

MY SOCIAL INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION AS A BLACK FEMALE SCHOOL  
ADMINISTRATOR AND FACTORS AFFECTING MY RETENTION: AN  
AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

by

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## ABSTRACT

AIMY SHANTELL LA'NAE STEELE. My Social Inclusion and Exclusion as a Black Female School Administrator and Factors Affecting My Retention: An Autoethnographic Study (Under the direction of DR. CHANCE W. LEWIS)

Information regarding school administrator quality, impact, and effectiveness exists in abundance (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Eagly, Karau, Johnson, 1992; Simien, 2005). There are few studies and research about the career development of Black female school administrators particularly and appropriate retention strategies that yield results encouraging them to remain in the field after having reported experiencing social exclusion and alienation while in their roles of leadership (Anderson, 1988; Tillman, 2004; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Horsford & Tillman, 2014). Personally speaking, after having years of childhood experiences of social inclusion, I was unaware of what social exclusion felt like until I became an adult trying to navigate the world of educational leadership after having been a classroom teacher for four years. This study addresses my journey and its impact on how I viewed my early school administrator experiences as well as my decision to remain in the profession year after year utilizing autoethnography design. This dissertation research focuses on my K-12 schooling, early teaching, and school administrator experiences as a child evolving into the Black female identity, specifically in educational settings. I examine interactions of social inclusion and exclusion and their impact on my journey toward a career as a school principal as well as within my current daily job as an administrator. Utilizing the content contextual analysis strategy to triangulate participant narrative essays, journals, school year calendars, culture grams, and timelines, I found there were three prevailing global super themes that emerged repeatedly with multiple

indicators. The three themes include (1) Being bothered or annoyed; (2) “Job as” expressing the functionality of my job; & (3) Advocacy for causes. I provide context for the role of social inclusion or exclusion in each global super theme as well as barriers to entering educational leadership for Black female school leaders. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the framework I use to contextualize the autoethnography design and the inclusion of personal narrative as well as Participant Action Research (PAR) to identify the triumphs and barriers in my quest for leadership such as isolation, marginalization, and lack of support. The findings inform the coaching, training, mentoring, and strategies for retention which I recommend for Black female administrators by local education agencies (LEA) across K-12 spectrums.

*Keywords:* Social inclusion, social exclusion Critical Race Theory (CRT), intersectionality, double consciousness, autoethnography,

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACT	American College Testing
ASCD	Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
NEA	National Education Association
NCASA	North Carolina Association of School Administrators
NCES	National Center for Educational Statistics
CRT	Critical Race Theory
IRB	Institutional Review Board
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math
K-12	Kindergarten Through 12 <sup>th</sup> Grades
CRDC	Civil Rights Data Collection
BFA	Black Feminist Autoethnography
LEA	Local Education Agencies
US	United States
DODS	Department of Defense Schools
PAR	Participatory Action Research
USDA FHA	United States Department of Agriculture Farmer's Home Administration
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
ESSA	Every Student Succeed Act

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As students become more diverse in K-12 public schools, it is important to ensure both teachers and administrators closely mirror the population of students to increase positive academic and general life outcomes for children (NCES, 2015a; Simien, 2005). In studying the composition of today's education workforce, the data are startling. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported in 2015 that the U.S. student population as of 2012 was racially comprised of 51% Whites, 16% Blacks, 24% Hispanics, 5% Asians/Pacific Islanders, 1% Native Americans/Alaskan Natives, and 3% 2 or more races. Consequently, the teacher population consisted of 82% Whites, 9% Blacks, 7% Hispanic, and 2% other (NCES, 2015b). For school administrators, the numbers are similar to teachers during the same time period; school administrators were 80% White, 10% Black, 7% Hispanic, and 3% other (NCES, 2015b). These data reveal disproportionality in the underrepresentation of Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, and Alaskan Natives in the overall teacher and school administrator populations. When the percentage of representation of a population is lower than their overall percentage of that same group in total, there is said to be disproportionality (National Education Association (NEA), 2008). Further, "disproportionality is defined as the "overrepresentation" and "underrepresentation" of a particular population or demographic group in special or gifted education programs relative to the presence of this group in the overall student population" (National Association for Bilingual Education, 2002). This is problematic for students, especially since research revealed that linked fate, or the "recognition that individual life chances are inextricably tied to the race as a whole" (Simien, 2005, p. 529). It is a valid

phenomenon to ensure students experience a variety of leadership practices from multiple races of leaders.

There is a superfluity of research on the school administrator's role in K-12 schools (Adkinson, 1981; Alpren, 1954; Alston, 1996; Arcy, 1980; Ashmore, Bolman & Deal, 1991; Del Boca, & Wohlers, 1986; Bales, 1950; Barone, 1982; Charters & Jovick, 1981; Coleman, 1979; Cooper, 1989; Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky (in press); Edmonds, 1979; Elmore, 2004; Far, 1988; Fiedler, 1967; Fishel & Pottker, 1977; Frasher & Frasher, 1979; Ghiselli, 1964; Glass, McGaw, & Smith, 1981; Grobman & Hines, 1956; Gross & Trask, 1976; Hallinger, 2005; Halpin, 1957; Halpin, 1966; Halpin & Winer, 1957; Heck, 2000; Hedges, 1987; Hedges & Becker, 1986; Hedges & Olkin, 1985; Hemphill & Coons, 1957; Hemhill & Griffiths, 1962; Hersey & Blanchard, 1977; Hersey & Blanchard, 1982; Jacoby & Terborg, 1975; Johnson, 1989; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Lewin & Lippitt, 1938; Likert, 1961; Marnani, 1982; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; McGregor, 1960; Morsink, 1970; Myers, 1970; Reddin & Reddin, 1979; Rice, 1978; Rosenthal, 1984; Shakeshaft, 1980; Shakeshaft, 1987; Shakeshaft, 1989; Stogdill, 1963; Stogdill, Goode, & Day, 1962; Van Aken, 1954; Van Meir, 1973; Vroom & Yelton, 1973). However, in this research study, I chose to focus only on one particularly marginalized school administrator, me, as a Black female. This is not a heavily researched topic in existing studies about school leaders (Alston, 1996; 2000; Marnani, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1989). As a Black female school administrator, I am most familiar with my journey of matriculating through K-12 educational settings and becoming a classroom teacher and later a school administrator as well as how the process unfolded throughout my career. I

know the things I have experienced as a child, who helped me along the way to be the best me, and who encouraged me to do things I had never thought possible. I also know best what it felt like to encounter feelings of isolation, despair, and desolation within my role as a school teacher and subsequently as a school administrator. I see the day to day challenges I face as I try to confidently navigate through the career field charting my next path. As I participate in meetings, carry out the responsibilities of my job, and adhere to the policies and procedures which I agreed to uphold upon signing my contract for service, I am faced with the reality that although contractually bound to my position for a set period of time, socially, I feel disjointed and disconnected. There has to be a reason why I feel this way. There has to be some explanation for why I love what I do but strangely feel as though I am not welcomed socially into this space by those who have occupied these types of positions for years.

Therefore, for the purpose of this study, I investigate how the journey of my K-12 schooling experiences, familial influence, and career trajectory to school administration positively or negatively contributed to my career choices. Furthermore, I explore if and how social inclusion and exclusionary factors influenced my life choices. I then pose potential solutions to increase the number of Black female school administrators in practice.

### **Topic and Research Problem**

As an early career Spanish teacher in an urban school district with more than 30,000 students, there was not another Black Spanish teacher within the almost 40 schools at the time. Further, when it was time to collaborate with others who taught the same subject as I did, I found myself working with a diverse group of teachers, primarily White

and Latino. This did not seemingly pose any problem, yet I wondered if I was the only Black woman who wanted to learn Spanish so I could teach it since I was also the only one in my undergraduate program at a Division I institution within this academic major who intended to teach. Although there were no other Black Spanish teachers in my school district, I still longed for collaboration about educational topics with teachers who looked like me. I also began to yearn for leadership opportunities as well since I wanted to grow as an educator. Throughout my three years of teaching Spanish in the same high school, it became apparent to me that there were no racially diverse school leaders at my large high school and only two or three Black school leaders throughout the school district. This was problematic as I began to reach out to leaders who looked like me in order to probe them on how they became a school administrator. I found myself reaching outside of my school district to neighboring counties that had a more diverse leadership workforce. I learned that racially diverse school administrators and superintendents are few in number and if I wanted to learn from them or speak to them about their pathway to their role, I would have to do some digging. This part of my journey began the question of why there were so few Black administrators, particular Black females, since that is how I identify.

To increase the quantity of Black female school administrators, the focus must address the diversity of classroom teachers, which begins in K-12 school settings where students make decisions about attending college. In order to teach in a public K-12 school setting, teachers must have a 4-year college degree therefore the necessity of graduating from high school is a top priority in order to access college or university admission and obtain the necessary credentials. According to NCES (2017), the overall graduation rate of high school students in the 2014-15 school years was 83%. Overall, NCES (2017) reported

of all students who attended school, Asian/Pacific Islanders had the highest graduation rate of 90% while others were lower: Whites, 88%, Hispanics 78%, Native Americans/Alaskan Natives 72%, and Blacks, 75%. To place this in perspective, this means that when there are fewer Blacks who graduate from high school, they lack the opportunity to attend college to study various career fields that require a 4-year degree. When we examine the rate of enrollment of students as freshman into 4-year colleges, we see disproportionality, as Blacks comprise 14.5% of the overall college attendees in 2014 (NCES, 2015c). If Black students do not graduate high school at higher rates, they will not access post-secondary education at the necessary levels to increase the pipeline of qualified teachers eligible to become school administrators.

According to the findings of the American College Testing's (ACT) national report, *The Condition of Future Educators (2015)* based on data from *The Condition of College & Career Readiness* assessment, there are four key findings regarding students who are interested in the teaching profession. They include: (a) the number of students interested in becoming educators continues to drop significantly, (b) students interested in education have lower-than-average achievement levels, particularly in STEM areas, (c) interest in pursuing an education career is low among males, and (d) in general, there is a lack of diversity among students interested in education (ACT, 2015, p. 3). With these findings by the ACT (2015) in mind, it is crucially important to ensure that racially diverse students are exposed to as many resources and opportunities that aid in their completion of high school and enrollment in 4-year educational institutions, to have an opportunity to become a teacher, and subsequently a school administrator.

With the number of required teachers expected to increase by 14% between 2010 and 2021, the pipeline of overall students interested in education continues to decline (NCES, 2015a). This alarming statistic rings the warning bell that significant strides are imperative to increase a number of high school students who pursue education careers, particularly those of marginalized populations. In fact, in order to ensure more students of color graduate from college, I know that they need to experience instances of social inclusion similar to what I encountered upon entering school while in Japan as an 8-year-old in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. A defining moment for me was when my teacher pulled me aside to help me with difficult 6-digit subtraction, which ensured I learned the necessary components of math for the next grade level. Defining moments such as these help students of color make positive decisions to stay in school, graduate from high school, and attend college before academic defeat enters their mindset as it could have possibly permeated mine.

While the ACT's seminal report highlights the status of those who are or are not pursuing education careers, it also suggests three key recommendations for alternative paths to teacher licensure for "diverse populations of high-achieving students" (ACT, 2014, p. 3). They include: (a) recruit high-achieving college students who are undecided about their future careers, (b) promote alternative pathways to teaching, and (c) improve educator benefits to attract and retain quality teachers. These strategies add to the teaching pipeline by suggesting the intentional recruitment of racially diverse students, the removal of barriers for non-traditional teacher candidates, and increasing beginner teacher salaries make them as competitive as entry-level positions in other professions (ACT, 2014). Similar to Siemen (2005), Egalite and Kisida (2016) conclude that African American and

Asian American students benefit from being taught by teachers of a similar race. Benefits include psychological and social elements where student perceptions of teachers as role models occur (Boser, 2011; Evans, 1992). There is increasingly emerging evidence on the academic outcomes of students as it relates to pairing similar demographic teachers (Blazar & Kraft, 2015). For this to happen, a diverse teacher pipeline must exist which further informs the pipeline amount of eligible multi-cultural administrators available for leadership positions. As a Black female student, the percentages of my own teachers who were Black females were: 50% elementary teachers; 20% middle school teachers; and 25% high school teachers. Most of my teachers were White males and females and about 5% overall were Asian or Latino throughout my K-12 schooling journey. I experienced a positive impact from the exposure to teachers whom I could identify with racially.

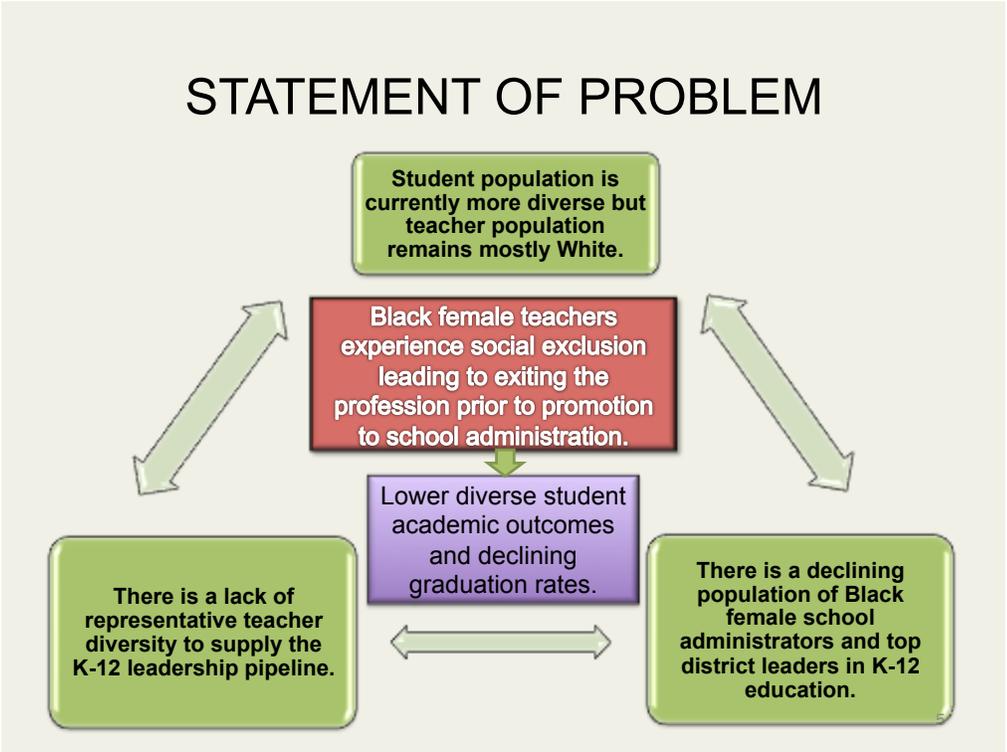


Figure 1. Statement of the Problem. This figure illustrates the problem that exists with having a diverse K-12 school-teacher and administrator pipeline.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research study is to systematically investigate my journey as a Black female school student in K-12 settings and how I became a teacher and a school administrator. This is relevant because in order to become a teacher, I had to be a student first. I was curious to see if there was anything This autoethnographic study focuses on my K-12 schooling experiences, familial influence, career trajectory to school administration, and examines social, systematic, and structural factors I experienced. I was curious to explore social inclusionary and exclusionary factors that I encountered as I matriculated to see exactly what led me to want to enter school administration, which is where I currently find myself.

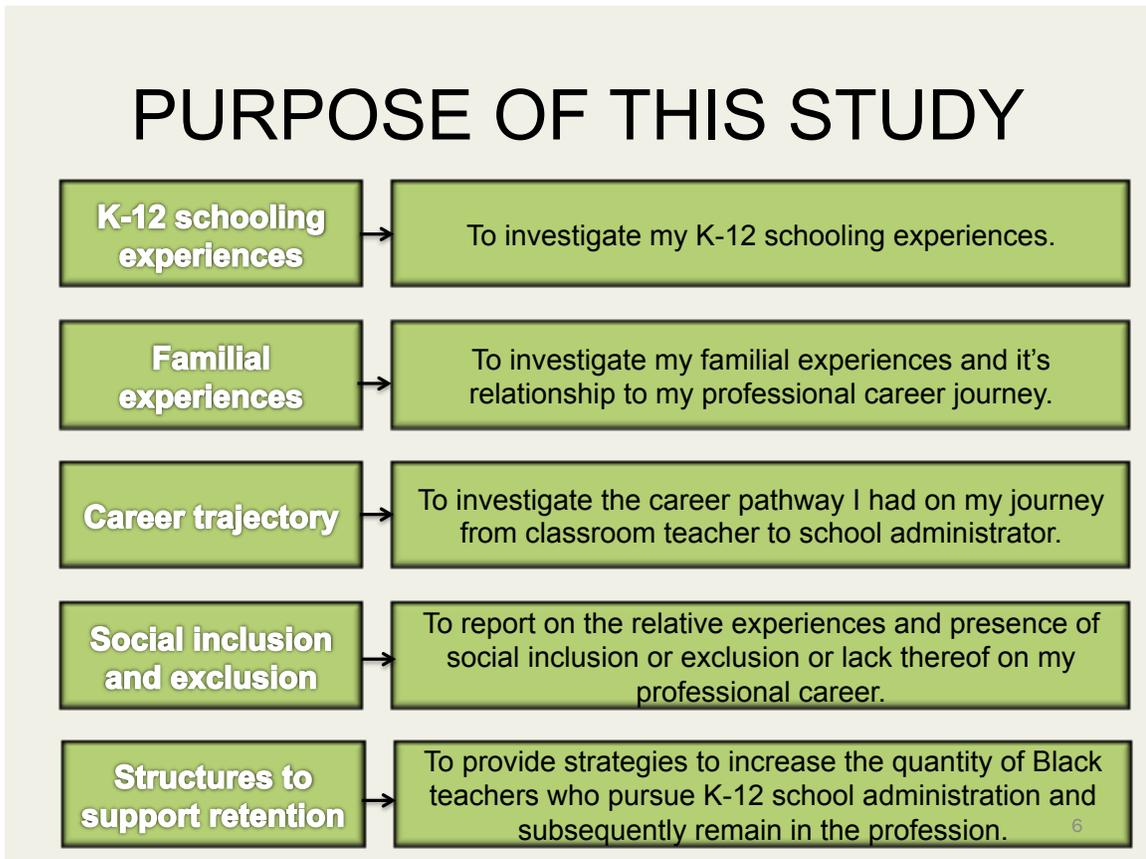
In this study, to further situate my experiences, I examine the historical background of key legislation in the United States that impacted traditionally marginalized teachers and administrators on a macro scale, but particularly Black females since I identify as one. This perspective is important to me since the Black female leader voice is practically void in educational leadership journals and discourse. Further, there are so few of us in school leadership proportionate to the amount of Black children as evidenced by the data provided from NCES (2015b) in school administration. Ultimately, I wanted to find out why this is the case and what caused me to get here.

Currently, the school district in which I work mirrors that of national statistics as it relates to student enrollment and the rate of Black male and female leaders. There are currently 19.2% (CRDC, 2016) students who identify as Black in my district and approximately 12.9% Black school administrators. While that is a little higher than the national average, when I walk into various leadership meetings, it still feels like I am one

of a few. In reality, 10% of the principals are Black females and there are no Black male principals. The remaining percentage accounts for Black female and male assistant principals. This is important because regardless of the seemingly matched percentage between my district's amount of Black administrators and the national average of the same, the feeling of isolation and exclusion still exists as I attend and actively participate in leadership meetings and other functions. Four principals out of 40 means that I see three other faces that look like me when I walk into leadership meetings while 36 of my colleagues can report that 90% of the room looks like them. Therefore, it is necessary that I seek answers as to why this population of Black leaders is so low nationally and locally as compared to the amount of students enrolled who identify as Black or are of diverse racial backgrounds.

As important as it is for me to examine my journey to school administration, I also knew it was critical to go back before coming forward. In other words, in order to see why and how I became a school administrator, I had to look back on my own K-12 schooling experiences to see what critical points in time allowed me to walk the pathway of school leadership preparation and ultimate assignment as a principal. Using an autoethnographic design allowed me to take a step out of my life to view the collective barrage of social inclusion and exclusionary encounters in order to make sense of them and their impact on me becoming a school administrator. Subsequently, I felt obligated to assess how my treatment of these experiences led to me remaining in the field of educational leadership thus far as well as how I can use my story to inform that of others like me, Black and female, who desire to become a school administrator. An in-depth account of my journey from elementary to high school student, college attendee, pre-service to the in-service

teacher, and principal intern to full-time principal follows as I narratively analyze the inclusionary and exclusionary moments. It is essential that my voice is primary to capture this experience since I am the best one to report my own personal experiences.



*Figure 2.* Purpose of the Study. This figure illustrates the purposes of conducting an autoethnography to explore my educational life.

### **Autoethnography and Subjectivity**

When utilizing autoethnography, subjectivity is a strength (Peshkin, 1988; Woodall, 2016). A true researcher cannot separate him or herself from their quest of finding meaning when conducting autoethnography as subjectivity is the very essence of value of my story (Woodall, 2016). Further, Mizzi (2010) identifies subjectivity in short as the “notion of including multivocality as an autoethnographic method to: (a) illustrate that there is no single and temporally-fixed voice that a researcher possesses, (b)unfix identity in a way

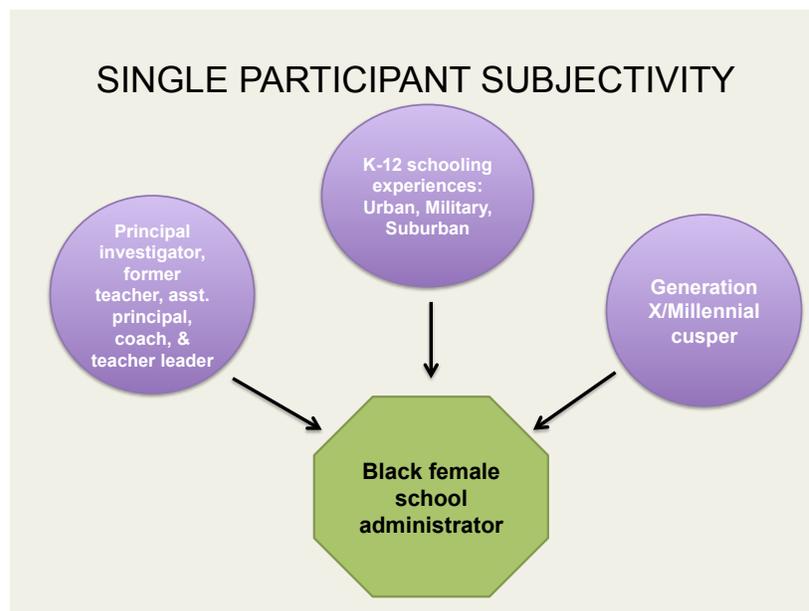
that exposes the fluid nature of identity as it moves through particular contexts, and (c) deconstruct competing tensions within the autoethnographer as s/he connects the personal self to the social context” (p. 1). Expressing my multivocality therefore serves as a strength to expose the audience to the multifaceted perspective from which my story is experienced.

For the purpose of identifying subjectivity in this research study, I acknowledge the following: I identify as a Black female who is currently a school administrator, a leader in a predominantly White cultural setting, and a researcher of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Each of these lenses allows me to see how my experiences have informed my life and shaped my cultural beliefs and why I do what I do. Subjectivity is therefore essential as I tell my story.

