with her in efforts to support the community. Through her efforts she works to change the negative images placed on minority students and their families. Rosanna believes that the school, parents, and the community need to work together to create a stronger force in change efforts for students.

Rhonda

A visionary leader who seeks to move forward by keeping the end in mind. Rhonda focuses on structures within systems that need to change. Always has a broad lens of equity while she closely examines a single structure to shift the system, then moves on to the next. Rhonda understands that change takes time and the processes of change. Rhonda seeks to control the narrative for students by creating a new one within the face of opposition.

Julia

One who was a fearless leader; not afraid to make a decision for the betterment of all students. Julia is called to do the peoples work and builds foundations for all students to be successful. An inquisitive yet competitive leader, she strives to have the best for her students and their families. She considers herself to be a thoughtful leader who considers all angles of a situation. By doing so, she is then able to make the best decisions for all stakeholders around student achievement.

Jennifer

She believes in a holistic approach that meets the needs of all students emotionally, culturally, socially, physically and psychologically. She too considers herself to be a transformational leader who focuses on the mindset work needed for student achievement. Jennifer is particularly passionate about work with girls, development of leaders, literature and Special Education. Jennifer is grounded in equitable practices and strives to provide the best opportunity for all students.

Cherika

Another bridge leader, Cherika strives to create spaces for members of the community to share their voices. She seeks to be a liaison between the community and the schools. She creates

programs to unite the two with hopes of building lasting partnerships for student achievement. Through her efforts, she addresses racial equity issues head on.

Ashley

A leader in connecting the schools with community programs, Ashley serves as a community family liaison for the schools. Her ability to forge relationships is essential to her efforts to change student outcomes. Ashley strives to create spaces for students beyond the walls of the school. In addition, she teaches competencies necessary for students to be bicultural in both spaces.

Sierra

As a leader, Sierra upholds what is right. Sierra does not believe in excuses in relation to student achievement. In efforts to maintain an equitable lens, she seeks to ensure students are biliterate so they understand the accountability within schools and their community. She views herself as an agent of change with mindset work. Her desire is that students are safe, provided the best possible educational opportunities, and lead successful lives as citizens.

Rebecca

Views herself as a bridge-builder leader. Rebecca desires to support families, bring parents into the schools, and create a school climate and culture that is conducive to everyone learning. With an iron fist in a velvet glove, Rebecca breaks down walls of inequity and rebuilds structures for all students.

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT CONSENT DECREE INVOLVMENT CHART

Participant Name	Consent Decree Years of Service	Leadership Appointment in Relation to Consent Decree	Came from Within Community	Came from Outside Community	Reason for Leaving
Shelley	13	During		x	Retired
Ebony	9.5	Before		x	New Position
Rosanna	12	During	x		Retired
Rhonda	13	During		x	New Position
Julia	9	During		x	New Position
Jennifer	13	During		x	Retired
Cherika	9	During	x	x	New Position
Ashley	12	During		x	New Position
Sierra	9	Before		x	Retired
Rebecca	13	During	x		New Position

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
528 East Green Street
Suite 203
Champaign, IL 61820



May 17, 2016

Anjale Welton
Ed Organization and Leadership
375 Education Bldg
1310 South Sixth Street
Champaign, IL 61820

RE: *The Impact of Black Women Leaders During a Consent Decree*
IRB Protocol Number: 16667

Dear Dr. Welton:

Thank you for submitting the completed IRB application form for your project entitled *The Impact of Black Women Leaders During a Consent Decree*. Your project was assigned Institutional Review Board (IRB) Protocol Number 16667 and reviewed. It has been determined that the research activities described in this application meet the criteria for exemption at 45CFR46.101(b)(2).

This determination of exemption only applies to the research study as submitted. Please note that additional modifications to your project need to be submitted to the IRB for review and exemption determination or approval before the modifications are initiated.

Copies of the attached, date-stamped consent form(s) are to be used when obtaining informed consent. If there is a need to revise or alter the consent form(s), please submit the revised form(s) for IRB review, approval, and date-stamping prior to use.

Exempt protocols will be closed and archived five years from the date of approval. Researchers will be required to contact our office if the study will continue beyond five years. If an amendment is submitted once the study has been archived, researchers will need to submit a new application and obtain approval prior to implementing the change.

We appreciate your conscientious adherence to the requirements of human subjects research. If you have any questions about the IRB process, or if you need assistance at any time, please feel free to contact me at OPRS, or visit our website at <http://oprs.research.illinois.edu>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "LeaAnn Carson".

