Guess who's coming to dinner: How African American male administrators in predominantly white educational systems negotiate cultural sacrifice

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Guess who’s coming to dinner: How African American male administrators in predominantly white educational systems negotiate cultural sacrifice

by

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Educational Leadership

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Guess who’s coming to dinner: How African American male administrators in predominantly white educational systems negotiate cultural sacrifice

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

Dissertation Committee

Dr. Stephen Brookfield, Committee Chair

Dr. Rama Hart, Committee Member

Dr. George Yancy, Committee Member

Final Approval Date
Abstract

It is said that being a school administrator is a very lonely and challenging position to have, but one of the most rewarding to create the conditions by which students succeed. It is even more challenging when one must continually negotiate who they authentically are in an effort to remain in the position. The purpose of this study is to explore the personal, professional, and social experiences of African American male school leaders in predominantly white school systems and answers the question of how they negotiate their racial identity without committing cultural sacrifice. By utilizing a qualitative research design and a scholarly professional narrative, this study highlights key features germane to black male principals to remain successful. Extensive interviews were conducted with eight black male principals that were coded and analyzed to solicit dominant themes upon which to expound. I utilized critical race theory as a dominant framework to analyze the narratives, specifically addressing the permanence of racism juxtaposed to being a leader of color within predominantly white systems governed by dominant Eurocentric ideology. I close with a summary and discussion of research themes and questions along with implications for practice and opportunities to extend future research.
Dedication

This body of research is dedicated to a young man named Reggie who changed my life forever over twenty-five years ago. You were ten years old and I was in my early twenties. We met almost every day after school at the local YMCA where I helped you with homework and you engaged me in foosball. Little did you know, when you said to me, “I wish I had a dad like you,” that you would help me realize my true calling in life. From that moment forward, God purposed me to serve young people in this world and to help them overcome obstacles in their life that may prevent them from accessing their dreams and reaching their full potential.

I never had an opportunity to thank you for entering my life, but I want you to know that because of you, I am a better man and carry your spirit with me every day. You must be in your mid-thirties by now and I pray that God delivered you from the circumstances that brought our time to an abrupt end. Together, we represent the continuum of black males, the good and the bad, the happy and the sad. Our totality signifies to the world that we will rise irrespective of the world telling us we can’t!
Acknowledgements

“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” - I Corinthians 15:57

I thank God for placing me on this amazing journey of self-discovery. Little did I know that pursuing a doctorate was yet another way God uses blessings to teach life lessons. I am appreciative of the many people He introduced me to along the way and for his unwavering love, support and grace when I felt I was not capable of accepting this blessing. He is my strength and my rock and it is only because of Him that I am who I am.

To the former University of St. Thomas President, Father Dease, I cannot thank you enough for believing in me. As an undergraduate, your Presidency pushed the University to new heights and expanded equity and social justice frameworks on campus. Because of your efforts, I felt comfortable and supported in my authentic voice. You invited me to return to St. Thomas to pursue my doctoral studies. These gestures exemplify what it means to be like Christ. Your humility and ethic of care for people is so powerful and because of you, I had a pathway and always felt St. Thomas was home. May God continue to bless you in retirement.

I will always remember the late Father Posey, former theology professor at the University of St. Thomas. I met you at a point in my life where I needed you most. You helped me re-discover my faith and belief in God. You pushed me and directly challenged me...by design. I would not have been successful as an undergrad without you. Every day you began class with an inspirational passage and little do you know that on September 3, 1994, you read a daily devotional passage entitled Right Place. It felt like a devotion you crafted just for me. I read it almost daily and have shared it with hundreds of people praying that it instills the same hope it did for me. It is premised in Psalm 73:24. I thank God for placing you in my life, I know you are in heaven looking down upon me.
I also want to thank my dissertation Chair, Dr. Stephen Brookfield for your inspirational teaching. It was because of your classes that I discovered my dissertation topic and knew that your research background and my interest would converge in a manner that would allow me to complete the dissertation process. You were understanding when ‘life continued to happen’ for me and directive when I needed guidance. And to Dr. Yancy and Dr. Hart, thank you both for your willingness to bring your research expertise as a critical lens to my dissertation topic. You kept me consciously focused on race and organizational systems and how this held the narratives of my participants. Your participation on my committee is very much appreciated!