There are many additional ways in which I uniquely view the world around me and my lenses include growing up in a military household influenced my high expectation identity that impacted both my teaching and leadership practices. I grew up in a predominantly Black and Latino neighborhood located in Houston, Texas. Early on, I was exposed to hard-working women as I observed both of my grandmothers devoting themselves to careers in both the medical and domestic capacities for more than 30 years. I cannot help but notice that their work ethic, along with that of my mom and dads rubbed off on me in a positive way instilling in my mind the necessity to strive for excellence in all I seek to accomplish.

As a young teacher, first entering the classroom at the age of 23, I learned strategies for engaging with teachers and colleagues of all ages from the perspective of a Millennial. Millennials are people born from 1978-1995 (U.S. Census, 2016). This influenced my decision-making ability, tolerance level for difficult situations, and ability to be flexible

when facing tough challenges. My subjectivity is further impacted by my K-12 schooling experiences, which began in an urban setting of Houston, Texas, continued in Department of Defense Schools (DODS) in Sagamihara, Japan, and culminated with a historically Black high school in an urban setting of Fayetteville, North Carolina. I attended a predominantly White public university for undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral studies. Each post-secondary institutional exposure informed my knowledge of the systematic inclusion and social exclusion people of color typically experience. The realization that systemic changes are necessary continuously informs my desire to advocate for social justice change within our society (DeMatthews, 2015). Therefore, one can conclude that my subjectivity is a vital factor to the way I view myself and the world around me.



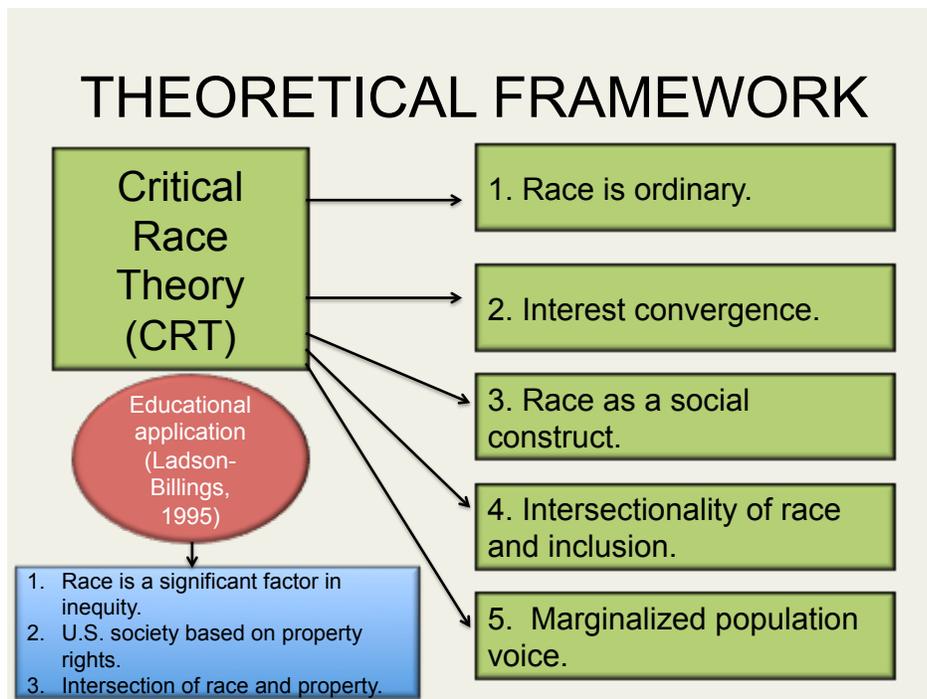
*Figure 3. Autoethnography and Subjectivity. This figure illustrates my subjectivity as a strength in autoethnography.*

### Conceptual Framework

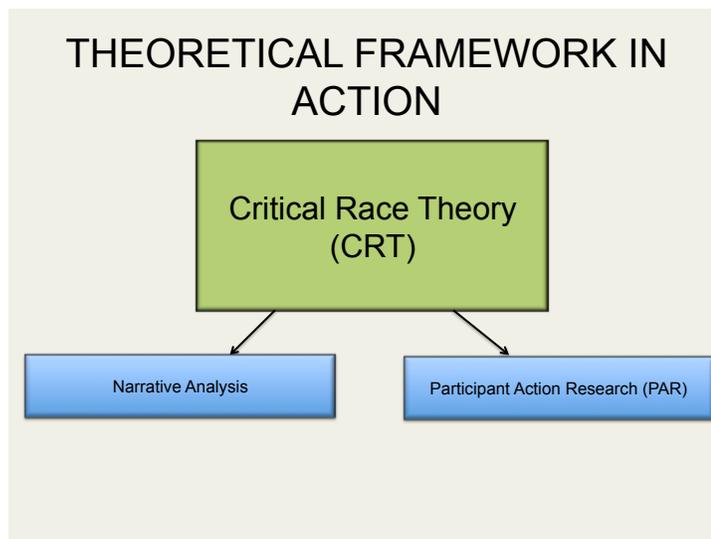
Law Professor Bell was the leading creator and father of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Bell, 1976; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT was used to address issues of

“school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, affirmative action, and high stakes testing, controversies over curriculum and history, and alternative and charter schools” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, pp. 6-7). For this study, I operationalize the way Black women interact in the educational workspace from a CRT perspective utilizing its five tenets to contextualize their experiences. Black women operate in three distinct areas of intersectionality between their gender, race, and class, making CRT a relevant framework with which to observe their debacle between these triple existences. Utilizing CRT as a conceptual and theoretical framework, the five tenets central to understanding its impact on the analysis of the educational system and the stakeholders employed by the entity are essential for this study. They include: (a) racism is ordinary and “the usual way society does business” and is rather difficult to address; (b) “Interest convergence or material determinism”; (c) “Social construction thesis” which states that race is a social construct rather than a reality; (d) intersectionality and anti-essentialism so as to say the inclusion of certain racial groups based on the needs of society; and (e) unique voice of color wherein marginalized groups are able to recount their own experiences better than anyone else (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, pp. 6-7). It is with the framework of CRT that I examine my life experiences and the factors that contributed to my status as a school administrator. Additionally, utilizing the CRT framework, I offer systematic analysis of the data collected during this participatory action research (PAR) study in order to understand how I interacted with various career and personal situations and ultimately how these impacted my desire to pursue school administration and remain in the field. PAR allows the unity of qualitative research in action from the participation of the researched party. In this case, as the sole participant in this study, I provide the participation and research within the study. Brydon-Miller (1997)

defines PAR as providing “an integrated process in which research, education, and action all draw on the skills of all participants (researcher and researched), with the goal of increasing the knowledge of all participants and enabling social transformation” (p. 44). To provide analysis of CRT’s application to PAR, narrative analysis allows me to script and explain my unique confrontation with my K-12 schooling and career experiences to shape a description of encounters with social inclusion and exclusion. The framework as CRT and CRT in action is demonstrated below.



*Figure 4.* Theoretical Framework. This figure illustrates the outline of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in its purest form followed by the educational application.



*Figure 5.* Theoretical Framework in Action. This figure illustrates the outline of Critical Race Theory (CRT) with Autoethnography applied using Narrative Analysis and Participatory Action Research (PAR).

### **Research Questions**

The research questions for this study are:

1. *As a Black female student, how did I come to know the impact of inclusionary or exclusionary practices in my K-12 schooling experiences?*
2. *As a Black female teacher, how did I become a school administrator?*
3. *As a Black female teacher, how did I come to know the impact of inclusionary or exclusionary practices on my interest and success as a leader?*
4. *As a Black female school administrator, what factors impacted my retention in the field?*

### **Outline of the Study**

My research study begins with a review of the literature regarding several key elements of educational leaders' experiences within the field. The literature review highlights research about Black women in educational leadership, leadership theory in general, CRT along with discourses around social justice, and social inclusion and

exclusion of Black educators. The review of works essential to understanding how school leadership is contextualized in the field is also included in the literature review. Next, I present the methodology of my research, which examines the data collected during the time frame of the study as well as triangulation of additional data points essential to the autoethnography. In this study, my story is told throughout chapters three and four as I analyzed data collected during the prescribed collection period as well as from culture grams, journals, and observational data. I reveal the major global themes that emerged from the study as well as their impact on me as a Black female school administrator. I examined the role of social inclusion and exclusion in the school leadership profession and how this can contribute both positively and negatively to the retention of highly qualified Black female school administrators. Few studies have examined Black female school administrators' perceptions of social exclusion and even fewer from their perspectives such as the Black Feminist or Double Consciousness therefore my study was essential to address this deficit. My research study concludes with a discussion representing a summary of the findings of the study as well as recommendations for future research and practice.

### **Definitions and Terms**

**Black:** Of or belonging to a group of people having skin that is brown, African American people (Cambridge Dictionary, 2016).

**Class:** A group of people within a society who have the same economic and social position (Cambridge Dictionary, 2016). A social stratum whose members share certain economic, social, or cultural characteristics: the lower-income classes (American Heritage Dictionary, 2016).

Feminist: A person who believes in feminism, and tries to achieve change that helps women to get equal opportunities and treatment (Cambridge Dictionary, 2016).

Gender: A grammatical category, often designated as male, female, or neuter, used in the classification of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and in some languages, verbs that may be arbitrary or based on characteristics such as sex or animacy and that determines agreement with or selection of modifiers, referents, or grammatical forms (American Heritage Dictionary, 2016).

Hegemonic: The position of being the strongest and most powerful and therefore able to control others (Cambridge Dictionary, 2016).

Intersectionality: A theoretical critical knowledge base that provides insight on race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age where all factors do not operate as unitary, mutually exclusive entities (Collins, 1991).

Marginalized: To treat someone or something as if they are not important (Cambridge Dictionary, 2016).

Race: Social construct that captures the physical and cultural dimensions of a person (Collins, 1991). A group of people identified as distinct from other groups because of supposed physical or genetic traits shared by the group. Most biologists and anthropologists do not recognize race as a biologically valid classification, in part because there is more genetic variation within groups than between them (American Heritage Dictionary, 2016).

Social Inclusion: The process of improving the terms of individuals and groups to take part in society (The World Bank, 2017); The provision of certain rights to all

individuals and groups in society, such as employment, adequate housing, health care, education, and training.

Social Exclusion: The act of not allowing someone or something to take part in an activity or to enter a place (Cambridge Dictionary, 2016). The act or practice of excluding (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2016).

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to assess the current literature that exists in the field of educational leadership in general and other critical areas of social sciences regarding the study of Black females in leadership roles. To begin, I situate the literature in the context of educational leadership in general as a White male dominated profession, followed by a review of the historical treatment of Black educators, Black women, and their presence in educational leadership, as well as their lack of inclusion in studies surrounding leadership theory. The review continues with an examination of substantially important areas of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Black Feminist Matrix of Domination, Afrocentricity, Social theories of inclusion and exclusion, and Double Consciousness. These areas of the literature review provide a theoretical background for the primary framework for this study, which is CRT.

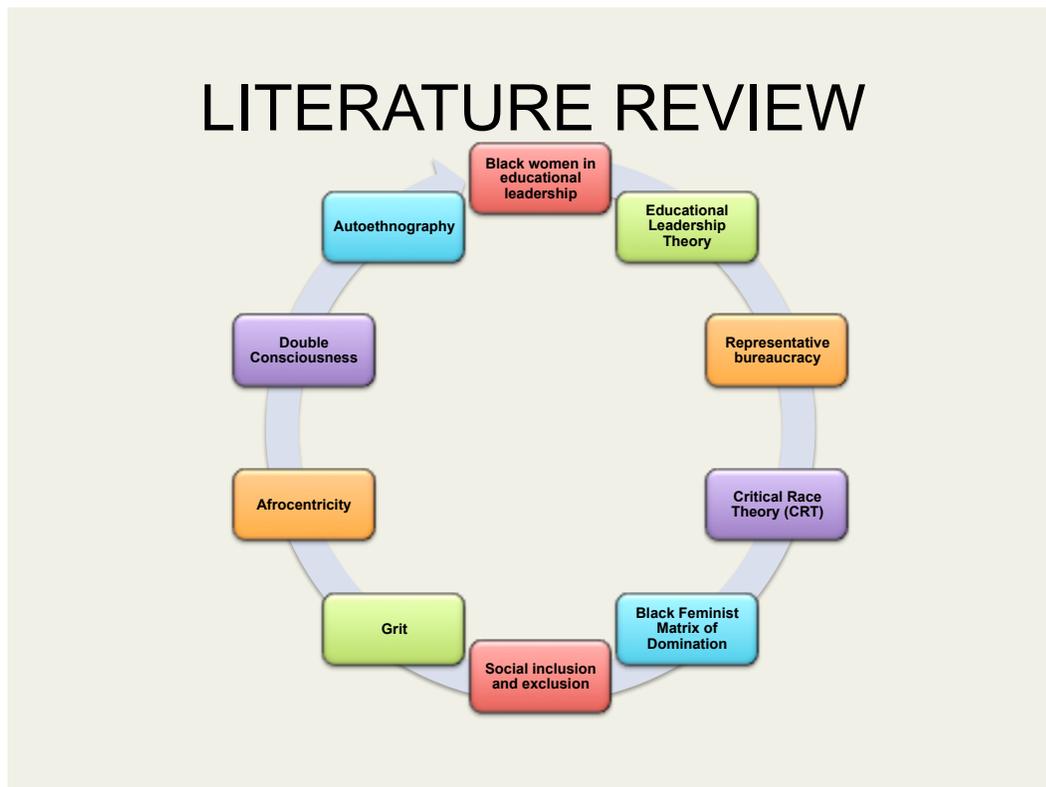
The literature available to examine educational leadership as a general topic is vast (Adkinson, 1981; Alpren, 1954; Alston, 1996; Arcy, 1980; Ashmore, Del Boca, & Wohlers, 1986; Bales, 1950; Barone, 1982; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Charters & Jovick, 1981; Coleman, 1979; Cooper, 1989; Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky (in press); Far, 1988; Fiedler, 1967; Fishel & Pottker, 1977; Frasher & Frasher, 1979; Ghiselli, 1964; Glass, McGaw, & Smith, 1981; Grobman & Hines, 1956; Gross & Trask, 1976; Halpin, 1957; Halpin, 1966; Halpin & Winer, 1957; Hedges, 1987; Hedges & Becker, 1986; Hedges & Olkin, 1985; Hemphill & Coons, 1957; Hemhill & Griffiths, 1962; Hersey & Blanchard, 1977; Hersey & Blanchard, 1982; Jacoby & Terborg, 1975; Johnson, 1989; Lewin & Lippitt, 1938; Likert, 1961;

Marnani, 1982; McGregor, 1960; Morsink, 1970; Myers, 1970; Reddin & Reddin, 1979; Rice, 1978; Rosenthal, 1984; Shakeshaft, 1980; Shakeshaft, 1987; Shakeshaft, 1989; Simien, 2005; Stogdill, 1963; Stogdill, Goode, & Day, 1962; Van Aken, 1954; Van Meir, 1973; Vroom & Yelton, 1973). Works that highlight the social exclusion of Black females from school administration and leadership roles and the lack of support they receive once they ascend to those positions, however, is limited (Anderson, 1988; Horsford & Tillman, 2014; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Tillman, 1994). Beginning with the history of education in the U.S., scholars make the case that the education system as a whole has long been one of persistent inequality from the onset limiting the opportunities of marginalized groups such as Black females from leadership roles (Anderson, 1988; King, 1991; Wilder, 2013; Woodson, 1977).

Since the landmark court case, *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, Black females have been excluded from the education profession in a myriad of ways (Alston, 2005). The *Brown* decision, although positive for ending desegregation, also contributed to the decline in the number of Black male and female teachers and administrators (Alston, 2005). Toppo (2004) found that while 82,000 Black teachers taught “as many as 2 million Black children, in the years following Brown, more than 38,000 Black teachers and administrators in 17 southern Border States lost their jobs” (p. 1). They include being denied teaching positions because of their race and subjected to institutional practices that allocated more funds to African American schools to construct new schools and remodel old ones as well as purchase instructional materials rather than to pay for necessary Black teachers and administrators (Anderson, 1988; Ramsey, 2008). Further, Black teachers lost their jobs in droves and were forced to leave the education profession in search of career

options as predominantly Black schools began to close (Ramsey, 2008). This left a community void of the primary leaders, motivators, and teachers in the classroom.

The post-*Brown* environment for school administrators provided even more disdain. Similar to teachers, Black administrators were demoted to positions of teacher or coach and lost their jobs as well (Anderson, 1988). Alston (1996) summarized the context in how Black females struggle to climb the educational career ladder, identifying five moderate or significant barriers to Black women's ascension to the role of the superintendency, which can be similarly used for the role of the principalship. They are: (a) "absence of old-boy network," support systems, or sponsorship; (b) lack of awareness of political maneuvers, (c) lack of role models; (d) societal attitudes that Blacks lack competency in leadership positions; and (e) no formal or informal method for identifying Black aspirants to administrative positions" (Alston, 1999 as cited in Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000, p. 536). These insightful findings provide a rich context to the portrayal of Black females in the literature on school leadership.



*Figure 6.* Literature Review Summary. This figure illustrates the outline of the Literature Review that follows in narrative form.

### **Black Women in Educational Leadership**

Often examined in literary or case studies from the episteme of patriarchal, White-Anglo perspectives (Mertz & McNeely, 1998), Black females are a group that bears a unique burden as they navigate life, specifically, within educational settings (Collins, 1991). Leadership studies do not typically capture the perspectives of Black female school administrators regarding practices of exclusion from leadership roles and vital mentorship that can increase their success while in the administrative position. Shanker (2015) found that even when marginalized teachers enter the workforce, the main reason they leave the profession causing a shortage in the school administration pipeline are the working conditions in which they find themselves. This further perpetuates the issues and challenges faced by diverse students in the classroom. When they do not encounter teachers and leaders who look like them in leadership roles, research suggests they are less

likely to declare goals to attain these types of positions once they enter the workforce (Simien, 2005). Furthermore, institutions of higher education also face challenges with hiring a diverse workforce including Black women due to their limited availability. One must ask, “Why is this the case?” As Black women “struggle in the academy against the twin forces of sexism and racism,” (Gregory, 1995, p. xii) awareness of their unique challenges is required for advancement in leadership and higher education positions.

In studies by Alston (2000) and Revere (1987), Black women superintendents existed in sparse numbers dating back to 1956 and the literature since then has not sufficiently dealt with the severe shortage of Black females in leadership beyond the principalship. This is important because the principals most immediately supply the pipeline for Black female superintendents or other central office administrators for mentoring these executive levels of leadership (Alston, 2000). Alston (2000) assessed the evolution of Black women in educational leadership from 1905 and concluded that there had been purposeful exclusion from these higher roles due to White male and female dominance in the positions except for elementary school (Shakeshaft, 1989). Additionally, she posited that Black women have demonstrated throughout history the ability to start, fund, and operate successful schools with and without the help of government entities such as the Freedmen’s Bureau (Alston, 2000; Anderson, 1988). Alston (2000) concludes that even when Black women desire an appointment to roles of executive educational leadership, there are still obstacles they face including lack of sponsorship and mentorship.

Loder (2005) found that there is a severe lack of “scholars and policy-makers” who possess knowledge of the “unique leadership dilemmas” of Black females (p. 299).

Benham (1997) found that not only are there low numbers of Black female leaders when

compared to their White counterparts, but there are few researchers who conduct studies. Benham (1997) concludes that the lack of research about this underrepresented group is intentional, “regarded as dubious and unlikely to be published in professional journals” (p. 344). Tillman (2004) added significant research to the field asserting that the role of Black female leaders is often undermined and not viewed with the “tradition of excellence” that it should be (Daye, 2007, p. 14). Tillman (2004), in her work, found that the contributions of Black women educational leaders date back to slavery times. The women led their communities, sometimes in secret, provided instruction to students serving as both teachers and principals, were advisors to the local superintendents, and developed new instructional methods and curricula as needed (Tillman, 2004). Loder (2005) and Mertz and McNeely (1998) highlight the research regarding Black women in leadership from the perspective of “mothering values of nurturing, caretaking, and developing children” (Daye, 2007, p. 15). Collins (1991) referred to this form of leadership by Black women as “other mothering” (Daye, 2007, p. 15). This encompasses the overview of the literary portrayal of Black women in educational leadership.

### **Leadership Theory**

There is a plethora of literature on leadership theory in general. The primary focus of existing research is by or about White males. As it pertains to women, the research referencing females consistently highlights White women as opposed to Black, Latino, or Asian women. In the field of educational leadership theory, Black women are severely underrepresented. According to Mertz and McNeely (1998), school leadership has been predominantly White male dominated since its inception. Shakeshaft (1989) said, “Studying male behavior, and more particularly white male behavior is not in and of itself

a problem. It becomes a problem when the results of studying male behavior are assumed appropriate for understanding all behavior” (Mertz & McNeely, 1998, p. 196). Shakeshaft (1989) found insufficient studies on the role of women in educational leadership and called for more research on the inclusiveness of female perspectives. DuBois also identified the importance of developing “theory grounded in the actual experience of and language of women” (DuBois, 1979, p.108).

### **Representative Bureaucracy**

Representative bureaucracy is viewed as a predominant political term, is the notion that a “demographically diverse public sector workforce will lead to policy outcomes that reflect the interests of all groups represented, including historically disadvantaged communities” (Bradbury & Kellough, 2008, p. 697). Furthermore, the main premise of representative bureaucracy is that the needs, wants, values and concerns of the traditionally marginalized populations of citizens is held near and dear to the hearts of those in positions of leadership and power. Therefore, if the leaders in political, social, and educational settings are of similar demographic representation, they are more likely than not to affirm the needs and interests of the population they mirror in policy formulation and decisions regarding implementation (Bradbury & Kellough, 2008).

Based on the findings in political science settings, representative bureaucracy theory overwhelmingly lends itself to the notion that educational outcomes of diverse students increase when they experience racially diverse leaders within their schools. Meier found that “this connection occurs...because the demographic and social backgrounds of individual bureaucrats influence their socialization experiences and the development of attitudes, values, and opinions that ultimately affect their decisions on

policy issues” (Meier 1993b; Saltzstien, 1979). There is also delineation between active versus passive representation. Active representation refers to the bureaucrat recognizing his or her capacity to adequately speak up for the interests of those whom they represent. As well as, to make an active decision to do what is necessary to ensure their needs are at the forefront of policy making decisions (Selden, 1997; Selden, Brudney, & Kellough, 1998). Passive representation, although not as explicit as its counterpart, can surely lead to active representation (Bradbury & Kellough, 2008). Selden (1997) found in a study of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Farmers Home Administration (USDAFHA) that the “passive representation of African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians positively influenced the allocation of loans favoring those groups in the Farmers Home Administration’s Rural Housing Loans program” (p. 36). In educational settings, the findings were similar in the positive outcomes of representation with racially diverse teachers. The work of Meier and Stewart (1992) and Meier (1993) demonstrated that the role of racially diverse Latino teachers in a passive manner of serving in the teacher role led to the eventual active representation of Latino students. The same can be said of the way in which African American or Black teachers represent both actively and passively, the interests of African American or Black students in educational settings. As the quantity of Black teachers increase in the workforce, the more concentrated the pool of potential Black school administrators will be; therefore, leading to active representation at the classroom, school, district, state, national, and global levels.