Human Subjects Research Specialist, Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

Attachment(s)

c: Mykah Jackson

U of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign • IORG0000014 • FWA #00008584
telephone (217) 333-2670 • fax (217) 333-0405 • email IRB@illinois.edu

APPENDIX D: SPIRITUALS

Songs

My participant, Sierra, frequently referenced Negro Spirituals as she responded during her interviews. I incorporated song titles into my analysis to acknowledge her.

Take My Hand, Precious Lord

Precious Lord, take my hand
Lead me on, let me stand
I'm tired, I'm weak, I'm lone
Through the storm, through the night
Lead me on to the light
Take my hand precious Lord, lead me home

When my way grows drear, precious Lord linger near
When my light is almost gone
Hear my cry, hear my call
Hold my hand lest I fall
Take my hand precious Lord, lead me home

When the darkness appears and the night draws near
And the day is past and gone
At the river I stand
Guide my feet, hold my hand
Take my hand precious Lord, lead me home

Precious Lord, take my hand
Lead me on, let me stand
I'm tired, I'm weak, I'm lone
Through the storm, through the night
Lead me on to the light
Take my hand precious Lord, lead me home (lead me home)

Songwriters: THOMAS A. DORSEY
© Warner/Chappell Music, Inc.

How I Got Over

How I got over
How did I make it over
You know my soul look back and wonder
How did I make it over
How I made it over
Going on over all these years
You know my soul look back and wonder
How did I make it over

Tell me how we got over Lord
Had a mighty hard time coming on over
You know my soul look back and wonder
How did we make it over
Tell me how we got over Lord
I've been falling and rising all these years
But you know my soul look back and wonder
How did I make it over

But, soon as I can see Jesus
The man that died for me
Man that bled and suffered
And he hung on Calvary

And I want to thank him for how he brought me
And I want to thank God for how he taught me
Oh thank my God how he kept me
I'm gonna thank him 'cause he never left me
Then I'm gonna thank God for 'ole time religion
And I'm gonna thank God for giving me a vision
One day, I'm gonna join the heavenly choir
I'm gonna sing and never get tired

And then I'm gonna sing somewhere 'round God alter
And I'm gonna shout all my trouble over
You know I've gotta thank God and thank him for being
So good to me, Lord yeah
How I made it over Lord
I had to cry in the midnight hour coming on over
But you know my soul look back and wonder
How did I make it over

Tell me how I made it over Lord God Lord
Falling and rising all these years
You know my soul look back and wonder
How did I make it over

I'm gonna wear a diamond garment
In that new Jerusalem
I'm gonna walk the streets of gold
It's the homeland of the soul
I'm gonna view the host in white
They've been traveling day and night
Coming up from every nation
They're on their way to the great Cognation

Coming from the north, south, east, and west
They're on their way to a land of rest
And they're gonna join the heavenly choir
You know we're gonna sing and never get tired
And then we're gonna sing somewhere 'round God alter
And then we're gonna shout all our troubles over
You know we gotta thank God
Thank him for being so good to me

You know I come to thank God this evening
I come to thank him this evening
You know all all night long God kept his angels watching over me
Early this morning, early this morning
God told his angel God said, "touch her in my name"
God said, "touch her in my name"

I 'rose this morning, I 'rose this morning, I 'rose this morning
I feel like shouting, I feel like shouting, I feel like shouting
I feel like shouting, I feel like shouting, I feel like shouting
I feel like shouting, I just gotta thank God, I just gotta thank God
I just gotta thank God, I just gotta thank him
Thank God for being so good, God been good to me

Songwriters: W HERBERT, REV BREWSTER
© Universal Music Publishing Group

Eyes on The Prize

Paul and Silas bound in jail
Had no money for to go their bail
Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold on, hold on

Paul and Silas thought they was lost
Dungeon shook and the chains fell off
Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold on, hold on

Hold on, hold on
Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold on, hold on

The only thing that we did was wrong
Was staying' in the wilderness too long
Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold on, hold on

The only thing we did was right
Was the day we begun to fight
Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold on, hold on

Hold on, hold on
Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold on, hold on

Freedom's name is mighty sweet
One day soon we're gonna meet
Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold on, hold on

Got my hand on the gospel plow
Won't take nothing for my journey now
Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold on, hold on

Hold on, hold on
Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold on, hold on

And some possible alternative verses:

Only chain that a man can stand
Is that chain o'hand on hand
Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold on, hold on

We're gonna board that big Greyhound,
Carryin' love from town to town.
Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold on, hold on

We're gonna ride for civil rights,
We're gonna ride both black and white.
Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold on, hold on

We've met jail and violence too,
But God's love has seen us through.
Keep your eyes on the prize
Hold on, hold on

Songwriter: ALICE WINE for Civil Rights Movement