To the participants of this study. I cannot thank you enough for the brotherhood we formed over the years. Our conversations create not only a space for us to be our best, but we give permission for others to do the same. I have so much respect for each of you and have mad love for you all. I am forever changed by our fellowship and thank God for placing you all in my life.

Michaela and Alana, you two are the most amazing young women I know and I am honored to be your father. I never knew that by raising girls, I would learn so much about being a man. Watching you grow into strong, smart, beautiful black women brings tears of joy to my heart. It won’t be long before you’re both in college and beginning an amazing chapter in your lives…wow, it seems like yesterday mom and I were welcoming you into this world! This journey has taken me a lot of time, hopefully I modeled for you the persistence required to achieve your dreams. I want you both to know that I strive to be my best for you in everything that I do. Keep God first your life and He will continue to bless you abundantly. I love you both more than you know.

Finally, to my amazing wife Tamiko. Over twenty years ago, God brought us together and I still wonder how I got so lucky? You truly bring out the best in me and words cannot express
how deep my love is for you. There have been many times when I questioned whether or not I
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believing in me and when needed, giving me a swift kick in the butt! You availed yourself on
numerous occasions to be a sounding board, a critical reader, an editor and often times, the voice
of reason. You once said to me, “You can do everything honey, but you can’t do it all at once.” I
thank God for your love, patience, appreciation and balance. You are the anchor in our family
and I know my dissertation commitment put a lot on your plate. Thank you for holding our
family together during the most challenging times. It’s often stated that behind every strong man
is an even stronger woman and I think I have the strongest who stands out front! You are beyond
amazing and I couldn’t dream of anyone else with whom I would rather spend my life. I love you
to the moon and back!
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Chapter 1. Introduction to the study

Reflexive statement

“You will never amount to shit because you are too busy goofing around!” This statement, followed by the strong racial epithet of calling me a nigger while I was in sixth grade seeded my desire to awaken and begin my lifelong journey of advocating for issues of racial and social equity. Even though this occurred many years ago, the power of such statements can last forever. I have long forgiven my teacher for his remarks, but it serves as an example of how predominantly white systems can constrict the life-blood of individuals of color within it. I was a young person of color, growing up in multi-racial family (e.g., black father and a white mother) spending my formative years in the inner-city then moving to a predominantly white environment during adolescence. Additionally, with the absence of cultural barometers back then, who would challenge statements such as these or protect the innocent minds of young students of color so as not to have their dreams deferred?

This was a time in my life when I learned what it meant to be different, what it meant to be black and unfortunately, what it meant to hate. I did not have the tools or resources necessary to combat, or as I will explore later, negotiate the cultural landscape of being a person of color in a predominantly white world, juxtaposed to loving a white mother every day of my life. Young, black and confused, I searched for a culturally relevant purpose that would armor me from future situations such as this. Much changed in my life since then and as a matured 47-year-old man, I am at that reflective stage of life. I am not only gauging how I will continue my journey, but also as a father of two daughters, how I serve as a guide and protector to ensure their journey as young African American girls is much easier than mine by providing them with the skills necessary to negotiate their world.
My personal life experiences influence my professional role as an African American educational leader; however, this role has not come easily. “Leaders are called to stand in that lonely place between the no longer and the not yet, and intentionally make decisions that will bind, forge, move and create history” (Anderson, 1970). Making the decision to become a leader is one that takes extreme personal insight and assessment. It is not simple as to say, I want to be a leader today. To the contrary, making such a decision includes great sacrifices, both formal and informal. It also requires significant training to not only understand the technical aspects of leadership, but honing the artistic craft of being a leader. By artistic craft, I mean how one’s authentic character is instilled into the technical aspects of leadership; marrying both the heart and the head.