It is also critical to consider the work of Selden (1997) who posited that the “minority representative role” is critical in assessing the willingness of “bureaucrats to see themselves as advocates for, or representatives of, minority interests” (p. 140). As it relates

to education, when racially diverse teachers, as well as, non-racially diverse or White teachers see themselves as advocates and representatives of the interests of the students whom they phenotypically relate to, the better their social and educational outcomes. Educators must see themselves as “representatives of minority concerns” (Bradbury & Kellough, 2008, p. 699) and demonstrate this passive or active representation toward students and parents alike to increase the positive life and academic outcomes of racially diverse students.

### **Situational Leadership**

The Situational Approach (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969b) deals with leaders and how they evaluate employees to assess their competence and commitment to perform a given task. This model is based on Reddin’s (1967) 3-D Management Style Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969a). There are four levels of support that correspond leadership styles to certain behaviors that determine the level of support employees receive, which are: Supporting, Delegating, Coaching, and Directing (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969b) Situational leadership highlights how behavior patterns influence others. There is directive (task) behaviors and supportive (relationship) behaviors. These behaviors are outlined in four major quadrants that direct the subordinate or participant and are shown below in Figure 7.

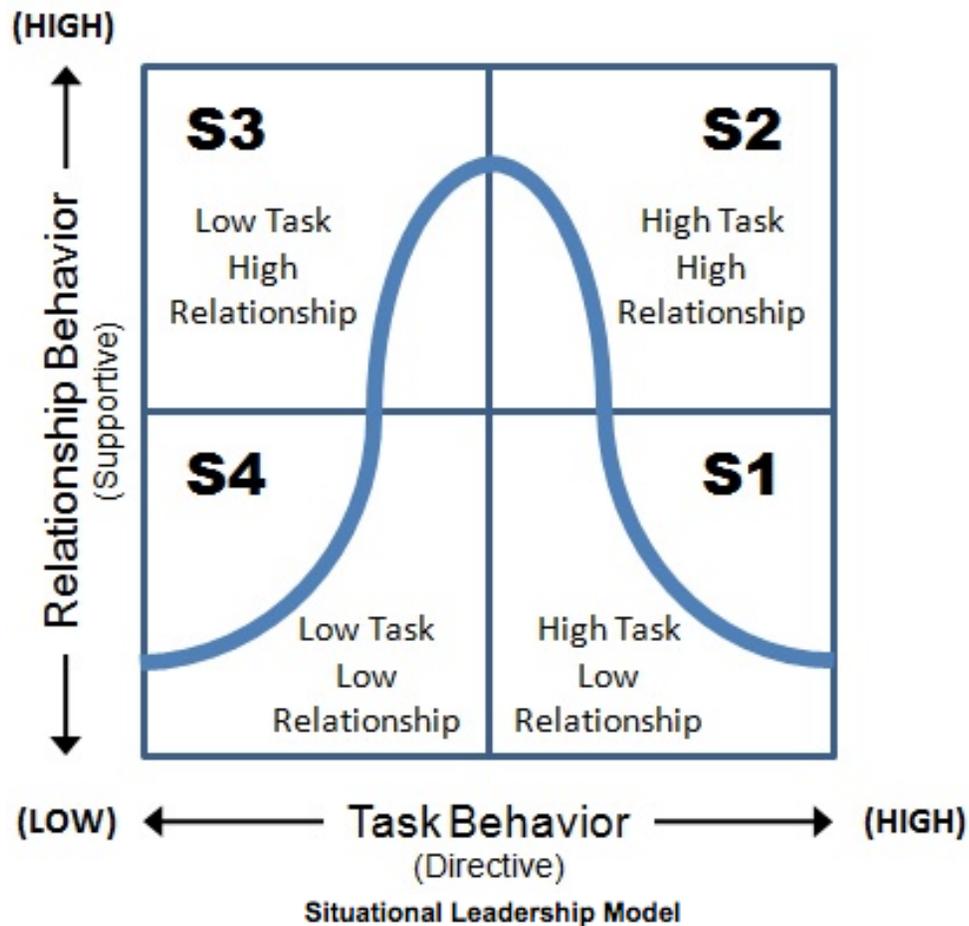


Figure 7. Situational Leadership Style. This figure represents the process of demonstrating project management skills.

- S1- High directive-Low supportive: This directing style focuses on goal achievement with little supportive behavior.
- S2- High directive-High supportive: This coaching style focuses on goals and maintains emotional needs.
- S3- High supportive-Low directive: This quadrant focuses on supporting the leaders more so than directing them, as more independence is evident.
- S4- Low supportive-Low directive: This sector deals with delegating that offers less task input and social support.

As the subordinate is further developed, the degree to which their competence and level of commitment necessary to accomplish certain tasks are analyzed. The appropriate level of support he or she receives then determines the level of involvement the leader mentor provides. Leaders move along this continuum and constantly assess where they are in the process. They are:

- D1: Low incompetence, high in commitment
- D2: Some competence, low in commitment
- D3: Moderate to high competence, lack of commitment
- D4- High in development, high commitment, and competence

Utilizing these development levels helps to inform the procedures that will occur in a mentor/mentee relationship.

### **Critical Race Theory (CRT)**

As the founder and creator of Critical Race Theory (CRT), law professor Bell sought to assert an academic philosophy wherein society is divided among two racial lines: White oppressors and Black victims (Bell, 1976; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This aligned with early Marxism claims of the class theory model separating the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (Grusky, 2001, p. 93). CRT is used to address the notion that race is a social construct and is not biological in nature with solid scientific evidence (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1995) was the first scholar to construct educational application of CRT and identified key challenges in the scholarship surrounding CRT declaring that race as a mechanism to determine equity in schools is still prevalent. She posited three concepts regarding CRT in education. They were (1) “race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States”; (2) “U.S. society is based on property rights”;

and (3) the intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequity” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 48).

CRT is best iterated using five key components. They include (a) counter-storytelling; (b) the performance of racism; (c) Whiteness as property; (d) interest convergence; and (e) the critique of liberalism (Bell, 1976; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

### **Black Feminist Matrix of Domination**

Early feminist theories did not necessarily apply to Black women and the issues they faced in neither society nor the evolution of Black Feminism. These frameworks are another way to examine the experiences of Black women around issues of race, social class, and gender. The feminist movement has characteristically associated its mantras with the perspectives of White females who challenge dominant White patriarchal systems of oppression, which is why using the lens of Black women to examine their placement, and status in society is especially important (Collins, 1991; DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1998). Collins (1991) said that “...placing Black women’s experiences at the center of analysis offers fresh insights on the prevailing concepts, paradigms, and epistemologies of this worldview and its feminist and Afrocentric critiques” (p. 221)

The history of Black females in the U.S. has been tumultuous. Facing a series of oppressive encounters and hegemonic White patriarchal societal practices such as slavery, sexual abuse, and harassment, Black women, have suffered tremendously (DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1998). In her work, *Black Feminist Thought* (1991), Collins (1991) shares that “all African American women share the common experience of being Black women in a society that denigrate women of African descent” (p. 22). Through the work and the tireless efforts of Black feminists, work is done to replace negative images of Black

women with new ones that change the narrative toward a positive expression of Black women that allows them to pursue freedom and equality (DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1998).

Meanwhile, the Black feminist movement deals with the portrayal of Black women as “self-defined, self-reliant individuals confronting race, gender, and class oppression” as well as the importance of knowledge as power (Lemert, 2004, p. 230). The movement continues with the expression of Black women’s power expressed in the creation of alternative communities to cope with the triplicate issues they face (Lemert, 2004). Collins (1991, p. 221-223) offers two primary foci toward bringing Black feminist thought to the forefront of analysis.

“Black feminist thought fosters the fundamental pragmatic shift in how we think about oppression. By embracing a paradigm of race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression, Black feminist thought reconceptualizes the social relations of domination and resistance. Second, Black feminist thought addresses ongoing epistemological debates in feminist theory and in the sociology of knowledge concerning ways of assessing truth.”

Therefore, bringing the Black feminist perspective to the center of the conversation surrounding the quantity and treatment of Black female school administrators in education is imperative.

### **Social Inclusion and Exclusion**

Ballantine and Hammack (2012) asserted that educational attainment is a direct predictor of life success. Since Puritan settlers have long excluded minoritized individuals from the general process of educational inclusiveness since the first schools opened in 1635, their opportunities to achieve academic success have been blocked in several ways (Anderson, 1988; Smith, 1966; Wilder, 2013; Woodson, 1977). They include the denial of access to appropriate education like their White counterparts, the lack of access to equal facilities, and absence of exposure to high-quality academic materials (Anderson, 1988).

Limited enrollment in honors and advanced placement courses, which are required to attend college, unfairly keep students stratified into low ability course tracks (Holcomb-McCoy & Booker, 2012). Furthermore, Ballantine and Hammack (2012) report inequalities exist in the societal class structure, capitalism, and modernity and each area impacts education attainment negatively. It then becomes increasingly difficult for racially minoritized students who are also economically disadvantaged to become economically stable adults, resist the tendency toward class reproduction, and instead practice learning, thinking differently, and independently (Ballantine & Hammack, 2012).

In a study by Brunner and Peyton-Caire (2000), a Black superintendent was interviewed regarding her experiences in the ascension to her current role while a Black female graduate student responded to the superintendent's interview through narrative analysis. The interview revealed instances of marginalization while the narrative response also confirmed instances of social exclusion revealed by the superintendent. Social exclusionary practices experienced by both Black females in the superintendency and graduate school respectively included being "left out of the loop," instances of invisibility, silencing and being passed over for opportunities (Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000, p. 540).

### **Grit**

Research qualifies grit as "the quality that enables individuals to work hard and stick to their long-term passions and goals" (Perkins-Gough, 2013, p. 14). Grit, as defined by Duckworth (2016), is known as a non-cognitive trait that relates to either "responding resiliently to situations of failure and adversity or being a hard worker" as well as "Having consistent interests---focused passions---over a long time" (Perkins-Gough, 2013, p. 14). Duckworth (2016) found that grit was the main predictor of a person's success as it

relates to college admissions and retention at prestigious institutions, National Spelling Bee contestants, and first-year teachers who work in high needs schools (Perkins-Gough, 2013). Utilizing this element of human capacity, grit can be a welcoming trait of any leader seeking upper levels of management.

### **Afrocentricity**

Traore (2007) asserted that if people of African descent are to actualize freedom really, they must first free themselves from the Eurocentric perspective and construct their identity based on Afrocentric thought (Hamlet, 1998). Woodson (1977) and Asante (1998), the fathers of Afrocentricity, posited five key tenets of the framework to analyze the experiences of Blacks. They are (a) the consideration that “no phenomenon can be apprehended adequately without locating it first; (b) the consideration of phenomena to be diverse, dynamic, and in motion while the researcher acknowledges his or her role in the process; (c) the Afrocentric method is a form of cultural criticism that examines etymological uses of words and terms in order to know the source of an author’s location; (d) the Afrocentric method seeks to uncover the masks behind the rhetoric of power, privilege, and position in order to establish how principal myths create place; (e) the location of the "imaginative structure of a system of economics, bureau of politics, policy of government, expression of cultural form in the attitude, direction, and language of the phenom, be it text, institution, personality, interaction, or event” (Asante, 1991, p.172).

Asante (1998) asserted that what is central to education and the critical way in which the Afrocentric framework should be challenged is that: (a) it questions the imposition of the White supremacist view as universal and/or classical (Asante, 1998); (b) it demonstrates the indefensibility of racist theories that assault multiculturalism and

pluralism; and (c) it projects a humanistic and pluralistic viewpoint by articulating Afrocentricity as a valid, non-hegemonic perspective (p. 173). With this in mind, the Afrocentric perspective is central to the creation of a critical curriculum in K-12 education, which should train students to know the true history of various points in time, traditionally depicted from a Eurocentric perspective.

To examine the role Black females, play in school administration, the Afrocentric feminist epistemology is relevant (Hamlet, 1998). Interestingly, the concept of domination is like what Asante (1998) says occurs when outside influences suppresses African culture out of a person. Additionally, Collins (1991) illuminated Black feminism and the intersectionality of race, class, and gender.

The universality of a dominant culture produces the implication that the dominant one is the standard and all others should acquiesce (Asante, 1998). Nobles (1976) described how Blacks feel about dominant culture as people who face a type of “cultural incarceration” (p. 11). Asante (1991) confirms that Blacks must become “cultural scientists” to reclaim what was lost during years of oppressive practices by dominant cultures (p. 10).

### **Double Consciousness**

From the onset of scholars such as Du Bois into the field of academe and sociology, the examination of the importance of Blacks in every component of society occurred. While modern social theory exposed readers to the massive social change in Europe from 1750-1920 (Morrison, 2006), Du Bois (1903/1994) played a key role in framing the intellectual identity of the Black protest in America and additionally the anti-conformity to White supremacy that existed during the early twentieth century (Du Bois,

1903/1994). Du Bois (1903/1994) knew that opportunities were eliminated for African Americans and were therefore, an early proponent of what is known today as the opportunity gap, a term researched and clarified by Darling-Hammond (2010). Many of the same concepts Du Bois (1903/1994) addressed are still very evident in today's public society and schools alike. He says that being poor is hard, but being a poor race in a land where there is plenty is the bottom of all hardships (Du Bois, 1903/1994). The notion is that unless the opportunity gap is addressed, the presence of social and political hegemony shall remain a visible and deterring force in the lives of African Americans.

Du Bois (1903/1994) explains that double-consciousness, "the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p.2). Furthermore, he proclaimed that Black people war between the identity of "an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Du Bois, 1994, p.2). The concept of double-consciousness is one that allows the Black person to be authentically American and Black simultaneously without ridicule and degradation. He further highlights the journey of merging one's double consciousness into a better, truer self (Du Bois, 1903/1994).

Black female teachers to exhibit a double-consciousness as they help students "become socially literate individuals" (Ramsey, 2008, p. 90). Their impact and influence in the lives of their students were vital in the efforts to desegregate schools in the South. According to Jean-Marie, Williams, and Sherman (2009), Black women serve as unconventional advocates for the educational success of children they serve. Jean-Marie et al. (2009) further asserted that the activism, leadership, and spirituality allow Black women

to “negotiate the injustices inflicted upon them” (p. 60). National education policies have been instituted as an attempt to solve inequities such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, its reauthorization and renaming as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation of 2001, and the most recent Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, Black women still lack adequate resources and support to succeed educationally in a global society (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). They are marginalized and essentially voiceless in their communities where they were once viewed as community elders, justice seekers, liberation and empowerment activists, and staunch proponents of maximizing educational opportunities for all students (Jean-Marie et al., 2009).

After a review of the literature, gaps exist surrounding the social inclusion of Black female administrators. This is problematic since historically; Black females are critical to the learning environments in K-12 schools (Anderson, 1988; Horsford & Tillman, 2014; Jean-Marie et al., 2009). One primary gap is in the area of studies that not only engage the Black female leaders in the discourse about educational leadership but also in the creation of leadership theory that captures their views to develop culturally relevant theories that inform practice. Furthermore, another gap is the voice of the Black female leader engaged in the context of professional education journals that highlight their perspective. These gaps in the current literature provide a basis for this proposed study.

### **Autoethnography**

Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010) describe autoethnography as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience to understand cultural experience” (p. 2). They further posited autoethnography is “both process and product” (p. 2). Chang (2008) reported a characteristic of the autoethnography

approach provided “personal fascination with self-reflection, introspection, intrapersonal intelligence, and self-analysis” (p. 11).

The basis of autoethnographic research relies on the reflective recollection of past-lived experiences (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). Most autoethnographic studies are conducted in the first person narrative form and divulge personal experiences (Haynes, 2011). As synthesized by Haynes (2011, p.136), the various methods for autoethnography include novel (Ellis, 2004), dramatized episodes or conversations (Ellis & Bockner, 2000), vignettes (Haynes, 2006; Humphreys, 2005), personal narratives or stories (Bochner, 1997), poems and performance (Spry, 2011), field notes (Jenks, 2002), and diaries (Vickers, 2002).

Chang (2008) also recognizes the complexities of the cultural aspect of autoethnography and poses a four-part theoretical framework in her book, *Autoethnography as Method*. She suggests that culture, from an anthropological perspective, is best understood under four assumptions: (1) “culture is a group-oriented concept by which self is always connected with others; (2) the reading and writing of self-narratives provides a window through which self and others can be examined and understood; (3) telling one’s story does not automatically result in the *cultural* understanding of self and others, which only grows out of in-depth cultural analysis and interpretation; and (4) autoethnography is an excellent instructional tool to help not only social scientists, but also practitioners such as teachers, medical personnel, counselors, and human services workers—gain profound understanding of self and others and function more effectively with others from diverse cultural backgrounds” (Chang, 2008, p. 13). Each assumption assists in the understanding of the how autoethnography can greatly

contribute to furthering research about cultures that closely associates with authentic accounts of experiences. Additionally, autoethnography brings a specific voice to the storied and lived life of the person telling the story.

Autoethnography was born out of the desire of social scientists to dispel the myths that there is one narrative to characterize all people and that supposed “facts and truths” were “inextricably tied to the vocabularies and paradigms the scientists used to represent them” (as cited in Kuhn, 1996; Rorty 1982, p.2). Social scientists found autoethnography as a way to tell the unique experiences of others from a non-colonialist perspective which seeks to demean and alter their recollection of their untold stories (Conquergood, 1991; Ellis, 2004; Riedmann, 1993). Autoethnography serves as a way of “producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 735). This form of research allows subjectivity to live at the center stage with emotion and researcher influence on the findings (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010; Peshkin, 1988).

From a racial and gendered perspective, Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2010) also found that to ignore the unique cultural conditions people have and insist on the “canonical forms of doing and writing research” is to assume advocacy from “a White, masculine, heterosexual, middle/upper-classed, Christian, able-bodied perspective” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010, p. 6). To showcase the cultural uniqueness of a particular group, one must strongly consider that autoethnography is a process that expands meaning and understanding far beyond the normal interpretation (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). This broader context further explores the multi-faceted array of the autoethnographic approach.

Autoethnography can be conducted using a variety of methods depending on the “study of others, the researcher’s self and interaction with others, traditional analysis, and the interview context, as well as on power relationships” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010, p. 7). They include indigenous/native ethnographies, narrative ethnographies, reflexive/didactic interviews, reflexive ethnographies, layered accounts, interactive interviews, community autoethnographies, co-constructed narratives, and personal narratives (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). For the purpose of this study, I utilize the personal narrative approach to delve deep my life as a K-12 student, pre-service and in-service teacher, and current school administrator revealing detailed academic and personal experiences. The personal narrative approach provides the context for “reflexive intellectual inquiry” (Haynes, 2011, p. 134). I also take an analytic approach critical analysis to my experiences based on my data collection (Anderson, 2006).

The literary review of the various research-based phenomenon is relevant to this study. Each topic explored adds value to the perspective that I, the principal investigator, bring to the research study to provide appropriate context for the experiences of Black female school administrators in their work and social settings.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### **Researcher's Role**

As a researcher of self, my role throughout this autoethnography is to reveal my challenges and successes, illuminate a pathway for others to achieve, experience, or just know what I have been through, and take a step back from my life of 37 years and critically examine the many facets that have contributed to my educational outcomes and subsequent career as a school administrator. My purpose is to demonstrate how I have navigated my life space and reveal experiences of either social inclusion or exclusion in my role as student, teacher, and school administrator. This autoethnography serves to expose factors that contributed to my retention in the job as a school administrator as well as suggest strategies to increase the amount of Black female school administrators in the profession.

### **Participant Selection**

I chose to do an autoethnography to examine my own lived experiences to give voice to them and the meanings I have derived from my life. I analyze my own experiences because I firmly believe that the best way to understand a phenomenon is to recall the one you either have experienced or are currently experiencing. I am the best person to not only tell my story, but to critically analyze it as well. As a current elementary school principal, I am more consciously aware of the way in which I came to this position, my interactions with various persons in this role ranging from students, teachers, community members, and colleagues, as well as how I, along with my life experiences, fit into my current role as a school leader. This autoethnographic study highlights my K-12 schooling experiences, my early career teaching experiences, and steps leading to my promotion to school

administrator. More importantly, I also focus my data collection on my current role as an elementary school principal. This provides context on ways in which I experience social inclusionary or exclusionary practices, and how all of this influences my retention as a principal.

### **Research Design**

The qualitative design for this research study is an autoethnography based on my life as a school principal since I identify as a Black female. According to Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010), autoethnography is used to “describe and systematically analyze personal experience to understand cultural experience” (p. 1). Unlike traditional qualitative studies, autoethnography uses a variety of qualitative methods to capture the essence of the primary author’s experience such as journals, academic year calendars, culture gram, life timeline, and narrative reflective essay. The primary data collection methods for this study include personal narratives (Bochner, 2007), culture grams (Chang, 2008), career timeline (Chang, 2008), and novel (Ellis, 2004).

There are several forms of autoethnography, each which offers its allure to qualitative research. The primary version used for this study is participatory action research (PAR) along with critical autoethnography. For the purpose of this study, autoethnography is an effective methodology to capture the true essence of one Black female teacher’s experiences that led to her appointment as a school administrator.

Hancock, Allen, and Lewis (2015) revealed that we construct knowledge based on how we live and what we experience. Therefore, this type of research design is relevant to develop a thorough understanding of the cultural experience one has and a person’s connection to it (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005). The design of this research study is

emerging as there is not one systematic way in which to conduct an autoethnography. I engaged in an observational data collection period for a 4-week period utilizing the following schedule:

- Week 1: Personal observations, note-taking, classroom observations, timelines.
- Week 2: Personal observations, note-taking, classroom observations, timelines, informal teacher conversations.
- Week 3: Personal observations, note-taking, classroom observations, timelines, informal student conversations.
- Week 4: Personal observations, note-taking, classroom observations, personal reflections.

The period was from Monday, January 23, 2017, through Friday, February 17, 2017. The data collection consisted of a combination of observations, informal conversations, group discussions, classroom observations, note-taking, and personal reflections about each data set. After data collection, the narrative analysis process began with key word identification, coding, and thematic development.

### **Data Collection Methods**

First, I utilized my four research questions to decide on the type of data I needed to collect. The research questions led me to collect observational data of my daily work and professional time in my school from 7:45 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. for approximately four weeks. The research questions for this study were:

- 1. As a Black female student, how did I come to know the impact of inclusionary or exclusionary practices in my K-12 schooling experiences?*
- 2. As a Black female teacher, how did I become a school administrator?*

3. *As a Black female teacher, how did I come to know the impact of inclusionary or exclusionary practices on my interest and success as a leader?*
4. *As a Black female school administrator, what factors impacted my retention in the field?*

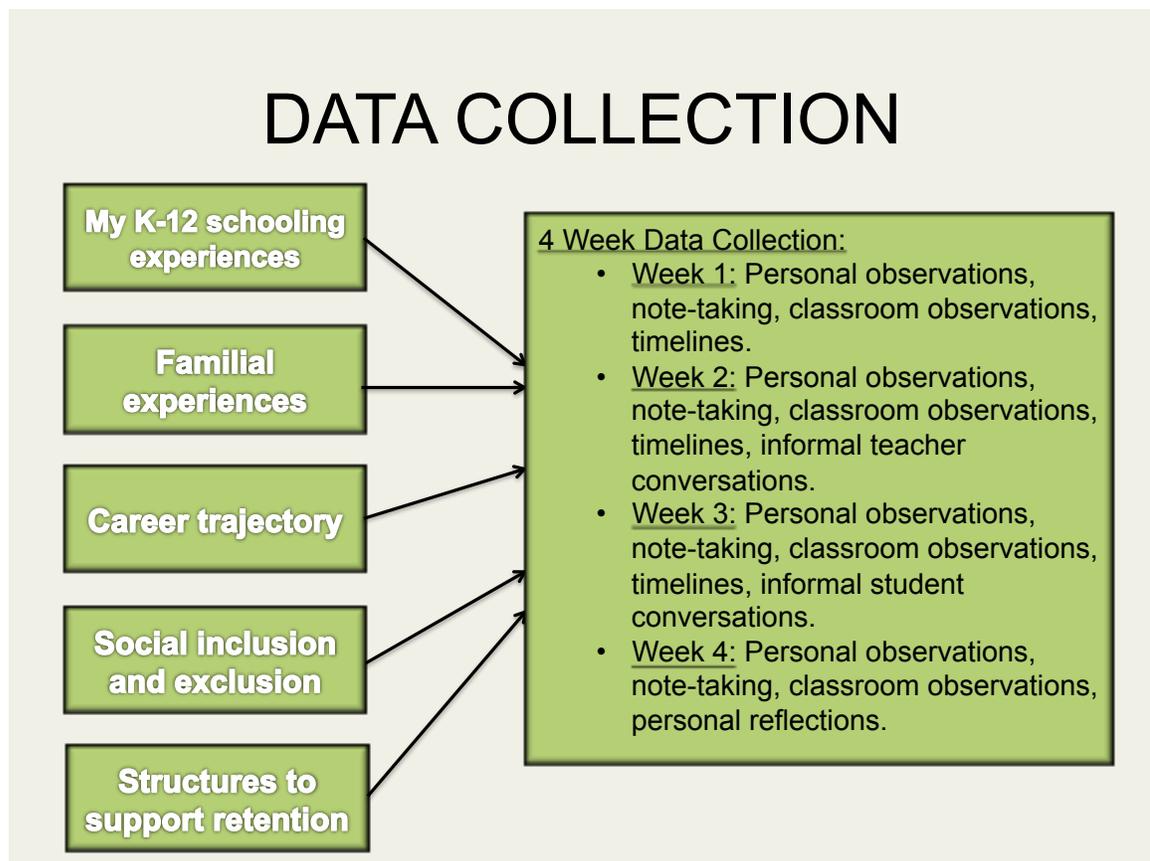
Daily, I utilized a journal to record observational data ranging from observations of myself, interactions with staff members, students, and parents, to thoughts about my interactions with others. I recorded occurrences of events regarding what happened first, second, and third, as well as wrote down how I responded to what someone said, what someone did, or feelings in me that resulted.

For further clarity of data, each week during the four-week observational period, I reviewed the data and made clarifying notes in the margins of the journal to further substantiate what I may have meant in a section of the journal. This was important, as I needed to ensure complete and thorough understanding of the meaning behind various journal entries during the week in which the notes were recorded or closely thereafter.

Autoethnography as a method is found to have its primary purpose as providing insight into a person's lived experiences (Boje & Tyler, 2009; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Humphreys, 2005). As a Black female school administrator in a large Southeastern state, I have served as an assistant principal and principal in a K-12 public school setting. I also taught in middle and high schools and was an administrator on each level: elementary, middle, and high school. The data collected captures my life narrative, early career teaching experiences, and journey toward school administration.

The following tools are part of the collected data regarding my experiences: journaling, observational note taking, participating in self-reflection practice, and

interviews with those who observe me on a regular basis. Due to the self-inquiry basis of autoethnography, my data collection extends beyond my educational experiences and those of being a teacher and school administrator to my personal life. I also included in my data analysis a book chapter I authored, which highlights my early childhood and K-12 educational experiences. The encounters from the book chapter introduced an element of international education exposure that I had not originally factored into the various influences present in my life. Utilizing the book chapter, I was able to analyze why I do certain things a particular way and how my exposure to military life and Asian culture as an elementary age student impacted my adult life.

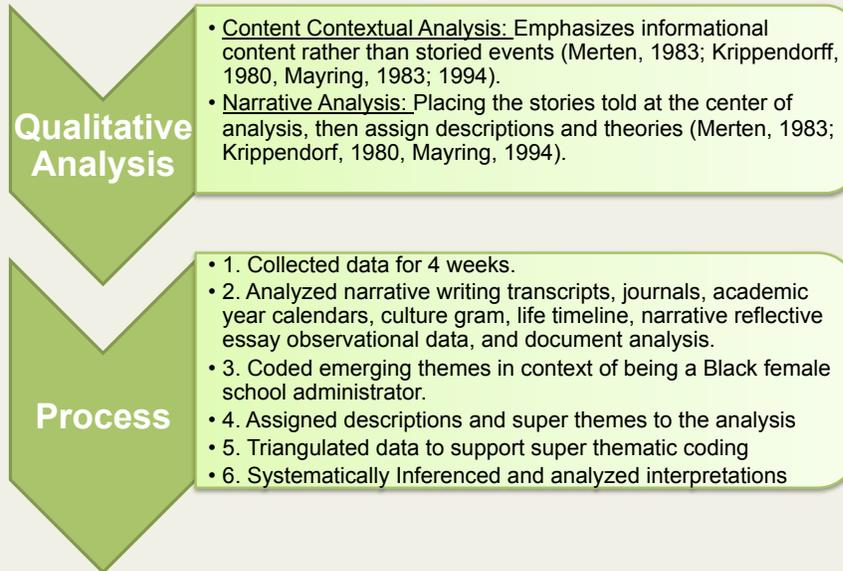


*Figure 8.* Data Collection Summary. This figure illustrates the data collection process for this research study.

## **Data Analysis Methods**

Data were analyzed using content contextual and narrative analyses methods (Merten, 1983; Krippendorff, 1980, Mayring, 1994). The narrative writing transcripts, journals, academic year calendars, culture gram (Chang, 2008), life timeline, narrative reflective essay observational data, and document analysis are used to categorize and derive certain themes and patterns from the data. Coding of emergent themes took place by me, the researcher, to analyze the context of Black female educator's experiences in obtaining access to leadership roles as well as from a lens of CRT. I then allocated descriptions and themes based on predominant data that emerged as a result of closely reading and analyzing the text from data collection journals. Data triangulation took place to synthesize the data collected as well as to support the super thematic coding I derived and concluded in the analysis process. Systematic inferencing and interpretations provide opportunities to analyze recurring themes and make relevant suggestions for future implications. Emerging themes and initial coding is captured in Chapter 4: Findings, however, Figure 9 captures the data analysis strategy and process.

# DATA ANALYSIS



*Figure 9.* Data Analysis. This figure illustrates the data analysis and process used for this research study.

## **Procedures and Analysis**

To analyze the autoethnographic methods chosen for this study, the content contextual and narrative analysis methods proved to be most appropriate. Using the content contextual analysis process to analyze data first involved the examination of the various documents collected for analysis. I utilized my reflective journals, culture gram, academic year calendars, and published a book chapter for this document analysis. I identified raw words to represent key words and phrases occurring throughout the data collected. This was done in a variety of ways. First, I reflected on my early, middle, and high school time periods of my K-12 schooling, my teaching career, and my school administration journey and analyzed the reflections. Second, I reviewed the reflections and

provided further clarification of the content by making notes in the margins of the reflective journals. This allowed me to clarify my thoughts or provide more detail of the meaning behind a concept or experience. Third, I analyzed the narrative journals and my culture gram and created open codes based on the raw words highlighted in the data. Additionally, once I confirmed the open codes, I determined which ones coalesced together for the purpose of establishing saliency of the data and avoiding data saturation throughout the data analysis process. I used the open codes to develop themes resulting from the narrative analysis process. Lastly, these themes became super themes and were compared to one another to synthesize the findings.

### **Further Consideration**

Some of the considerations of this study include my own risk of revealing the real me and exposing myself to others in a vulnerable way that autoethnography forces one to do. Opening the reality of my findings to anonymous readers is a huge undertaking as I fear being misunderstood or as if my story does not hold value in the educational world. This study heightened my own understanding of the ways in which I have experienced social inclusion and exclusion in my current work environment as well as my life. This awareness has allowed me to make practical adjustments to my work and personal situation that influences my outcomes in a positive manner. The exposure to my own awareness makes me alert to the social inclusion or exclusion others may experience who are racially diverse. It makes me want to take on a role of advocating for others to have the space to dialog and process just what they experience on a day to day basis and provide support to them as I feel I needed from time to time but was unsure of what that should look like.

To address ethical and political issues that may have emerged because of my narrative analysis, I tried to remain as objective as I could in the process without naming people specifically who may have had a negative impact on my K-12 schooling, teaching, or early administrative career experiences. This study has implication in the broader literary spectrum as it provides context for the experiences of one Black female school administrator rather than reporting on what others say about me as if I am not able to speak for myself. Although this is a common feature of ethnographic and phenomenological studies about racialized and gendered groups of educators, I sought to change the paradigm and report on myself from my perspective. This not only opened me up for more vulnerability, but also exposed areas I did not originally view as an open door for analysis. Instead, if I were to be studied by someone else, I may only expose parts of my true being for fear of looking bad or not quite as polished as I have been trained to portray.

### **Strategies for Quality**

The strategies I used to enhance the quality of my study were to discuss my findings with two professors for written feedback as well as a classmate who helped me create an additional analysis of my initial findings. The professors helped me engage in further critical analysis of what the literature has already shown with relation to my topic, and one even provided current insight on the field of Black females in school administration having served as a researcher of this group for 20 years. Additionally, I engaged in informal conversations about the data with teachers who have been in public education for more than 10 years regarding my perceptions of the data and subsequent analysis.

## **Trustworthiness**

To establish trustworthiness in this study, I identified my subjectivity by explicitly declaring it at the beginning. This reveals the bias of me as the researcher and the fact that researcher subjectivity is welcomed in autoethnography especially since it is challenging to figuratively step outside to analyze oneself or one's experiences objectively. Validity ensued as a result of using sound research questions according to the IRB protocol as well as ensuring the ethical treatment of participants. However, since no additional participants were utilized in this study, IRB approval was not required. To further establish trustworthiness, triangulation is done to ensure “multiple landmarks in navigation and surveying” occur (Seale, 1999, p. 53). Approaches to triangulation in this study include data, investigator, theoretical, and methodological triangulation (Roulston, 2010). Furthermore, dependability is established through the systematic design of the data collection methods and a clear audit trail that would allow readers to clearly understand not only the research processes but the thought processes I held as the researcher. The same audit trail would allow for confirmability, inform triangulated research findings, and allow the reader to understand the connections between the data and the conclusions I drew. Finally, transferability is established through the thick description of a methodology allowing readers to draw their conclusions about the relevance of the research to the field of educational leadership for Black females.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

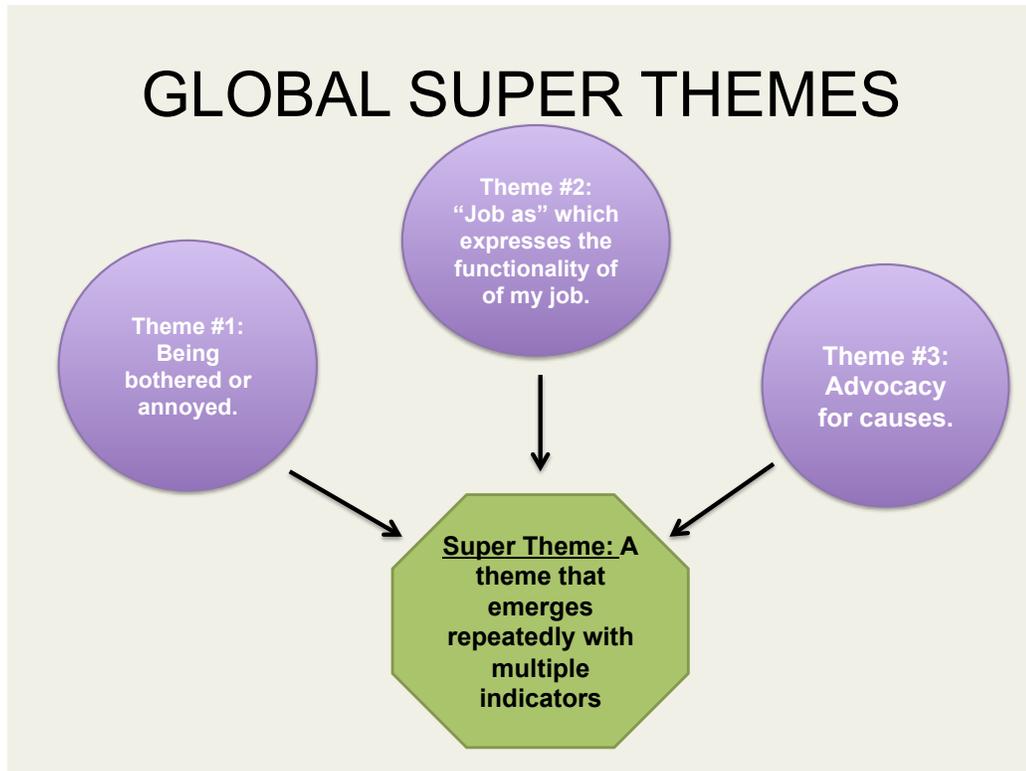
As a 37-year old Black woman, I interpreted my life experiences as a series of connected events that follow one another more so than collectively comprise my unique blend of personality. Throughout this autoethnography process, I have utilized the data collected to tell the story of how my educational experiences have been impacted in the outcomes of feelings of inclusion and exclusion. I was curious as to how my life experiences factored into my ability to stay with one career for a long period of time and whether race was a factor as I originally hypothesized it would be. I am in awe that an encounter I may have originally interpreted to be negative from an outsider (a teacher or fellow educator) could have been influenced by my tone or attitude at the time of the interaction. Although I have compiled three super themes resulting from my data collection and analysis, I am very much a passionate advocate of things; particularly education related matters that influence policies and life outcomes for children. When anyone steps in the way of my passion and focus, I inherently have a problem with them or their conversation. It does not matter who it is. It can be teachers, students, government officials, community members, organization representatives, or whomever. Whatever person or structures impede my progress in ensuring people have equitable access to opportunities, they go on my “bad” list. That list then manifests in instances of social exclusion because I exclude them from my life or my circle. I would probably have thousands more friends, acquaintances, or colleagues if it were not for the file and sort approach I take toward those who do not share my vision of advocating for children. To provide further clarity of the themes I developed and how they manifested in the data, my analysis follows.

## **Theme Introduction**

As I entered this process of data collection for this autoethnography, I expected to see certain themes of racial conflict, tension with women—particularly White female teachers, as well as challenges with systemic structures and how they impact my advocacy for others. Utilizing the narrative analysis process outlined in Chapter 3, and after the initial coding, I was pleasantly surprised about the three themes that emerged as what I will refer to as “super themes” or “global themes” of the observational data I collected.

A super theme is a theme that emerges repeatedly with multiple indicators that this particular theme is bubbling to the top (Attride-Sterling, 2001). The term derives from qualitative researchers who explore basic theme creation and how it evolves into organizing themes based on similar issues. Further, Attride-Sterling (2001) asserts that once themes organize into similar categories, they then develop into global themes. These global themes become a “concluding or final tenet” (Attride-Sterling, 2001, p. 389) that tell the story of the data presented and collected.

The coalescence of codes, which can be found in brief in Appendices B and C, led to the following themes: (1) Being bothered or annoyed; (2) The “Job as” theme expressing the functionality of my job; and (3) Advocacy for causes. Each of these themes emerged as a super theme due to the overwhelming amount of times they surfaced in the observational data collected and various document analysis. To support the themes developed, I provide an analysis of each below.



*Figure 10.* Global Super Themes. This figure illustrates the three global themes that emerged from the data analysis of all available data sources.

### **Theme 1: Being bothered or annoyed**

The concept of being bothered or annoyed surprised me the most of all the themes concluded. I think it is because I try to be tolerant of other people so much that I had a hard time grasping that I could be bothered or annoyed by those with whom I encounter on a regular basis in educational settings. As inclusive as I try to be, I realize that I am mostly inclusive of those who are unable to help or advocate for themselves, such as children. When I encounter people who reasonably should be able to take care of themselves mentally, emotionally, and economically yet choose to dwell on insignificant or trivial issues, it literally boils my blood. I do not like drama nor tolerate those who waste my time

with insignificant stories about their day and this is what my data revealed. To be honest, I never thought I would see that.

I am also equally bothered and annoyed by systems and structures such as educational, governmental, and financial institutions. I believe this is because there is a misalignment of my values with the existing system leading to being annoyed, then bothered. Based on my childhood and the systems to which I was exposed, I did not have a healthy identity of who I really was. In my book chapter, I cite this very dissonance from my identity development:

“I was born and raised in Houston, Texas. My race is Black and I identify as an African American woman. With that in mind, in my early years I did not have a full understanding of what it meant to be a Black female because I was more or less a product of Eurocentric global cultural domination. As Carter G. Woodson wrote in *The Mis-education of the Negro*, Blacks were not placed as the central subject matter in their own history. Rather, through Eurocentric history, education and theology, they were considered barbaric and portrayed as sub-human, which was then transmitted to future generations. I must admit, I was a victim of mis-education and I was guilty of not fully understanding my place in history or the society I thought I knew so well” (Steele, 2016, p. 12).

Based on this excerpt, my Blackness developed over the course of my entire life causing me to become increasingly aware of this part of my identity. Once I developed more self-awareness about my racial identity, it caused me to question the systemic structures, which I viewed as contradictory to the way in which I wanted to express myself as a student, a teacher, and as a school administrator. To me, if I am supporting a group of students who are unable to represent themselves adequately for the desired positive life outcomes, then the way I act or behave should not be a factor in that discourse. However,

so many times, my interactions with people have been sources of conversations about whether I am inclusive or exclusive of others. For years, I interpreted this sequence of events as instances of social exclusion rather than seeing that I was socially excluding myself due to my desire to dedicate myself to the causes of others.

If something/someone bothers me, I push them to the side. I ask myself, “Why am I bothered by this so much.” This creates a story of why. I ask, “Is it because this is who I am?” I have concluded that it is because this is just the way I am but it is also due to the way in which I was cultured and influenced over the course of my schooling years. I remember my first distinct feeling of social inclusion. It occurred when I first moved to Japan. I recount the experience below.

“On my first day of school, I remember when my teacher introduced me as Aimy Williams, the girl who had just moved there from Houston, Texas. I took my seat and realized that life would never be the same again. The class was working on six-digit subtraction. At this stage of my life, I had never seen that type of math. In my previous school, we had done two and three-digit addition and subtraction. I always thought subtraction was the more difficult task of the two, so being introduced to six-digit subtraction before I had seen four and five-digit addition was just beyond my exposure at that time. I was in utter shock. I remember feeling like I was the slowest person in the room and that everyone knew what was going on except for me. Thankfully, I had a teacher who took me under her tutelage and assisted me with math and from there, things started to take a turn for the better. The process of catching up to where my classmates were mathematically included engrossing myself in the culture of highly engaging instruction from my teachers, as well as meeting high expectations. I had to catch up to the pace of my classmates without being concerned about what others thought of me or the fast learning curve on which I found myself. There was a desperate need to be able to simply understand my schoolwork and within the Japanese culture, a high emphasis was placed on academic excellence, studying hard, doing enriching activities to complement the regular school

curriculum, and being intentionally focused on doing well. In order to experience academic success, learning Japanese culture required assimilation where I had to adopt the identity of the people in the country I found myself. However, this was often done at the expense of my own culture” (Steele, 2016, p. 8).

This experience essentially defined my dedication to socially including as many people as I could since I was so warmly welcomed into a very challenging academic setting by a teacher. For me, it solidified a desire to teach others how to do things similar to what had been done for me.

What also emerges in this theme of being bothered or annoyed is my love of students. My emotional connection to children is so real and deep and I genuinely love kids. In my observational data, I repeatedly mentioned things like “But I love students.” My love and admiration of these little creatures and their well-being as well as their academic success overshadows my negative encounters with fellow educators whose views or compassion are in direct contradiction to my own.

Further, my general impatience with people led me to ask, “Could this lack of patience with people get in the way of my connection and relativity to people?” This may be seen as an example of the social exclusion, which I originally sought to justify why Black females may exit the education profession more rapidly than their White counterparts prior to becoming a school administrator. The data revealed that I am “super short with people (conversationally short as in using limited words)” and that I question my social interaction characteristics repeatedly. As I reflected on my daily interactions with students and teachers, I constantly asked myself versions of this question: “Do I socially exclude myself by being “to myself” or by “cutting people off” and “Is my being

(conversationally) short a barrier?” I justified that an emotional response is essential as I questioned and recalled:

“Why would I be dry and stale? I’m not. I’m going to be passionate because a business consultant told me a long time ago that the only emotion allowed in business (translation-your job) is a passion for excellence. That’s my philosophy. That does not stop the fact that I run this school and if there are things that happen when I’m not in the building, I need to know regardless of how anyone “thinks” I will react.”