**Racial demographics**

Over my years of practice within education, I watched many people emerge into their roles as leaders and witnessed first-hand the challenges they experienced, how roles and social dynamics changed for them and lastly the fall of some. I also witnessed that there was a clear tracking system. It seemed consistent that white men advanced into leadership positions with little effort, while women and people of color experienced more challenges to doing the same (Carton, A., & Rosette, A., 2011; Parker, 2005; Rosette, A., Leonardelli, G., & Phillips, K., 2008). As an African American male, I certainly learned about my gender privilege, but it was my racial background that created a level of dissonance no matter where I went.

As I advanced my career, my racial support base decreased, meaning that more of my colleagues were no longer people of color; rather, white individuals who often shared very different leadership perspectives than I. It became increasingly challenging because I often felt alone or dismissed based upon the perspectives I brought as an African American leader. At the
time, an African American mentor of mine who was an assistant superintendent stated, “You have a great future ahead of you, but just remember, the higher you climb the leadership ladder, the whiter it will get. As long as you’re comfortable with this, you’ll do just fine, but never forget who you are!” That stark statement of reality served as a declaration of support and solidified my intent to attain the highest position possible within a school system to affect change as it pertained to social and racial justice, yet posed a dialectic where I needed to balance my authentic self (specifically being an African American leader) within a predominantly white framework. Questions in my head at that time were, “Would I be successful,” “Is it even attainable,” “If not me…who?”

Today, I often find myself to be the only educational leader of color in many professional settings yet serve a student demographic that is rapidly diversifying. For example, the Minnesota State Demographic Center (2013) shows that Minnesota’s white population resides at 85%, while projections show that by the year 2035, the white population will only increase by about 9% while the growth rate for individuals of color is 25%. In 1996, students of color accounted for 36% of the K-12 enrollment. By 2050, student of color enrollment is projected to reach over 50% (Orfield & Yun, 1999). Between 1990 and 2000, America’s K-12 population increased by 16% and of this, 59% of the total increase was due to students of color. During this same time frame, the Latino American, African American, Asian American and Native American K-12 enrollment grew at the rate of 179%, 118%, 87% and 34% respectively. Conversely, the white K-12 population has continued to decrease in public education since1997 (Minnesota Minority Education Partnership [MMEP], 2001). To date, schools in Minnesota enroll a higher percentage of students of color than the overall diversity of the state and outside of the urban core
(Minneapolis & St. Paul), the trend data remains high, totaling 133% increase in student of color enrollment (MMEP, 2013).

The importance of noting these statistics is that many school districts have strategic plans that outline their commitment to diversity on paper, but struggle to recruit and retain a diverse working staff or align practices accordingly (Hansen & Quintero, 2018). I watched a district where I worked for twelve years pledge commitment to diversity, but continued to struggle with actual implementation or follow-through in terms of support, especially for the staff and leadership of color in the district. I even faced challenges when I attempted to leverage grant resources just to purchase multicultural artwork for the district so that there was some visual representation to the students and community that reflected who they were. Ultimately, most of the leadership of color left the district and consequently, so did staff.

The greatest challenge for me as a leader has not been the typical balance of time, it was my ability to include a racialized perspective of leadership every single day without feeling marginalized. This cultural negotiation creates a significant problem, not only for me, but also for the organization in which I serve because I am not allowed to be fully present; therefore, providing a disservice or a level of compromised contribution.

I was part of a racial affinity group called the Brothers Network whose membership was men who identified as African American men. We were primarily composed of educational administrators, though we had members who were leaders in corporate America, human services and corrections. Irrespective of their affiliate organizations, many were the sole representative or a member of a few leaders of color within their respective organizations. We formulated this group as an outlet, whereby we assembled as like-minded individuals to share rich, cultural experiences directly pertaining to our leadership; it was an opportunity to seek and speak our
truths through a racialized lens without the fear of being isolated, pacified or dismissed.