Several additional codes and concepts emerged as a signal that I considered as closely related to this theme of being bothered or annoyed. They include: 1) *Angry Black woman syndrome possible in the workplace*: Who named this term? Am I typifying a stereotype? Just because of my passion? If I am projecting a stereotype, why is that a problem? “Who really thinks I’m an angry Black woman?” Further, Griffin (2012) coined Black Feminist Autoethnography (BFA) which methodologically supports my lack of concern with ever being referred to as an ‘angry Black woman’. In her work, Griffin (2012) posits “resistance” as a key outcome of a Black woman expressing her passion, outrage, and pure disgust with the ways in which racism, sexism, and systematic oppression have remained prominent in mainstream life (p. 139). 2) *My passion exuded because of a situation*: “Again, my passion should not dictate whether I ‘find’ out things that happen in my building. BUT, is that a barrier causing social exclusion? I just don’t know. I am the boss and I run this school.” In my analysis of my passion, I can say this particular situation is passion expressed as anger. Anger from not knowing what was happening right under my watch as a leader of a Title I school. Title I is defined as a school that receives federal funds to supplement the high population of students who receive free and reduced lunch. If I am not aware of what happens, I have to look at what

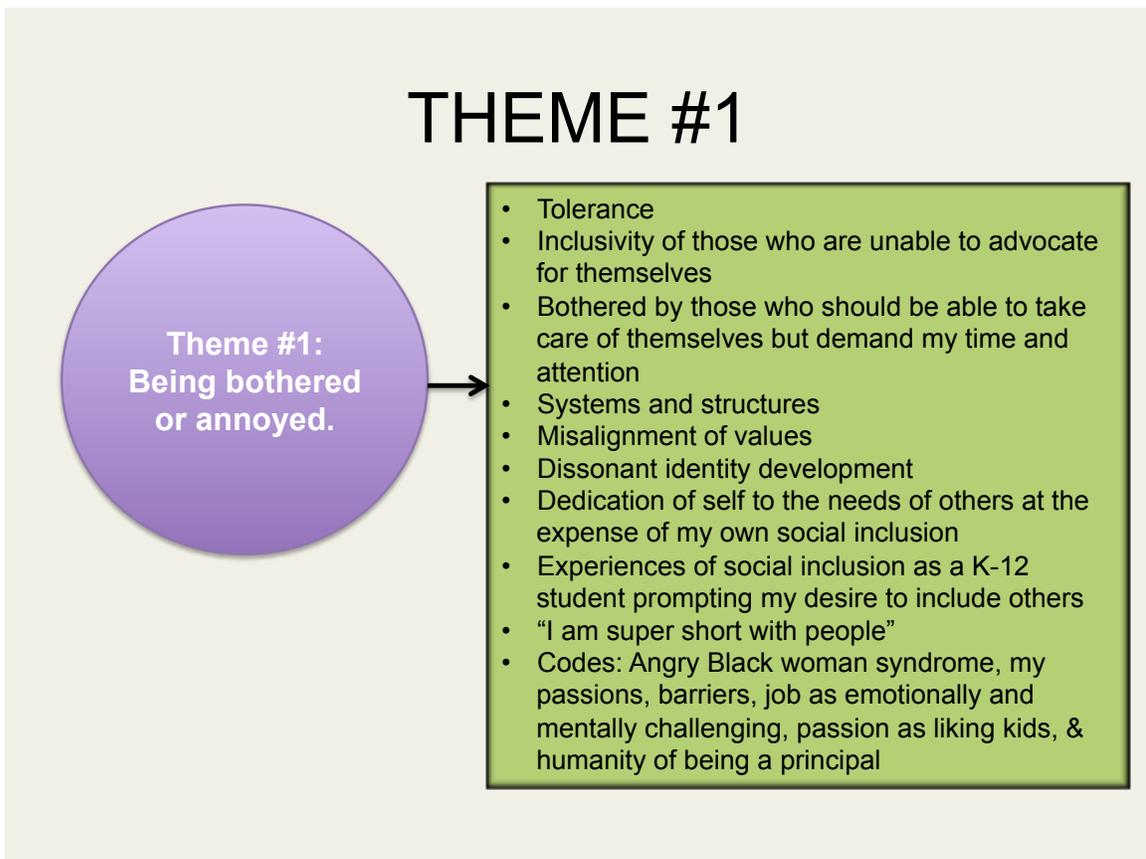
makes someone withhold information from me as well as why they thought it appropriate to do so. Am I causing them to not want to talk to me regardless of the situation? Or do they feel as though they know more than me and do not have to keep the lines of communication open since they feel they can handle the situation without me?

3) *Barriers*: Are these social barriers I erect causing exclusion? If so, are these exclusionary outcomes I may experience brought on by the fact that I join many colleagues in the academy in my disgust and outrage over “injustices in education” (Griffin, 2012, p. 139) that have taken place for decades? (Cooper, 1995; hooks, 1981; Lorde, 1984; Shange, 1975). Perhaps I experience barriers, not because I bring them upon myself but because others are not ready to hear what I have to say from my lens, that of a Black woman in academia, education, and school administration.

4) *Job as emotionally and mentally challenging*: When children are inappropriately handled or prematurely exposed to something they should not be such as sexual abuse, it literally overtakes me emotionally for a short time until I then calm down and relax. I take on personal responsibility for the welfare of others, such as children, and when their safety and well-being is in danger, I express disgust and advocacy for him or her. The emotional and mental anguish I sometimes feel places me in a position of severe stress as I care for other people’s children.

5) *Passion expressed as liking kids, wanting to do the job we do*: Women of color show lots of passion. Why? Typically, we grew up in families that exhibit a great deal of social, emotional, mental, and financial support of each other. I had a very supportive family. I knew I could always come home and find accolades and high fives. There was always genuine happiness for my successes in the home. In the workplace, not so much. Rarely do colleagues express what I perceive to be genuine happiness about my accomplishments

like my previous home life (K-12) or celebration for my victories. I sometimes feel there may be a hint of either disdain or disappointment when I may accomplish something that others may want to do. 6) *The humanity of being a principal* is manifested daily on my job. This allows me to maintain the connection with people since I require that our school mission be inclusive of those within the community we serve. Inclusion of others allows us to see their unique gifts and purpose and utilize them in our school as a strength. Figure 11 provides a visual representation of the most prevalent points that surfaced from my data collection.



*Figure 11.* Theme 1. Being bothered or annoyed. This figure illustrates the codes that emerged for theme being bothered or annoyed theme.

## **Theme 2: “Job as” (Functionality)**

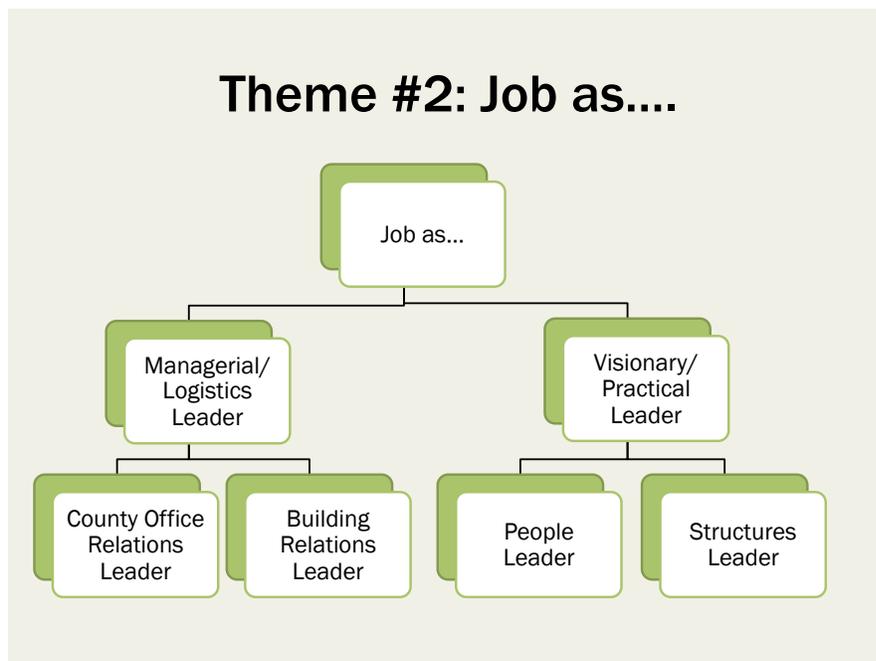
This theme developed out of the overwhelming presence of data surrounding my job function as a school principal. During the 4-week data collection period, the narrative data collected revealed a significant accounting of my daily routine at the beginning of the school day. It was the data collected that revealed the many facets in which I operate on a daily basis and how the job as school administrator is much different than what were told and instructed during my master’s level administrative training program. There is usually a generic job description for principals and educators in general, but they are not necessarily completely accurate or all inclusive if that is even possible. During my data collection process, there were so many functions of my job that surfaced in my role as a principal. I tried to capture them by indicating “job as” in the narrative analysis. This heading, “job as” is based on my fundamental belief that children and adults need help and support from leaders and as a function of my role in this position, I will see to it that they get everything they deserve. In my journal, I wrote:

“I must help put people at ease to reduce issues and apprehension.”

My reflection of this observation followed:

As a Black woman, I feel a sense of responsibility to a great deal of things and people. My mom who was a single parent, to my Bigmama who raised me when my mom was only 14, my 5 kids who are watching my every move, my husband who is my best friend and whom I inspire, my 400+ kids at my elementary school where I serve as their principal, my extended family and friends who are wishing me well, and ALL the Black people who think it’s impossible to get a Ph.D. This is the weight I bare. I take my calling and my responsibility very seriously. This sense of duty and responsibility was developed undoubtedly from my observations of my military dad who always met his regimented demands of his job and family commitments

This is who I am and why my job is not nicely contained in one particular job description. My analysis provided a glimpse into the immense responsibility I feel as a school leader and potential sources of why I feel this way. Further, I use the visual in Figure 12 to encapsulate the relative relationship between the “job as” heading that surfaced in the data collection as well as my analysis that ensued.



*Figure 12.* Theme 2. “Job as...” This figure illustrates the super codes that emerged for the “Job as...” theme.

Initially, when I began analyzing the “Job as...” theme, it occurred to me that there were many functions of my job that were not explicitly spelled out in my pre-prescribed courses on school administration, leadership, or instructional capacity. They became so numerous to name that I created a simple hierarchical graphic organizer in Figure 12 above of these job functions that surfaced and then provided a narrative analysis of each to set the tone for what the data revealed I actually do in each of them. Those brief descriptions and analyses appear in Appendix C and further provide context to the way in which my job

evolved daily, essentially during my entire career and the data collection process. Further, the most eye opening take away from the “Job as...” theme is that out of the many functions of the job, the primary category that surfaced was “Visionary and Practical Leader” and more specifically, in the are of “People Leader.” I believe this is due to the fact that education is a people business and evolves around the people who operate within the complex system of the structures that comprise it. Further, some principals find themselves engrossed in the executive functioning of school leadership logistics while others favor the other side regardless of race or gender of the leader. I, as a Black female principal, prefer the people side but there has to be a balance. During the data collection period, I heavily identified the functions of my role as principal and discovered that what I do cannot be contained in the annals of a textbook or a manual for the job. Much of my job involves what my heart and gut say when in the middle of a situation. The main function of my job, which I did not readily and explicitly identify but is really a requirement to be in education in general, is the ability to be flexible and accommodating to a degree. Without those pertinent skills, it would be nearly impossible to remain committed to this profession or lead others as they express their devotion to teaching children.

Another reality I discovered is that adequate training or professional development did not necessarily accompany the various roles I hold as a school leader. From the perspective of a Black female leader, I feel I needed additional training to overcome some of the social barriers I encountered leading to my sporadic feelings of social exclusion while serving in this role. I just had to be ready to perform the functions of my job at any given point and with minimal complaint or aggravation. Being flexible and accommodating allows me to maintain a positive attitude about the situations I face on a

daily basis since I prepare myself for the reality that everything will change, regardless of my race or gender. Things will just be different from the way I plan them. If I plan to observe a teacher in a classroom but then a fight breaks out and I have to stop what I am doing to remediate with a group of students, then that is what I have to do. I will either see the teacher at the prescribed time and separate the students until I finish the observation or delay the observation, especially if it was an unannounced one, until a later time. Decisions to address the people first, then the “stuff or logistics” second are mostly what I find myself doing on a consistent basis. I try to prioritize the people first during the day and then take care of logistics after school or during the early evening hours. Trying to maintain balance with those demands and home and family life can however, present a challenge though when placing people first during the school day. Ultimately, I do the best I can but always try to do it with a smile on my face and with a positive attitude. As a Black female, there is a tendency for others to see me as easily angered so I go out of my way to portray a positive attitude for the sake of maintaining a good reputation. I never know what exactly each day will bring but I know it will be an adventure that will not be the same twice in a row.

The role of a principal is ever evolving. Figure 13 visually captures the more prevalent words that manifested in my data collection while Figure 14 demonstrates the most important points from the observation data surfacing during the collection phase. The larger the word, the more often it was repeated. Clearly, “job” is the largest word while several others appeared large such as “problem,” “leader,” “data,” “advocate,” “coach,” “solver,” “instructional,” and “agent.” This Wordle provides visual context to how complex and demanding the role of a principal can be but also how I as an administrator



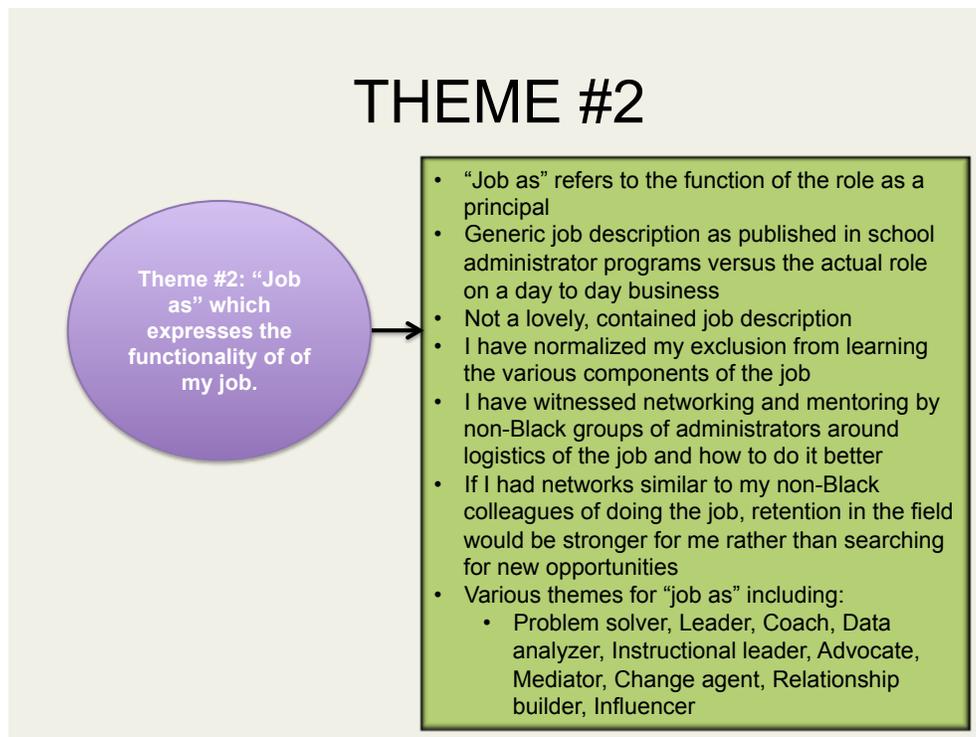


Figure 14. Theme 2. “Job as...”. This figure illustrates the codes that emerged for the “Job as...” theme.

### **Theme 3: Advocacy for students**

The gap in the amount of opportunities students face is well researched. The Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) found that there are significant differences in the “resources needed for academic success, such as early childhood education, highly prepared and effective teachers, college preparatory curricula, and equitable instructional resources” (<http://schottfoundation.org/resources/lost-opportunity-50-state-report>). With these disparities, students who are historically disadvantaged are disproportionately affected by the inequalities of educational resources available to them. According to the Schott Foundation’s report, *Lost Opportunity*, these disparities have long lasting detrimental effects.

In analyzing my role as an advocate, I can say wholeheartedly that I have tried my hardest to provide what Selden (1997) says is the “minority representative role” (p.140) to

my students on each of the three levels of schools (elementary, middle, and high) in which I have served. My role is so much an advocate for all students regardless of their race, but I have noticed a particularly special place in my heart for students of color. This is due to my care and concern for their well-being as well as the recognition of the overwhelming marginalization felt by persons from my race. Several points in my data journal, advocacy of all sorts and for all types of people in my educational setting was observed. They include:

“..so thankful for interagency support. It doesn’t make these cases easier but it does make the handling of them easier.”

“child neglect..investigated...investigation.”

“my job is to give them (parents) what they need based on my experience.”

“STEM Coaches....this is a great time to show how valuable the coaches are and how much we need them.”

“advocacy will be best exercised as a member of the policy making body of Cabarrus County. I’m planning to run for political office.”

The way in which I express my advocacy can be seen best in these moments when I place the needs of others before my own and sometimes before my family’s needs. The theme that emerged because of my desire to advocate for students who need it most is what developed in this particular theme. What I learned from my data observation was that I advocate vocally on a grand scale for causes in which I believe. The source of my advocacy these days are children and any inequities they face. My whole drive is to include kids in matters of educational opportunities and growth while excluding any drama that impedes this process. The overarching theme that continued to surface in the data is that I am an advocate for children by any means necessary. I will suffer any level of ridicule or

embarrassment as well as rejection on behalf of a student. If something is in their best interest academically, socially, emotionally, or physically, I will press and pursue until I obtain the desired outcome. This has not only become my trademark quality, persistence, but it also appeared in the coded data repeatedly.

Advocacy for resources that directly influence my school or me is more easily done the more confident I become. When I can speak out about my beliefs regarding an issue in a salient, professional way, my peers respond well and I feel like I have done my job. I feel empowered to speak up more, not just in my school, but on the school district level as well especially in principal's meetings and principal roundtable discussions with the superintendent.

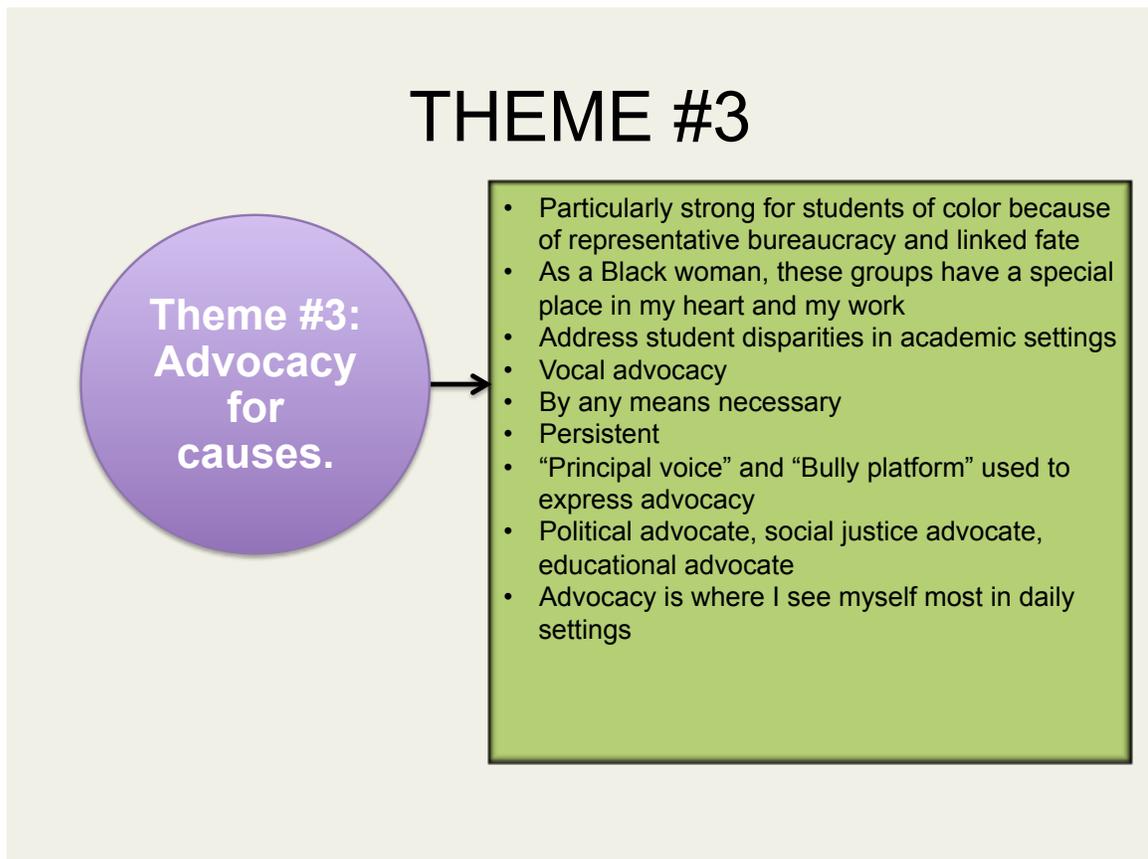
Principal's meetings are usually a place to either be quiet and listen or participate and advocate. I choose more these days to use my "principal voice" or "bully platform" as affectionately referred to by my superintendent as a place where the principal can declare that certain things be done without necessarily having a consensus from stakeholders. It is with this "bully platform" that I further various causes necessary to help students and educators.

As an advocate, or the person who speaks up for or on behalf of a group of people or a cause, the role of principal affords me the space to do this on more grand scale but with a significant amount of humility. My intellectual and operational capacity is best utilized in a space of advocating for others who have been dismissed by mass media outlets as degenerates or lower class individuals without a voice. When I advocate for their rights to experience a high-quality education, I know I am operating in my calling and passion.

How exactly do I view myself as an advocate? One way is in political advocacy as a strategy to represent students and kids in education and the policies that inform educational practice. How I view myself is so critical because being in my city has softened my once more boisterous strong voice due to the relationships I have built over the years. I am more conscientious of how I am perceived, however, I do have a much stronger perspective on what I can do, who I should advocate for, and the beliefs I have in myself. This belief helps me be a social and mental justice reporter and supporter. This is a constant place of advocacy because these types of needs must be taken care of before they overtake the school and diminish students' abilities to complete their schoolwork and fully engage in the learning process.

I advocate for kids, parents, my school, and causes that I personally support. I am aware that others are always watching me so I feel obligated to ensure my image and influence are appropriately represented in my community because I represent more than just me and my family. I am concerned about kids and their well-being. I am unable to ignore their needs because they are young and relatively unable to speak up for their needs. No matter their size or age, if I feel they need something they are not receiving, I will be on their side to obtain it for them. My values intersect with those of parents who are not doing what I think they should be doing for children. In a meeting, there was a discussion about the loss of some of the STEM coaches who support the STEM school in which I work. I recall saying to myself, "STEM Coaches.... this is a great time to show how valuable the coaches are and how much we need them." Almost immediately, I spoke my thoughts. This is where I consistently find myself, saying what I feel when necessary. After I expressed my thoughts in that particular meeting, I was met with resistance as two

principals disagreed with my advocacy for my STEM coach. Although not a negative encounter, it was a disagreement with how we should allocate the resource of a STEM coach and therefore, we agreed to disagree in our views. When others get in the way of my advocacy or express the opposite opinion, I sometimes take personal offense to it and therefore potentially lead myself into a space of social exclusion unintentionally. This is what I analyzed in this research study.



*Figure 15.* Theme 3. Advocacy for causes. This figure illustrates codes that emerged for the theme of advocacy for causes.

### **Research Question Analysis**

As a result of the super themes developed above, further reflection brought me to an analysis of my research questions utilized for this research study. The super themes of (1) Being bothered or annoyed; (2) The “Job as” theme expressing the functionality of my

job; and (3) Advocacy for students and their causes. These themes resonate within the four research questions guiding the work and subsequent data collection. I spent a considerable amount of time reflecting on my experiences and how they related to the three super themes. My analysis for each research questions follows.

*RQ1: As a Black female student, how did I come to know the impact of inclusionary or exclusionary practices in my K-12 schooling experiences?*

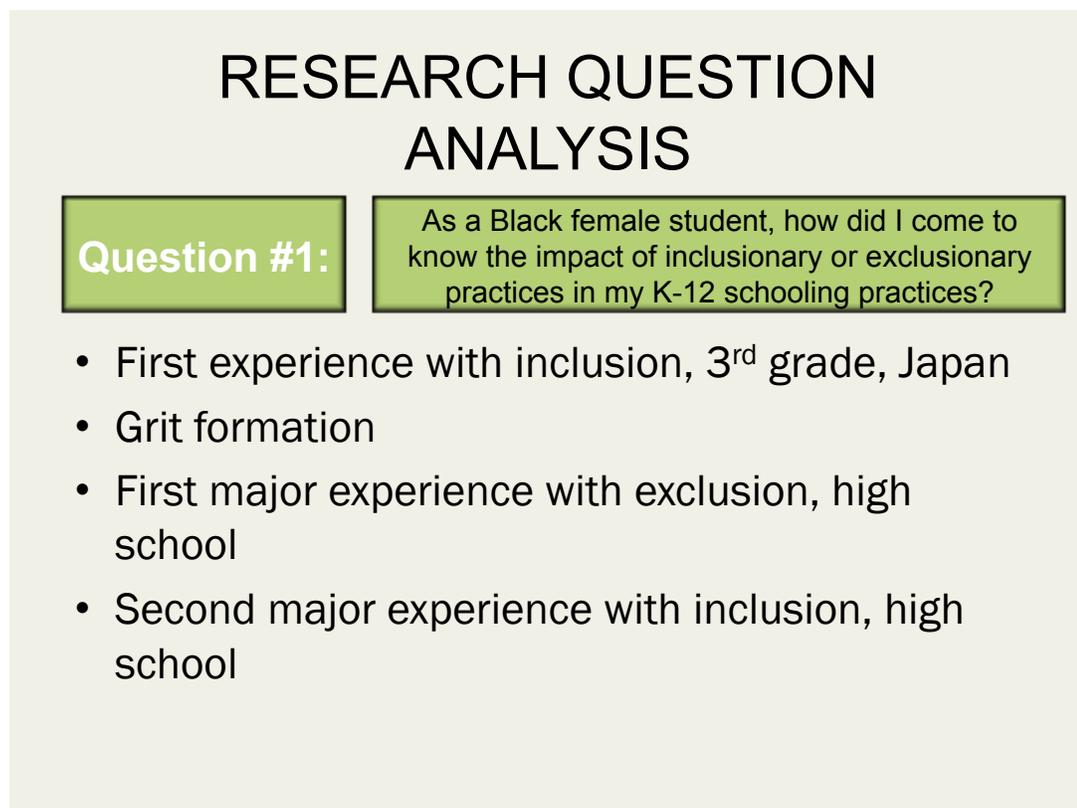
In my reflection of data contained in Appendices A and E, it is evident that I came to know inclusionary practices, defined as being included in the conversation, activities, and rhetoric of my early childhood experiences when I first moved to Japan after having been in my Houston, Texas home for the first eight years of my life. This move required me to change 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classes and shift from a class of predominantly Black and Latino students in Houston to a class of predominantly White and Asian students. Not only was I in complete culture shock as a talkative 8-year old little girl, but I was also behind academically. I did not understand Japanese culture, Japanese language, nor the customs of the brand-new military life into which I was thrust. I had no idea of how I would function or last for a long time in this setting at the time. Thank goodness, I had a 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade teacher who walked me through the steps of academic preparedness by ensuring I stayed after school to learn 6-digit subtraction and other key components of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade to which I had not been exposed. This was a pivotal year for me as I saw firsthand how it felt to be uprooted from all that I knew of a racially diverse environment and placed in a different type of setting of other races to which I was not accustomed to but still felt like I belonged to my local community. A White teacher led that effort and made me feel socially included. She advocated for my inclusion and positioned herself as my champion. Her

selflessness, as I perceived it to be in my undeveloped 8-year old mind, served as a catalyst for my consistent role as an advocate for children and the injustices they face.

Additionally, in my current job, I see a primary function of my position is that of being an advocate for those who are unable to do so for themselves. This experience of social inclusion also led to my grit formation. Grit, although I did not realize it at the time, was forming inside of me and would sustain me throughout subsequent 4<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade school experiences.

Another predominant instance in my life occurred during high school. Although some years after my initial educational experience of social inclusion, I had a negative experience while in student council. I ran for president of my sophomore class. I felt I had a great speech and a powerful political platform within my school. I meticulously campaigned and ran for office. A young Black girl who sang a song of hope majestically during her campaign speech defeated me. The students applauded her ferociously and I felt so awful. In the pit of my stomach, I knew I had lost the election before ballots were even cast. Well, inevitably, I lost. I still served in the capacity of class representative. I could witness first hand during my sophomore year the impact of the person who defeated me. While I respected her, the time she spent in office did not appear to be meaningful. Since I still served in a minor capacity, and was a witness to her less than impactful reign in office on the front lines, I became naturally included in more sophomore class decisions and leadership. This experience led me to want to pursue office again and run for junior class president, which I subsequently won. I wanted to prove that my advocacy for matters concerning my class was important and that I was willing to fight for my classmates and what mattered to them. I like to think I had a great year in office and in leadership, which

led to more social inclusion and more impact on a school level. I concluded my senior year by winning the office of student body president. From then on, I felt socially included by the students, teachers, administrators, and the community at large with whom I interacted. This was in part due to my success as a student council officer as well as my advocacy for students and items they requested for our school and community in order to benefit them. I believe that when a group of people feels their needs are being met, they develop a sense of closeness and community that indulge a spirit of inclusion. Therefore, what I gather is that in both instances of social inclusion within my K-12 experiences, I did find that neither race nor gender were directly a factor in the inclusionary or exclusionary practices I faced.



*Figure 16.* Research Question #1 Analysis. This figure illustrates the analysis of research question #1.

*RQ2: As a Black female teacher, how did I become a school administrator?*

Upon reflecting on why I chose to be a teacher, I am reminded of my 12<sup>th</sup> grade year and my interactions with my guidance counselor. Utilizing my life timeline found in Appendix A, I used narrative reflection to uncover what I experienced during that year. My counselor, Mrs. Paroli, a White woman, made it her mission to expose me to more than I ever could imagine. She ensured that opportunities were passed along to me as I worked in the guidance office at lunch daily. She passed along applications to various summer programs and for that I am so thankful. She did not seem to look at me as a Black female student who was incapable of becoming a teacher. Instead, she saw me as a student with opportunity and she helped me reach my goals. One such application she made sure I completed was that of the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program. This program paid for four years of education at an accredited 4-year college or university for those who chose to teach in the state of North Carolina for four years following graduation from college. Through this program, Mrs. Paroli made sure she served as my advocate in exposing me to opportunities that could propel me forward in my college career and educational attainment as a first generation college student. My race did not appear to be a factor in her decision to help me. She helped me because I was her student.

Once I applied and interviewed for this program, I became more interested in teaching, but was unsure what I would teach. Initially, I began majoring in Chemistry at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, but changed my major to Spanish. Upon completing the NC Teaching Fellows program, I taught for one year at a high needs, mostly Black and Latino middle school in a large urban district in the Southeast before I left teaching at the end of the school year.

I departed due to a situation that occurred when students had a riot in the hallway in January of my first year of teaching. There had been chronic staff absenteeism for months leading up to this particular day in 2003 and I had to constantly monitor classes while on morning duty on a hallway that was not my typical duty station. While I was on duty on this day, and nine months pregnant, the 7<sup>th</sup> grade students who were walking to classes during the first five minutes of the school day decided to become active in a large mob group and started running down the hallway. In about 30 seconds, the mob was so large, they caused what the news media referred to as a riot in the hallway. All I remember is that I was carried physically in the mob but was upright the entire time for about 10 seconds. My feet did not touch the ground the entire time. This caused me to be physically in danger for a short while, but at the end of that school year, I left teaching for fear that everyday would be the same thereafter.

When I left teaching, I became a real estate broker for five years before returning to teach high school Spanish after the real estate market crashed toward the end of 2007. When I returned to teaching in 2008, things improved tremendously in my teaching career as I changed districts and had more support in many areas including classroom management, instructional strategies with racially diverse students, and working with exceptional students in the world languages classroom. These new supports encouraged me to feel welcomed and like I fit and belonged within the teaching profession. Additionally, none of the experiences I had as a pre-service and in-service teacher seemed to contain race related factors contributing to why I subsequently became a school administrator. As a part of this research question, I wanted to see if it had an impact but I discovered that race was not a factor.

As it relates to those who have helped me obtain an administrator position along the way, there were senior White and Black administrators who placed opportunities for advancement in my viewpoint and provided coaching on how to obtain these roles. One day in my second year returning as a Spanish teacher, I received an email from my superintendent at the time announcing the North Carolina (NC) Principal Fellows program. It was similar to the NC Teaching Fellows program, but if I were a successful applicant, I would be required to be a school administrator for four years after graduation from the program. The program would provide me with a scholarship for \$72,000 to attend school and receive a stipend if I agreed to serve as a school administrator in North Carolina for at least four years upon graduation. I maintained the email and referred to it and the program website periodically over the next three years in preparation for the application window.

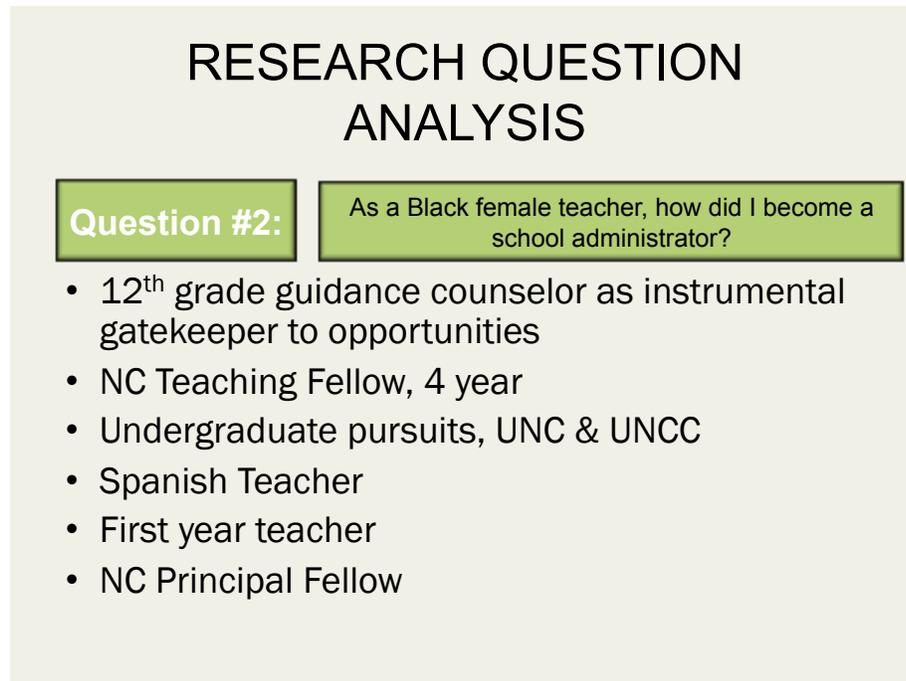
I taught for three more years before I became eligible for applying for the scholarship. I applied, received the scholarship award, and left teaching after four years total in order to study school leadership full time at a major university during year one and become a principal intern during year two. I was fortunate to remain in the same school district and do my one-year full-time internship under the same principal that I worked for in 2008. Although she was the principal at another school, I joined her at the new school and served as her administrative intern. This was a wonderful experience of learning and revelation. Serving as a high school administrator was by far one of the biggest administrative highlights of my career because I found that this particular age group is where my administrative role is most comfortable for me. Perhaps it was due to the social inclusion and positive experience I had with my counselor and support systems while in high school myself. With the great amount of support I received in my own high school, I

realized that high schools have a special place in my life as a symbol of great support and encouragement. Therefore, I enjoy being a school administrator in high school. It reminds me of the high rates of social inclusion I experienced.

Upon continued reflection, and after having served as a principal intern in racially diverse rural and urban high school for one year, an assistant principal of instruction in high socioeconomic status high school for one year, a middle school principal in a Title I school for one year, and a Title I elementary school principal for the last two years, I now have a very good understanding of the disconnection that exists between the three levels of schooling. It has become increasingly evident of what needs to happen to ensure a healthy level of advocacy manifests on each level of schooling; elementary, middle, and high. I have also learned that I enjoy the role of high school administrator more than any other level of schooling.

At the time of this writing, I am completing my fourth year as a school administrator, three of which have been as a principal while simultaneously starting and finishing my doctoral program. Ironically, the experiences during my rigorous doctoral program had the most significant influence on my desire to remain in the field of school administration as my participation in this program have been filled with countless experiences of support and social inclusion leading to a more thorough understanding of my role as a school principal. The research I have done, knowledge I have learned, and connections I have made have contributed to learning a plethora of responsibilities related to my job as a principal. I remain humbled by the opportunities to learn by experiences that are presented to me daily so I may grow more proficient in my job. Overall, although I did not find that race had a direct impact on me becoming a school administrator, there is a

possibility that it did and perhaps I was seen as a qualified candidate who was ready to move to the level of school leadership after being a teacher.



*Figure 17. Research Question #2 Analysis. This figure illustrates the analysis of research question #2.*

*RQ3: As a Black female teacher, how did I come to know the impact of inclusionary or exclusionary practices on my interest and success as a leader?*

When I define social inclusion and exclusion, I offer the analogy of a student in a cafeteria. Consider a student, new to the school, going through the lunch line on the first day of school. Upon making her selection of food and emerging from the food line area, she peers out into the crowd looking for a table at which to sit. She scans the cafeteria only to be stared at by many students at multiple tables until suddenly, one group of friendly faces looks at her motioning their hands to come sit at their table. This would be an example of social inclusion when the girls invited the new girl to sit with them. All those

who saw the girl and did not motion for the young lady to join them would be a part of those who socially excluded her; whether they meant to or not.

In my journey to becoming a school administrator, which consisted of four non-consecutive years as a Spanish teacher, five years as a stay-at-home mom and Realtor, and one year of full-time graduate school, I can count on one hand the instances of social inclusion that stand out to me as pivotal in my interest and subsequent success becoming a school leader. They included 1) the time that my principal, a White female, asked me to consider joining the school improvement team and represent my department, 2) when my superintendent, a White male, signed off on my desire to enter the Principal Fellows Program and 3) later reassured me that I was doing the right thing, and 4) once in my administration program, the principals whom I observed invited me into the proverbial “other side” to observe and learn what being an administrator was all about and entailed.

While the occurrences of social exclusion during work were few, the main instance of social inclusion that I recall experiencing at work were not directly related to me, but I felt I had been excluded as a result. One day I was chatting with a White female friend of mine with whom I taught previously, and she wanted to ask me about my administrative program and what I was learning. I was eager to share as much information as I could with her and was elated that she wanted to know what advice I could offer. As our conversation concluded, she mentioned that our previous principal had encouraged her time and time again to become a school administrator because she saw potential in my friend. While I was happy that potential had been spotted in her, I was saddened that the same administrator never once encouraged me to become a school administrator. I wondered, “Did she think I was ready? Did she feel I would be a good leader? What would I have had

to do to convince her I was going to be a great administrator?" These thoughts haunted me for months until I realized that I applied for a very prestigious program, was accepted into the program, earned a \$72,000 scholarship, and completed a degree with five children and did it with a smile. Of course, I was ready. However, I could not help but wonder if I was missing something. To this day, I have access to this former principal, but have never asked if she really believed I was ready because at this point, it does not matter. No matter what instances of social exclusion I felt, I am where I need to be for this time in my life. It is for that reason that the theme of advocacy for others resonates so strongly in my role as an administrator in an elementary school. As others advocate for me, I feel obligated to express the same amount of concern and obligation on their behalf. Maybe race was not a factor. Perhaps it was age or inexperience and I interpreted it as race or gender but the fact still remains that 80% of principals in K-12 educational settings are White. If diversity is to increase to match the student population more closely, practices along the spectrum of diverse candidates operating in roles of school leadership must change.

Other instances of social exclusion I have experienced in my role as a teacher where a barrier to school administration was present included the introduction to the new teacher evaluator system that was unveiled the year prior to me leaving to obtain my master's degree. Although the complex set of five teacher evaluator standards were revealed to all teachers and me in staff meetings designed to teach them to us, there seemed to still be a disconnect among the Black teachers as to what this new set of standards meant, how detailed it was, and how we would be evaluated as a teacher thus determining our status as a teacher at the school and our pay rate. In other words, the six of us accounted for 8% of that school's teacher population and we each had a similar

sensation that we were missing something and needed to dig deeper. In fact, when we began meeting regularly after school and on weekends to explore the evaluation instrument further, we discovered that it was extremely more complex than we originally learned. There were many instructional changes we needed to make in our daily lesson plans in order to make sure they were rigorous, inclusive of diverse learners, and differentiated for a variety of student needs. Although we felt as if we were already doing this, with the new evaluation tool, it needed to be more explicitly obvious in our lessons. Additionally, there were requirements to pursue leadership opportunities in the school as opposed to just teaching. We needed to be more outgoing in our profession and we gathered these conclusions by forming our own teacher group to look at the teacher evaluation system. It proved to be the best networking group for us as the next year, we each did very well and scored high on the new evaluation tool unlike some of our other colleagues who did not take the time to dig deeper into the instrument and learn more. This instance of social exclusion, while not explicit but quite the contrary, is just another example of how when there is a new initiative or program that is released, I do not take it for granted that I am proficient in knowing what is expected of me. There are unspoken rules, hidden agendas, and quiet requirements I feel that I am not always aware of and since this research study highlights my perspective as a Black female school leader, I want to clarify that I sometimes feel a little behind when new things are launched and I have not had adequate time to explore what it requires. This is a form of social exclusion, but not purposeful by any means. Again, in order to address social exclusion in matters of school leadership, I must serve as an advocate for other Black females who may feel as I do in that they are behind and unaware of certain social rules. I know I must offer advice, guidance, and

direction on matters relating to potential social exclusionary barriers that may prevent them from being recognized as potential school leaders while serving as teachers. Had I not been properly briefed, a military term, and further researched the teacher evaluator instrument, I would not have known what it takes to receive high ratings on my evaluation. This could have made me look unqualified to lead other teachers as a school administrator since my application for the leadership master's level program required me to demonstrate my strong teaching qualities as evidenced by my school district's evaluation system. It was a web of connectivity, which I did not recognize existed but could have delayed my pursuit of school leadership. As a Black female, I always feel that I am placed in scenarios where I have to wait my turn or let someone else have a chance before I place myself in first position for an opportunity. Usually, this involves not being prepared for the next role or not feeling ready for what is next. I no longer desire to feel this way nor will I continue to watch this unfold in my life, professionally and personally. The desire of Black female school teachers to pursue leadership positions should be readily open and available but it has to be a two part effort. Black females have to recognize when they should make these pursuits and persons in positions to influence to appoint leaders within the educational spectrum should encourage Black females to pursue leadership roles.

# RESEARCH QUESTION ANALYSIS

## Question #3:

As a Black female teacher, how did I come to know the impact of inclusionary or exclusionary practices on my interest and success as a leader?

- An invitation of inclusion
- A lack of opportunities
- The moment of exclusion, a colleague who was encouraged

*Figure 18.* Research Question #3 Analysis. This figure illustrates the analysis of research question #3.

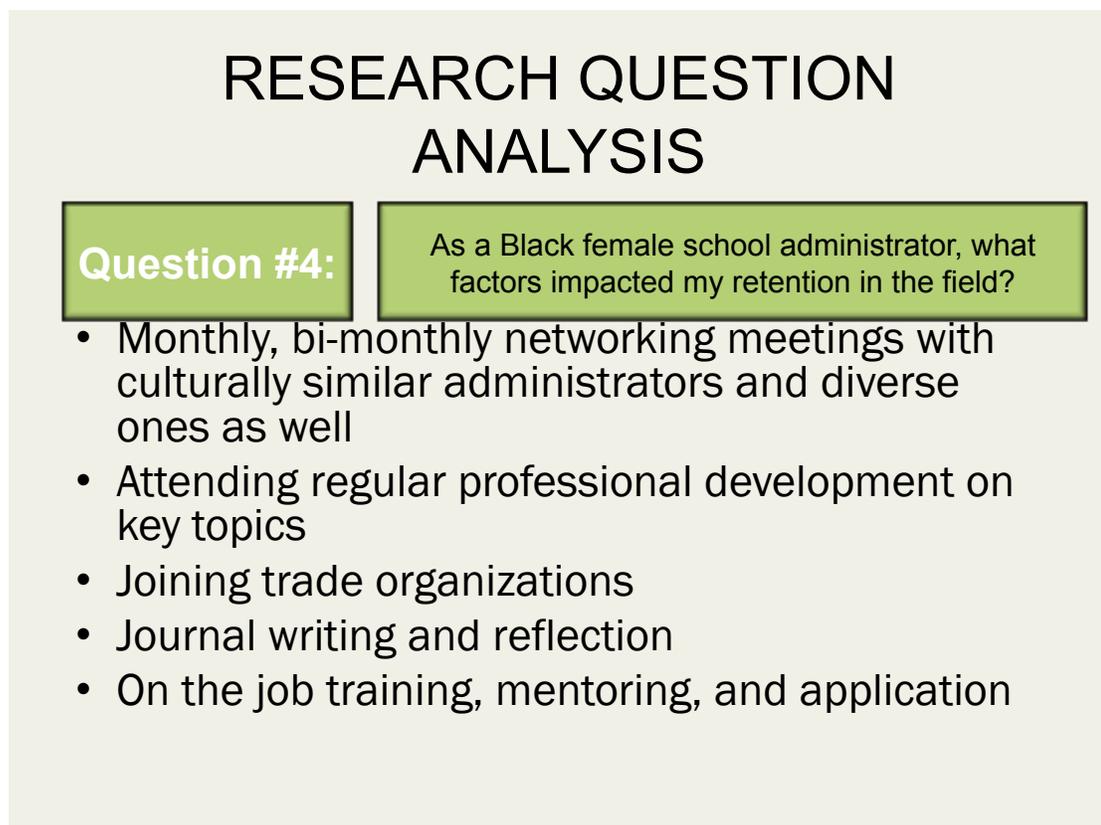
*RQ4: As a Black female school administrator, what factors impacted my retention in the field?*

After four years of being a school administrator, there are several factors that impact my retention in the field of leadership and education. The main one is having monthly or bi-monthly networking meetings with a culturally similar group of administrators who support one another and provide a space of debriefing and reflection without the inhibitions of others' expectations. These are arranged by one member of our group who makes the arrangements for our group to meet at a local restaurant regularly. I also meet with racially diverse principals in my district who are racially different from me in various ways. These meetings are arranged by a White female administrator and do not happen regularly but are more sporadic. In these meetings, we discuss practical responsibilities in our roles as school administrators but more specifically as it relates to our school district since we all work in the same district. Additionally, attending regular professional development sessions on various topics related to school improvement, urban

education leadership, managerial strategies, and instructional leadership also helped me to stay current on issues where I need to grow. These trainings and meetings are offered both locally and within my state. Joining trade organizations such as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and the North Carolina Association of School Administrators (NCASA) allows me the opportunity to attend conferences and network with other school administrators, as well as read peer-reviewed publications, articles, and books to stay current on matters of importance in public education. Journal writing and reflection have been key components to my web of support as well because these reflective pieces allow me the opportunity to wind down, be myself, write from a place of experience and no inhibitions. I am able to freely express myself and not worry about how someone will take my words out of context, try to exclude me from their circle, or try to compare me to them or themselves to me. It is my space to be free and it helps my emotional state of being because the demands of this role take a deep toll on one's social and emotional well-being. Additionally, there is only so much one can learn in a master's program about how to become a school administrator. Much of what is learned requires on the job training, application, assessment and reflection.

This process of critically analyzing my experiences as a K-12 school administrator and the inclusionary and exclusionary practices I experienced in my matriculation throughout school has been both eye opening slightly mind-boggling. Who knew that these three themes would serve as the manifested foundation of why I strive so diligently to represent the voices of those marginalized populations for which I advocate on a regular basis. It is with the spirit of support and projection of the rights and privileges of others that I humbly serve as a proud K-12 administrator.

I have to ask myself whether race played a factor, either negatively or positively, in my journey to school leadership. The answer remains a subjective one and biased to my opinion and systematic analysis of my experiences. Yes, to me, race led to more experiences of social exclusion but I gather that most of those experiences came as a result of something I may have done rather than something that was done to me. I may never know specifically which thing caused what outcome but I can safely say that I do believe race contributes to some experiences I have related to social exclusion.



*Figure 19.* Research Question #4 Analysis. This figure illustrates the analysis of research question #4.

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The final chapter of this dissertation is divided into five sections. The first section provides a brief overview of the background and research questions guiding the study. The second section is a review of the methodology chosen for the study. Next, section three summarizes the results and findings while section four includes the discussion of the findings and their relationship to the literature as well as the implications of the findings. The final section provides suggested future research as well as a concluding remarks.

### **Background and Research Questions**

The focus of this study developed out of (1) my experiences as a Black female school administrator, (2) critical reflection on how I became a school administrator and the guiding factors throughout my own K-12 schooling experiences, and (3) my desire to know whether or not I experienced social inclusionary or exclusionary practices that impacted my retention as a school administrator in K-12 schools. The research questions guiding the study were:

- 1. As a Black female student, how did I come to know the impact of inclusionary or exclusionary practices in my K-12 schooling experiences?*
- 2. As a Black female teacher, how did I become a school administrator?*
- 3. As a Black female teacher, how did I come to know the impact of inclusionary or exclusionary practices on my interest and success as a leader?*
- 4. As a Black female school administrator, what factors impacted my retention in the field?*

Given the lack of sufficient research in the area of Black female school administrators, I sought to bring what Griffin (2012) calls to the research stage as a unique voice that

“positions Black feminist scholarship in conversation with autoethnography” allowing the illumination of my experiences as a student, teacher, and then school administrator (p. 139). By utilizing autoethnography as my approach to answering the research questions, I add value to existing research positing recommendations for future practice relative to the retention of Black female school administrators in K-12 public education.

### **Review of Methodology**

This research was a qualitative autoethnography based on my life as a K-12 student, pre-service and in-service teacher, then school principal since I identify as a Black female. According to Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010), autoethnography is used to “describe and systematically analyze personal experience to understand cultural experience” (p. 1). Unlike traditional qualitative studies, autoethnography uses a variety of qualitative methods to capture the essence of the primary author’s experience such as journals, academic year calendars, culture gram, life timeline, and narrative reflective essay. Further, Griffin (2012) introduced the concept of Black feminist autoethnography (BFA), which explores the connection between traditional feminine discourse and autoethnography as a means of resisting marginalization, commonly experienced by Black females in academia or professional settings. Additionally, BFA “offers a narrative means for Black women to highlight struggles common to Black womanhood without erasing the diversity among Black women coupled with strategically “talking back” (hooks, 1989) to systems of oppression (e.g., sexism, racism, ableism, heterosexism, classism)” (p.143). This means of bringing a unique perspective to autoethnography is why this study is so crucial to understanding the voices of Black female school administrators currently in practice.

I was the sole participant for this study and I chose to analyze my own experiences because I firmly believe that the best way to understand a phenomenon is to recall the one you either have experienced or are currently experiencing. I am the best person to not only tell my story, but to critically analyze it as well. This autoethnographic study highlighted my K-12 schooling, my early career teaching experiences, and steps leading to my promotion to school administrator. More importantly, I also focused my data collection on my current role as an elementary school principal. This provided context on ways in which I experienced social inclusionary or exclusionary practices, and how all of this influences my retention as a principal.

The design of this research study emerged due to the lack of one systematic way in which to conduct an autoethnography. I engaged in an observational data collection period for a 4-week period, which consisted of a combination of observations, informal conversations, group discussions, classroom observations, note-taking, and personal reflections about each data set.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study include having just one Black female school administrator based on the indicated criteria of a building level leader. Additionally, focusing on one demographic, Black female school administrators, limits the expression of the experiences of other racially diverse persons such as Latina/Hispanic or Asian female administrators. Another limitation is the subjectivity of the researcher who identifies as a Black female administrator. While the subjectivity is revealed in the study, it can lead to flaws in the analysis of the data as well as the absence of a variety of perspectives.

## **Summary of the Results and Findings**

My role throughout this autoethnography included taking a step back from my life of 37 years and critically examining the many facets of it that have contributed to my educational outcomes and subsequent career as a school administrator. My purpose was to assess how my life experiences contributed to either social inclusion or exclusion in my role as student, teacher, and school administrator, to reveal any factors that contributed to my retention in the job, and to suggest strategies that can utilize my experiences to increase the amount of Black female or other marginalized populations of school administrators in the profession and positively impact their retention in the field. Below, I delve into not only further discussion of the overall findings but also how they connect to the literature chosen to explore the data I collected and analyzed but also into recommendations for how to address the shortage of Black female school administrators as a whole in K-12 education.

### **Discussion of the Findings and Their Relationship to the Literature**

#### *Relationship to the Literature*

Situated in the literature, Black females in educational leadership are rarely discussed from their vantage point rather educational leadership has been investigated from the perspective of White males. In other words, educational leadership literature typically discusses various topics such as instructional leadership, culture and climate within school settings, and teacher effectiveness from the perspectives of White males and females rather than from other groups' views. Particularly, Black female authors do not appear in mainstream leadership literature as prevalently as White males and females. This could be due to an absence of Black female scholars to contribute to journals citing these

types of works or being denied publication altogether when presented for consideration in top tier educational journals. Regardless of the reason, the quantity of Black female authors of scholarly texts related to instructional leadership topics is slim. This is problematic since hearing the voice of Black female school leaders, as evidenced in the benefits of BFA, is crucial to meeting the needs of these individuals and promoting retention in the field of school leadership. This study directly addresses this deficit and sought to expose issues Black females face regarding educational leadership while incorporating the historical treatment of Black educators, Black women, and their presence in K-12 academia. Further, the study adds elements of inclusion and exclusion and reasons why these types of experiences exist to the current literature as well as provides recommendations for future research. Using my voice as a Black female school leader can add tremendous quality to preparation programs discussed in educational leadership journals designed to attract and retain highly qualified Black female school leaders to higher roles in the K-12 space.

*Leadership Theory.* Current literature on leadership theory in general sorely lacks the perspective of Black females. The primary focus of existing research both involves and has generally been conducted by White males. As it pertains to women, the research referencing females consistently highlights White women as opposed to Black, Latino, or Asian women. Tillman (2004) added significant research to the field asserting that the role of Black female leaders is often undermined and not viewed with the “tradition of excellence” that it should be (Daye, 2007, p. 14). In the field of educational leadership theory, Black women are severely underrepresented. For this study, I as a Black female, used my one voice to add to the reality of how Black women are viewed in educational leadership.

During my data collection, I discovered that as a woman, I bring a unique passion to my craft that is honestly and earnestly respected in the K-12 academy, can yield excellent results in the areas of positive culture and climate within my school, increases academic achievement of students and highly engaging instruction exhibited by teachers since as a woman, I help bring out the best socially and emotionally in others (Ryan & Tutters, 2016). Seen as strengths, the emotional discoveries I encountered in my data analysis of “being bothered” and “job as advocacy” demonstrate the importance of my Black female voice to leadership theory since 82% of the teaching profession is female (NCES, 2015b). More female teachers in general need to become school, district, state, and national leaders so their strengths are noticed and included rather than ignored and devalued.

*Representative Bureaucracy.* Often examined in literary or case studies from the episteme of patriarchal, White-Anglo perspectives (Mertz & McNeely, 1998), Black females are a group that bears a unique burden as they navigate life, specifically, within educational settings (Collins, 1991). Loder (2005) found that there is a severe lack of “scholars and policy-makers” who possess knowledge of the “unique leadership dilemmas” of Black females (p. 299). Therefore, what I learned in my study is that I am the only one that can tell my story and speak from the perspective of Black females as I view it. No longer can my story be hidden behind the rhetoric of others who do not understand what I face as evidenced in traditional representation of local, state, and national school and government leaders who are typically White and do not look like me. My voice is important and deserves to be heard. Additionally, having adequate representation in seats of power and influence help me personally as a Black woman to feel

as though my needs are known and that someone is advocating for me, either explicitly or implied. The literature review of the study revealed for me that due to the lack of representation on Black female principals, I am the representation for many Black females and males. Therefore, my current role as a principal is of critical importance since I am advocating for all children yet Black children may feel as though I speak for them, too, with a bolder voice. This validates my value and I take it very seriously. My role matters and I aim to continue providing a voice to those whose presence may not be as noticed.

*Situational Leadership.* The Situational Approach (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969a) describes leaders and how they evaluate employees to assess their competence and commitment to perform a given task. This model is based on Reddin's (1967) 3-D Management Style Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969b) Situational leadership highlights how behavior patterns influence others. Throughout my study, a consistent theme developed, "job as....", that predominantly dealt with the logistics of the day-to-day operations as a principal. Of critical relationship to the Situational Approach, is the notion that I as a Black female needed structured mentoring to help process the ever evolving and highly demanding role of school leader. I am not saying that the roles I highlighted in this particular theme are non-essential, but I am sure that some of the job functions can be either streamlined or more efficiently achieved. Utilizing the Situational Approach to design a model for a systematic mentoring program that can be replicated for leaders, particularly, Black female school teachers aspiring to be leaders or school administrators, can offer great service to addressing their low representation. The utility of the Situational Approach allows for a structured mentoring environment for new or aspiring leaders that can be easily replicated in school districts across the nation. As research shows, Black

females in education benefit tremendously from mentoring that has characteristics of other-mothering, social, and emotional development, and spiritual growth (Alston, 1996; 2000; 2005; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000). This was evident in my findings that culturally relevant and structured mentoring can aid me and other Black women in mastering our role as a school or district leader. Just because we become school leaders, may not necessarily mean we feel we are ready to be school leaders and possess all the necessary overt and hidden knowledge pertinent to the role. Therefore, mentoring is crucial. There are many times that I felt as if I was ill prepared for this role. It could have been because I was not as experienced as some of my principal colleagues or because I was not confident in my unique abilities to overcome tough situations with grit and resilience. Either way, I feel that mentoring could have benefited me tremendously. Additionally, I must add that I know other leaders may need structured mentoring as outlined above, but in this autoethnography, I focus on my needs from my perspective as supported by data collection, narrative analysis, and action research. I do recognize that I had a unique and relatively short journey from teacher to school administrator but that is not characteristic of many Black female teachers aspiring to become school leaders. I speak for myself in this study but I would be remiss if I did not give credence to the Black teachers who were denigrated and removed from positions of school leadership post-Brown simply due to racial school integrative practices. The quantity of these leaders never recovered to pre-Brown numbers in terms of how many Black leaders are represented in K-12 school settings. Again, this is problematic and my voice represents the desire to see this statistic grow in order to more adequately represent the racially diverse student composition of today's education system.

*Black Feminist Matrix of Domination*. According to Mertz and McNeely (1998), school leadership and the study of this has been predominantly White male dominated since its inception. Shakeshaft (1989) said, “Studying male behavior, and more particularly white male behavior is not in and of itself a problem. It becomes a problem when the results of studying male behavior are assumed appropriate for understanding all behavior” (Mertz & McNeely, 1998, p. 196). As a female leader, it is imperative that I illuminate the perspective surrounding leadership practices and how they are impacted by our lived experiences. Who best to tell a woman’s story but a woman? From the Black Feminist Matrix of Domination, I sought to use the lens of a Black female caught betwixt two dichotomies of being a Black woman who speaks up for and advocates for other Black women’s rights and privileges as well as one who emphatically sees the impact of race, class, and gender in the professional experiences I have daily. The theme of “being bothered” resonates as somewhat of an emotional reaction to the injustices that persist in my life either personally or based on what I witness. As a woman, processing the “matrix” of race, class, and gender, I cannot help but to utilize this lens to view, record, analyze, and process my experiences in this complex way. This study revealed that the race and gender elements of the matrix are prevalent in how I deal with and process life experiences but the class factor rarely surfaced in the analysis. I did not factor in the role of class in the various opportunities I had such as moving to Japan, increasing my travel abroad enrichment activities while out of the U.S., and as an adult as I use elements of my class privilege to make certain opportunities available for my own children. Class certainly impacts these abilities yet race and gender were more dominant.

*Social inclusion and Exclusion.* Alston (1996) summarized the context in how Black females struggle to climb the educational career ladder, identifying five moderate or significant barriers to Black women's ascension to the role of the superintendency, which can be similarly used for the role of the principalship. They are: (a) "absence of old-boy network," support systems, or sponsorship; (b) lack of awareness of political maneuvers, (c) lack of role models; (d) societal attitudes that Blacks lack competency in leadership positions; and (e) no formal or informal method for identifying Black aspirants to administrative positions" (Alston, 1999 as cited in Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000, p. 536). These insightful findings laid a foundation for my study as I felt that I experienced these similar types of issues in my ascension to the principalship, but not in terms of slow promotion or being denied opportunities. For me, titles are not as important as the impact I am able to make in that role with the title of principal. That has been the area where I experience the most social exclusion and that is in the area of trying to advocate for others. Social inclusion persists when I sacrifice a part of my personality or social expression either to play along with the status quo or give into the popular, dominant rhetoric about a particular topic. As a Black female, I feel I have to work even harder than others in my same position to have my voice heard in a salient, professional, and articulate manner. If not, I risk sounding angry, uneducated, and uninformed. It is difficult to "fit in" with the crowd if the dominant narrative says something that I emphatically disagree with based on historical accounts of a troubled U.S. history. Issues of debates can include differing opinions about the positive or negative impact of recent U.S. presidential candidates or the role of immigration reform on the livelihood and well being of both immigrant and U.S. citizens. Overwhelmingly, however, I discovered that I may experience social inclusionary

or exclusionary practices from those outside of my immediate friendship circle based on how I choose to interact with them, not necessarily because they seek to include or exclude me. That was a riveting discovery.

*Grit.* Grit is “the quality that enables individuals to work hard and stick to their long-term passions and goals” (Perkins-Gough, 2013, p. 14). Grit, as defined by Duckworth (2016), is known as a non-cognitive trait that relates to either “responding resiliently to situations of failure and adversity or being a hard worker” as well as “Having consistent interests---focused passions---over a long time” (Perkins-Gough, 2013, p. 14). Grit, utilized as a predictor of success, surfaced in my findings as well, especially in the area of “job as....” and “advocacy”. As I recall some of the areas where I experienced those who advocated for me, had they not been there in my times of desperate need, I may not have achieved my goals. Further, my grit and determination became stronger the more I experienced advocacy from others for things that mattered most to me. Continuing to pursue my passions and purpose despite moving multiple times from the U.S. to Japan, Japan to the U.S., state to state, and school to school, have all contributed to my grit formation and continuation. Grit is truly a determining factor in the relative amount of success I have experienced.

*Afrocentricity.* Advocating from a perspective of Afrocentricity is critical in my role as a school administrator. I represent Black girls and Black boys whether I want to or not and they view me as a leader, advocate, and as a role model. I am obligated personally to ensure they see the best me in the most authentic way and that they have meaningful experiences that expose them to opportunities in an effort to close the opportunity and achievement gap. In order to do so, I must purport the elements of Afrocentricity in my

daily actions so they see that it is relevant, necessary, and required to use the lens of our ancestry and heritage to process and analyze our today experiences rather than forget where we have come from and how far we have persisted to yield results we have today.

*Double Consciousness.* Loder (2005) and Mertz and McNeely (1998) highlight the research regarding Black women in leadership from the perspective of “mothering values of nurturing, caretaking, and developing children” (Daye, 2007, p. 15). Collins (1991) referred to this form of leadership by Black women as “other mothering” (Daye, 2007, p. 15). This encompasses the overview that Black women must oscillate between being an “other mother” and a leader. There is rarely a separation of the two, especially based on what I noticed from my experiences. Coined by DuBois (1903/1944), double consciousness is a phenomenon that exists to show the debacle one experiences from being in two worlds of how you view yourself and others view you, plainly explained.

*Autoethnography.* Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010) describe autoethnography as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience to understand cultural experience” (p. 2). Chang (2008) said a characteristic of the autoethnography approach provided “personal fascination with self-reflection, introspection, intrapersonal intelligence, and self-analysis” (p. 11). I must say that during this study, I had to uncharacteristically become “obsessed” with myself and how I analyzed my viewpoints of my life. It was contrary to my normal daily routine to focus this much on myself in writing, reflection, and analysis. I have never had to be so vulnerable, open, willing to disclose, and critical of myself than through this process. I have learned a great deal about me and my tolerance levels of varying personal and professional matters. I know that I am a better, more reflective practitioner after this study

but it was a very different manner of research than I have ever conducted. Telling my story from my vantage point was, however, the best way to get my points across but also to learn about who I really am. I did not embark upon this journey thinking I would really learn something new about myself. I thought I “already knew” who I was. What I discovered was that I overlooked significant elements of my personality and interactions with others that have a significant impact on my professional life and its mission. This overwhelming process of autoethnography provided me with the opportunity to step outside of myself and really see myself. I value the opportunity to have done so.

### **Relationship to the Conceptual Framework**

The three major super themes of this research study were: (1) Being bothered or annoyed; (2) The “Job as” theme expressing the functionality of my job; & (3) Advocacy for causes. Although there was one predominant conceptual framework, Critical Race Theory (CRT), I found that rather than the five critical tenets of CRT, there was actually more cause to explore models of appropriate representative bureaucracy and grit as sources for my critical advocacy for students as well as my experiences in K-12 educational settings. The tenets of representative bureaucracy are more aligned to all three themes while CRT definitely surfaced in the theme of “job as...”. Although, the CRT tenets of “social construction thesis” which states that race is a social construct rather than a reality and “unique voice of color” wherein marginalized groups are able to recount their own experiences better than anyone else (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, pp. 6-7). The role of CRT with the impact of participatory action research surfaced in the findings of my research study as predominant factors as to why we as Black females are the best ones suited to tell our own story.

### *Critical Race Theory (CRT)*

Law Professor Bell was the leading creator of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Bell, 1976; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT was used to address issues of “school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, affirmative action, and high stakes testing, controversies over curriculum and history, and alternative and charter schools” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, pp. 6-7). Each issue addressed by CRT helps researchers and justice advocates to better frame them in a way that creates solutions to years of dilemmas. We as Black women in particular can use CRT to operationalize our experiences in various circles of work, social, and leisure settings. According to Collins (1991), we operate within three distinct areas of intersectionality between their gender, race, and class, making CRT a relevant framework with which to observe the debacle between these triple existences.

My retention in the role as school administrator is based primarily on my ability to accomplish the mission and calling on my life which is more in line with the characteristics of someone who has a tremendous amount of grit, dedication, and determination to accomplish a set of goals and passions. When I analyze my innate desire to wake up daily and go to work as a principal, it is apparent that I look forward to my pending interactions with students and the anticipation of meeting my desired goals of positively influencing the lives of children. This is evidenced in the level of excitement I express in my narrative analysis that serving children and meeting their needs is my passion. The passion for which I will go through anything to accomplish, climb any mountain to locate, and go to the depths of the sea to manifest, is that of taking care of children with the intent of ensuring they have every opportunity in life that has guaranteed them. When I perceive that anyone threatens this by hindering me in my calling, I have a problem with him or her. The data

narratives demonstrate this repeatedly. When someone wastes my time, impedes my space, talks negatively to a child, blocks a child's opportunity to advance his or her life, or merely is not as student-focused as I am being considered to be blocking the mission. Ultimately, when I perceive someone is blocking the mission, I naturally become frustrated and agitated with him or her and proceed to distance myself from the situation. In school leadership, the option to terminate an employee or move them to another school is not always a viable solution. In order to take this kind of action, I must take multiple steps of documentation, remediation, and action plans to address the problem with the employee. The action of distancing myself from situations such as this is a form of social exclusion and sometimes became my first option. Initially, I held a strong feeling that the social exclusion I may discover would be more related to those outside of my social circle and those whom I gave the power to exclude me from social, emotional, or academic circles.

Based on what I learned from my study, there were some direct connections with what I discussed earlier in the literature review relative to the potential phenomena related to social inclusion and exclusion. Through data collection, I found myself on a completely different pathway to why I felt social inclusion and exclusion during certain instances in my life. The major topics highlighted in the literature review included leadership theory, representative bureaucracy, situational leadership, Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Matrix of Domination, social inclusion and exclusion, grit, Afrocentricity, Double Consciousness, ethnography, and autoethnography. There were some glaring connections to certain elements of the literature review, which I highlighted above while some literary topics held no presence in the data collection nor subsequent analysis such as Ethnography, which I eliminated, from the work and Double Consciousness.

Grooming Black female teachers must increase as a priority for local education agencies (LEAs). This group of leaders currently exists in extremely low numbers and lack high-quality training, mentorship, and coaching while in positions of leadership (Mertz & McNeely, 1998; NCES, 2013b; Tillman, 2004). To retain culturally diverse school administrators, it is imperative to implement various support strategies that meet our unique needs. Particularly for me as a Black female school administrator, there are some unique and culturally relevant support strategies that would have supported my role as a teacher and subsequent ascension to school administration. Utilizing these suggestions can have significantly positive impact on existing Black female teachers and school administrators as well as those of other culturally diverse educators.

### **Implications of the Research**

The implications of this study include the identification of common themes of isolation and social exclusion experienced by me, a Black female school administrator. As a potential solution for some of the outcomes I experienced, further development of appropriate and duplicable solutions for Black female school administrators might be created because of data collected in this study. The insights into experiences involving this demographic of leaders may inform future leadership theory and add a relevant scholarship to the practice of educational leadership from a Black feminist critical perspective.

1. Culturally similar networking/support groups: These groups can be centered around topics that can be decided upon by the members of the group of administrators or educators. Additionally, topics can also be formed around a particular list of subjects that focus on instructional or managerial leadership, financial management, human resource matters, or climate and culture. This cause will unite

like-minded administrators and allow for more peer focused mentoring.

Additionally, this type of peer mentoring group causes more focus on a concept earlier explored in the literature review of linked fate where one's fate is inherently linked to those who are racially diverse and similar to them but in leadership roles. This is by far crucial for Black women who need a space to share in the critical exchange of ideas but also need the support of our sisters when others just do not "get" us. This is a typical way that I feel when interacting with other Black female school leaders as we communicate with each other easily and comfortably as we cite racially similar concerns and quickly understand what the other means by what she said.

2. Culturally diverse networking/support groups: This is similar to the culturally homogenous networking group but this racially heterogeneous group can provide even more diverse perspectives. It is important that Black female administrators as well as those of other racially diverse groups experience networking groups of racially different administrators to further capitalize on the variety of experiences others have in school leadership and education in general. This also informs how Black females "see" situations from others' perspectives, which can be invaluable when working with a variety of people in the workplace.
3. Creation of and use of grit scales: Similar to grit scales and surveys created by psychological, educational researchers, there needs to be an administrator educational focus and passion scale created that will allow the alignment of administrators' similar interests to coalesce into groups where he or she will be supported by targeted focus. Administrators will be able to discuss their passions

and unite to accomplish particular foci of the group within their LEA leading to administrator grit, resilience, and retention. Additionally, serving alongside administrators with similar grit can lead to organic peer mentoring and encouragement as well as a natural recognition of one's talent and abilities thus increasing retention of school administrators.

4. Local Education Agency (LEA) driven culturally responsive mentoring of administrators with senior administrators to increase retention. These partnerships should have well defined criteria for plan implementation and specific goals to accomplish. Additionally, new administrators (0-4 years of experience) and seasoned administrators (5+ years of experience) should have input into the desired outcomes to make the relationship feasible and worthwhile. Both parties should experience mutually reciprocal benefits to make the relationship the most productive.
5. Increased job shadowing of current school administrators: Current Black female teachers need the opportunity to intensely shadow current administrators to promote this career field of school leadership to them. This will allow Black female teachers the opportunity to ask questions to decide if this career path is right for them as well as develop a goal that may cause them to aspire toward school leadership.
6. Structured and flexible mentoring: Mentoring programs for Black female administrators should be flexible and include elements of structured and unstructured practices that allow the mentee to have access to the mentor for immediate feedback, discussion, debriefing, or collaboration. In the event of a crisis

or a pressing need to dialogue about a situation or topic, the mentor should make him or herself available to the mentee as she processes through how to handle the issue. This promotes more confidence for the administrator as well as an enhanced sense of self in that she can rely on a mentor for support, develop more fortitude to make decisions on her own without relying on feedback.

### **Limitations of this study**

Although this study highlights the thoughts, experiences, reflections, and critical analysis of one Black female school administrator, there were limitations. The limitations of this study include having just one Black female school administrator based on the indicated criteria of a building level leader. Additionally, focusing on one demographic, Black female school administrators, limits the expression of the experiences of other racially diverse persons such as Latina/Hispanic or Asian female administrators. Another limitation is the subjectivity of the researcher who identifies as a Black female administrator. While the subjectivity is revealed in the study as a strength of autoethnography, it can lead to flaws in the analysis of the data as well as the absence of a variety of perspectives. It also, however, can be a significant source of understanding for those researchers who do not routinely examine the episteme of racially diverse audience groups when exploring phenomena in research.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study was a qualitative autoethnography yet there are varying perspectives I recommend to further the research in the field regarding marginalized leaders such as Black females and women in general. The possibilities are:

1. Gather more critical autoethnographic accounts of women of color (Blacks, Latinas, Asians) in American public schools. Capture their experiences to inform culturally responsive mentoring programs.
2. Conduct a study of Black female teachers and chronicle their experiences in the classroom throughout a 5-7 year period looking at resiliency factors, strategies for their retention in the teaching field, overall support factors, and how those can and should look. Grooming Black female teachers must increase as a priority for local education agencies (LEAs). This group of leaders currently exists in extremely low numbers and lack high-quality training, mentorship, and coaching while in positions of leadership (Mertz & McNeely, 1998; NCES, 2013b; Tillman, 2004). Shanker (2015) found that even when marginalized teachers enter the workforce, the main reason they leave the profession causing a shortage in the school administration pipeline are the working conditions in which they find themselves. More must be done to change this phenomenon.
3. Compare and contrast study of the support Black women report they receive and need in K-12 school leadership versus that of White women.
4. A study regarding K-12 Black girls and their relative socialization experiences that lead them to select certain career choices. This is an effort to address the K-12 pipeline of students of color.
5. Quantitative study around the resiliency factors of Black women in relationship to grit and determination and how that relates to women of majority cultures.

6. Quantitative study around interviewing and hiring practices and policies and an examination of how current hiring policies and practices impact hiring of candidates of color into K-12 academic leadership positions.
7. A study of culture and climate satisfaction evaluations of institutions or school systems prior to the arrival of new staff such as Black females. Is the preparation for climate and culture inclusive of Black females prior to their arrival or is it even thought of? The rating on a culture and climate study relative to what types of experiences Black women can expect will help to advise them on whether or not that particular work place is a Black women friendly zone.
8. A longitudinal study that looks at factors of resilience and representative bureaucracy and the connection to Black feminist autoethnography (BFA).

### **Conclusion**

My identity has been largely shaped by four interesting phenomena. They include exposure to Eurocentric views and values, a military lifestyle for 13 years, and an international education in Japan from 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grades. Each of these significantly impacted my interactions with friends, family, teachers, administrators, colleagues, and community members. I have developed a very rigid, focused, and determined persona and am focused on righting the wrongs that exist in my pathway. As a devout Christian, I also carry a spiritual presence inside that impacts decisions of morality and conscience. Throughout this study, I noticed that in my role as principal, I have an awesome responsibility to those whom I serve. This responsibility is of critical importance as I strive to make an impact on public education that allows students to achieve higher, learn more, engage in active

learning on a grander scale, and benefit from schooling more so now than ever before. That is my mission and I will not stop advocating for this.

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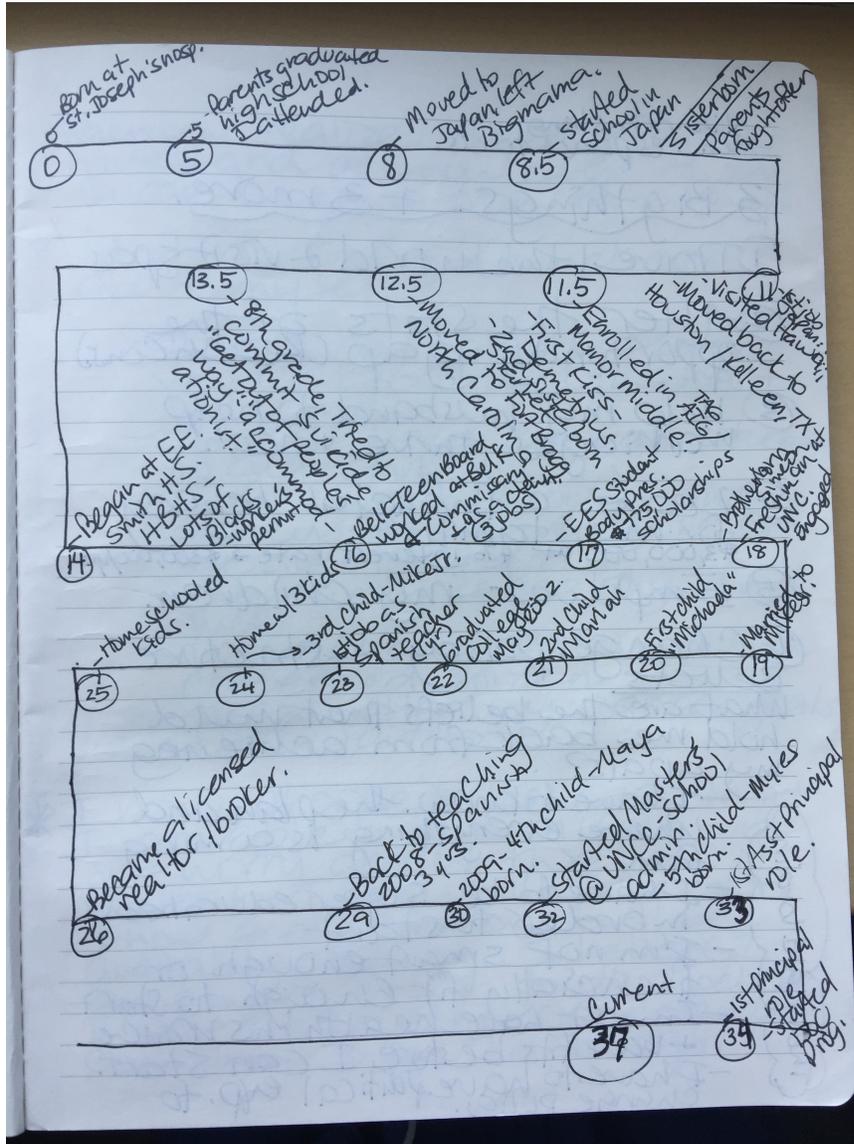
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APPENDIX A: LIFE TIMELINE



APPENDIX B: CODING AND THEMATIC CHART

Emerging themes and initial coding indicate the following codes below:

- 1-Being bothered
- 2-“Job as”
- 3-Advocacy

The coding process included taking all of the raw notes from the 4-week data collection period (January 23, 2017-February 17, 2017) and starting the content contextual analysis followed by narrative analysis processes to identify key words that surfaced in the data collection. These codes then coalesced into themes resulting in three global super themes identified in Chapter 4: Findings. (Excerpt included below. A more extensive chart was created but not included in this appendix section due to confidentiality of the data and names or organizations, people, and specific situations highlighted for which IRB approval was not obtained in order to include.)

Key Themes	Further Analysis	Supportive words or phrases/concepts
Personal life meets professional life	Why must the two be separated? In order to have a clear delineation between family and work life and to have balance.	Curious, upset, parent support for Trump-Friday, “I had forgotten about it by Sunday.”
Love of students	The emotional connection to students is so real and deep and I genuinely love kids.	“But I love students”
1 <sup>st</sup> mention of power, confident, authority with people	First day into the data collection, I have come face to face with the fact that I am way more confident and powerful than I have ever felt. I am in charge of my destiny, not a force that I allow to overtake my thought process.	“I realize my power my power, authority, but I have confidence. I realize this”
Impatience with people	Could this lack of patience with people get in the way of my connection and relativity to people? This may be seen as social exclusion.	“super short with people”

## APPENDIX C: THEME #2 “JOB AS

1. Job as child advocate: The children are the cause of this. Not bad, but because I’m a child advocate. Not only by teachers, but by parents because of my advocacy for children. I’m inclusive of these children.
2. Job as calming agent for kids and parents: I calm people down in a way unlike those who keep stuff stirred up. It’s like a game to me sort of. I enjoy knowing that I have talked someone down to reality and a sense of calm. Not sure why I value peace and calm so much. Maybe it’s because I have worked so hard in my life and I’m getting tired so calm and peace is what I currently seek.
3. Job as quick problem solver and instructional leader: I feel that this is my number one calling within my role as the principal. I’m there to solve the problems of inequities, low reading levels, unmotivated teachers, and any educational dilemma we face.
4. Job as a social justice advocate and personal self-care advocate: This requires that focus on the needs of those marginalized populations of students (Black, Latino, and migrant populations) as well as promote self-care of educational professionals who participate in such social justice advocacy. The work of social justice advocacy is tiring, long, and intense.
5. Job as a “ghetto fabulous advocate, LOL”. I like to have a little fun with this one as my job includes culturally responsive advocacy. If I am to impact the lives of all families, I must code switch in order to appropriately meet the needs of each population I serve. This term is offered in the most endearing and sincere way.

6. Job as advocate for what is needed in my building from the county office: I always have to balance the needs of those in my school with the available resources provided by our local school system. This requires both listening and healthy advocacy without upsetting anyone.
7. Job as human resources coach: My role includes career coaching to those who need or want it as well as making sure procedures are followed for various human resources procedures.
8. Job as career coach and leader who eliminates threats to the positive climate we desire at school: I have no problem with confrontation—nice or nicety. I think it comes from my mom being confrontational and my dad as well as he led soldiers for 27+ years in the Army. Eliminating threats sounds so harsh but is completely necessary.
9. Job as patient leader: I did not ask for patience but see where it comes in handy for sure. Being patient provides an opportunity to really see things and not react hastily.
10. Job as joy giver: Giving and promoting joy helps me process my life better and makes me happy. I enjoy making people smile as well as impacting someone's life in a positive way. Whether it is a teacher, staff member, student, community liaison, or someone from our central office in the maintenance department, inherently, I desire to make those in my presence smile.
11. Job as adult career coach: Usually this is directly connected to someone's loss of purpose. If a staff member exhibits a particular behavior that is not becoming of the positive environment, I find myself having crucial conversations with him or her to

reignite their purpose and passion for education. Additionally, I may suggest some relaxation or rejuvenation practices to help him or her reacclimate himself or herself to their career.

12. Job as people person, relationship builder, and conversation starter: By far, the hardest thing I have to do. I do not have a lot of time during any given school day but these types of conversations require a tremendous amount of time. When my time runs out, and it regularly does, people grow dissonant and impatient.
13. Job as emotional juggler of others' emotions: Why do I have to juggle others' emotions when I need help with mine? Really? The interesting thing about this job is the plethora of emotions I experience on a daily basis. They range from sheer excitement and joy to sometimes pure rage and anger.
14. Job as data coach and analyst: I am she who gets people (teachers) to take responsibility for their data. How do I effectively do this? Ultimately at the end of the school year, the data results rests on the principal. It is comprised of the hiring decisions I make, the instructional coaching I either directly provide or ensure is arranged for the staff, and the processes I oversee for data collection and analysis. I have learned that I am held responsible for the academic, discipline, and social/emotional data outcomes demonstrated by our school. While quite humbling, it is also an enormous task. Although I like solving problems, no professor, mentor, or other administrator really taught me how to change teachers' data. I need more training on how to coach teachers to teach better. How do I have those crucial conversations with teachers about their data and how to fix it? How do I solve this problem? A great mentor would be able to help me systematically complete this

process. I continue to ask myself, “Are my services accepted the same way as a Black woman toward White teachers or do I need continued validation in order to feel like I am trusted?” Or, “Do I simply need more time to build relationships?” As a principal, I value others’ opinions of me especially as it relates to the role of data coach and analyst since schools are rated annually on their ability to bring students to a proficient academic level in certain subjects. My success in this area of my job is crucial to my retention as a principal as well as my feeling of success in the role.

15. Job as looking for the positives: I must have moments like this in my job and life so burn out is not an eminent threat. With so many negatives that persist naturally in society, it is imperative to look for the positives in all situations. This particular part of my job allows me to turn around a situation when others least expect it because I focus on seeing the potential in a student, a teacher, or in a parent. I love being the one with rose-colored glasses.
16. Job as personal fix agent and balancer: I must balance the demands of my job with those of my home and personal life. To say my life is busy is an understatement. With the demands of work plus those of my home life including my children, husband, church, civic, and community responsibilities, I barely have time to eat and sleep. As a personal fix agent, both on the job and at home, it can become overwhelming to “fix” others’ problems when they arise but that is certainly part of my calling. Being able to see a resolution to the personal problems faced by my staff or students allows them to be able to focus on their education; either teaching or learning.

17. Job as a parent coach, community leader: This is a space that I find myself often that can be compromised or rather influenced heavily by my own parenting beliefs. As a mother of five, I find myself calling on my own experiences to advise parents as well as coach them through a situation they may encounter with their children. Parents drive our business. It is so important to embrace them as our partners in learning. Additionally, I must lead in my community as I forge partnerships with individuals and companies in order to plan effectively for my school. Community agencies and business partnerships are vital to extend our reach as a school beyond the walls in which we operate in daily.
18. Job as a life coach, personal assistant, problem solver, THEN instructional coach and leader: So much of what I do involves other people. If they are off, so am I. In graduate school, we did not have a class in this subject. We never discussed having to counsel people through the death of their loved ones, or dealing with allergies and making sure teachers have the appropriate medication so they can speak and teach effectively. We did, however, focus on ensuring their instruction is effective and accomplishes the mission of educating students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
19. Job as mediator between myself and others: Being a mediator requires patience and the ability to see all sides of a story or situation as objectively as possible. It requires diligence, inquiry, and a calming voice to mediate between myself, and others or just with others and their issues. In other words, I have to be ready to intervene in the event of a dispute or misunderstanding in order to maintain peace, especially when I am directly involved.

20. Job as parent organization representative: UUUGHHHHH. This particular emotional outburst came on a day where I had a negative observation of myself with the PTO. Although we all advocate for children, we do disagree on how that advocacy should take place and for whom. I choose to advocate for all children, not just my own while some elect to focus on a certain select group of students. This is where the controversy arose. So, for now, I shall remain cordial and only divulge that my job consists of working with inner support agencies such as my school's parent-teacher organization to be the administrative representative and do what is best for kids.
21. Job as implementer and problem solver: So many times, over and over again, I find myself solving others' problems and constantly in a state of analysis, sometimes to a fault. I feel that this is my number one calling within my role as the principal. I am there to solve the problems of inequities, low reading levels, unmotivated teachers, and any educational dilemma we face. There are many times, however, that I wish I had taken a little more time to think before rushing to offer a solution or suggestion to what I perceive to be a major issue. Although it does not turn out negatively too many times, I need to slow down a bit in my problem solving. I am quick to hear the story, rush to offer three or more solutions, and attempt implementation almost instantly. I heard my mentor say once, "Go slow to go fast" and I must remain in that frame of mind to maximize my effectiveness.
22. Job as substitute teacher: I jump in and do what it takes to get it done. There have been many instances where I have felt compelled to announce myself as a substitute teacher on the school announcements. It is actually quite fun and

exciting. I am able to lesson plan and do one thing I love which is to teach while shocking the children simultaneously who do not expect to see me as their teacher. In the past, especially when I served as a high school administrator, I subbed in Chemistry, Earth Science, Algebra, Spanish, and Physical Education classes. During my observation and data collection, I subbed as a third grade teacher and a guidance teacher. Again, these opportunities are especially fun because I am able to interact with the students on a different and more intimate level while continuing to build relationships. It is the best of both worlds.

23. Job as disciplinarian of adults and children: Discipline of children in a school setting is almost synonymous with eating in the cafeteria. It happens daily. Discipline of a teacher, however, is another story. When trying to build relationships with staff members, instances of policy enforcement and human resource matters always impede this process. While difficult, discipline is necessary.
24. Job as community advocate and as influencer: Others are watching me so I feel an overwhelming obligation to ensure my image and influence are conducive to the environment in which I work. Additionally, I realize that my influence reaches to those whom I see and know as well as those whom I do not. As an advocate, the calling on my life to give a voice to those who are voiceless remains my main focus and life purpose. The two callings—advocate and influencer--work in tandem as my primary purpose for being a teacher and subsequent school administrator.
25. Job as calming agent when there is a potential conflict that may arise: Culturally responsive conflict management and resolution is the type of conflict management I

have to engage in on a regular basis. I work with a racially diverse group of students, parents, and community members but my staff is 93% White, 5% Black, and 2% Indian. Although the staff is not quite as phenotypically diverse, I still find it necessary to be culturally relevant in my voice, tone, inflection, and actions toward a conflict in order to have reasonable outcomes for all stakeholders. One size does not fit all.

26. Job as listener: Perhaps I get frustrated with people and their trivial matters due to the fact that the main focus of our jobs should be on helping kids and not on our personal drama and issues. Unfortunately, I must practice listening to people on a regular basis. I have to process their problems and issues and take time to ensure they know I care. Why? Because I too am evaluated based on my staff, student, and community comments and feedback about my performance as their principal. These comments and thoughts are factored into my evaluation by my supervisor, which is usually an assistant superintendent. Whether it is fair or not, it is important that I develop great listening skills and that my constituents feel heard. Too many times though, I find myself getting more and more impatient with matters that are trivial or that we have already spent time trying to solve but have yet to reach a resolution. This is where my frustration level with both my job and those with whom I work reaches a maximum level of intolerance.
27. Job as people manager: They (professors) did tell me this in college. They said I would be a manager and instructional leader. That is all they said. This is the most by far the most exhausting part of my job. It is all those stories they tell in order to ensure I am listening. Managing people is a very delicate and tedious process

because all people have multiple dimensions and require handling with care. This too can be an exhausting part of my job, especially since my focus on ensuring children are learning daily requires that I manage them as well as their families so the students show up ready to learn. When they do not, I manage the process of ensuring they arrive at the appropriate level of learning readiness.

28. Job as a mentor of other aspiring principals: I currently have two principal interns that I mentor this academic school year. They happen to both be White females. I teach them out of my experiences, theoretical and research based practice, and experimental inquiry based approaches. The position as their mentor, with only four years' experience as an administrator, is quite humbling and eye opening. It forces me to reflect not only on my practice alone, but also on the actions of my mentors in order to provide a well-rounded experience to my mentees. It is also refreshing to pour into the hearts and minds of others who aspire to become school administrators. I find myself being the mentor who wants to retain them in the administrative field so I always discuss personal self-care methods so they remember to take care of themselves as they pour so much into others. It is a sobering reminder for me as well. One of the main foci of this research study is to identify barriers to and suggestions for support of school administrators, particularly Black female school administrators. Learning out loud is how I function. I would appreciate a mentor to whom I can talk to out loud when I am in the middle of a situation as this type structured but flexible mentoring is invaluable.
29. Job as advocate and principal leader—"principal voice": This is my Zen space as of the last year. Advocating for others and solving problems by using my principal

voice is a place in which I never thought I would experience. This is in part due to the possibility that I was leaving the profession. I am firm that being a principal now is the calling on my life and the space of finding my principal voice is a special one that I intend to further develop.

30. Job as supporter of family and social interactions: Just like a traditional Black family reunion, so do I view my interactions with my staff and students, except everyone is not Black. I do feel that I try to make my work environment as family friendly and oriented as possible. Doing this is important because so much of what I do at work relates to my personal calling and mission of my life, therefore it is critical that I make work feel like home and sometimes have work be a part of the home discussions and critical discourse.
31. Job as a safety leader: This function of my job is extremely important and comes with significant consequences if I inadvertently miss something or do not have the proper systems in place. Our schools have annual safety audits conducted by the school system safety team as well as daily and weekly checks by the custodial staff on site and the school resource officer. Weekly we are to report any maintenance issues that could impact safety and request they be fixed as well as follow up to ensure the repairs are done in a timely manner. Again, I am to ensure systems are in place to maximize safety in my building and beyond.
32. Job as a change agent: A change agent is a person who assesses a situation and proposes changes, sometimes minor and other times significant, in order to move the organization forward. Change is based on needs and maximizing impact, not merely on desire to change. This goes hand in hand with solving problems which I

enjoy doing. As stated earlier, I need to exercise more caution as it relates to solving problems or changing things too quickly. Doing so can be dangerous and ineffective.

APPENDIX D: DREAMING OF A PLACE CALLED HOME BOOK CHAPTER BRIEF  
OVERVIEW

**Dreaming of a Place Called Home: Local and International Perspectives on Teacher  
Education and School Diversity**

**Title: An Opportunity in a Far East Country**

Aimy S. L. Steele

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**Abstract:**

This chapter investigates how exposure to international education opportunities during primary and secondary schooling can heighten the worldview and enhance the academic performance of students. In this work, I auto-ethnographically use my life experiences in school and society to explain how my educational prospect increased because of being exposed to traditional Japanese culture and high expectation in school. Using assimilation and acculturation as frameworks, I frame my educational journey in the urban schools of my hometown of Texas, as well as the Department of Defense schools in Japan, and the suburban schools I attended in North Carolina. I examine how academic rigor and access to high quality teachers all helped me become one of the highest performing students in my classes, and eventually enroll in advanced courses once I returned to the U.S. While explaining my journey, the chapter also addresses my struggles with mis-education and assimilation and acculturation in my education and identity development. I also explain my experiences with racial and ethnic relations as a minority student both in the U.S. and Japan. Based on these experiences, I provide suggestions for teacher preparation.

APPENDIX E: CULTURE GRAM

Culture Gram: Aimy Steele