Overwhelmingly, I heard their stories...all sharing a common theme of cultural isolation, negotiation and in some cases ‘cultural sacrifice’, which is a term I derived to suggest a process by which they lose a deep sense of their personal racial identity at the expense of maintaining their status as leaders in predominantly white settings.

**Rationale for research**

After a Brothers Network convening, I reflected on our conversations and realized that though I knew many of these men on a very personal level, their stories were so powerful and captivating that I could not stop replaying them in my head and comparing/contrasting them to my own narrative. I hungered to hear more of what composed them as African American men who were leaders in their personal, ethnic communities, but also transcended race to attain positions of authority in predominantly white spaces. At that moment, I realized that this was the focus of my dissertation. These were the absent narratives, those that have been silenced and ridiculed for years.

I would be remiss not to disclose that part of the purpose for conducting this research is derived from my lived experiences; somewhat of a self-reconciliation and scholarly professional narrative (SPN). Nash (2004) notes “your own life has meaning, both for you and for others. Your own life tells a story [or a series of stories] that, when narrated well, can deliver to your readers those aha moments of self and social insight that are all too rare in more conventional forms of research” (p. 24). Because my racial identity is inextricably bound to my personal and professional identity, I seek a wholeness or congruence that many authors of SPN’s do. I am “most interested in constructing stories that might heal the rifts that exist between [my] personal
and professional life” (Nash, 2004, p. 99) and quite possibly, with the sharing of my research, could do the same for others.

I acknowledge that I am not alone on this journey and that the stories of others enhance my own lived experiences, so I want to better understand the broader scope of what it means to be an African American leader (e.g., head principal) negotiating cultural sacrifice in a predominantly white educational context. By utilizing a qualitative approach, I will gather epistemological narratives to unearth how one develops and situates their respective cultural identity and how this intersects with their professional contexts and expose the challenges, compromises and possibly sacrifices experienced. Lastly, the learning from this study will help to offer a lens of support to many black men who find themselves in predominantly white spaces to remain successful.

Statement of the problem

The ability of my narrative, or others similar to mine, to be upheld as truth or used to counter the lived experiences of many students of color is at times nonexistent. Irrespective of my accomplishments, credentials, title and ability to deliver high quality outcomes, my genetic makeup or phenotypic presence is threatening to systems that do not reflect me. My role as an executive administrative leader is truly that of the minority—in terms of numbers. Today, of the more than 6 million teachers in the United States, nearly 80 percent are white, 9.3 percent are black, 7.4 percent are Hispanic, 2.3 percent are Asian and 1.2 percent is another race. Additionally, 80 percent of all teachers are female (Toldson, 2012). Equally, the amount of executive level school leadership lacks representation (e.g., principals and/or superintendents of color). These statistics show the disparity between diverse student populations and of those who serve them.
African-American and Latino superintendents are not faring as well, and they are significantly underrepresented given the racially diverse pupil population. A study conducted by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) shared that only 2 percent of respondents categorized themselves as African American, another 2 percent as Latino. Consequently, more than half of the superintendents of color were employed in school districts where the minority population exceeded 50 percent (Domenech, 2010). As America’s PK-12 student demographic grows increasingly diverse, it is imperative that staff and leadership reflect learners and help sustain systems that are culturally relevant and responsive. Equally, those leaders and teachers of color ought to be fully present in who they are versus whom others want them to be to meet the needs of diverse learners. This research will investigate how race is constructed and the impact on African American male school leaders in their roles as principals in predominantly white educational systems.

This body of qualitative research will contribute to the field of education by exemplifying the challenges experienced by principals of color in predominantly white educational systems and what can be done in response to ensure their success. Additionally, I believe the findings of this research can be utilized to better understand similar challenges experienced by students of color who are being educated in predominantly white learning environments (or premised on dominant white ideology) and inform solutions to the racialized and often predictable achievement gaps in PK-12 education.

Research questions

The following anchor question will guide the research: What perspectives do these participants have regarding their personal, professional and sociocultural experiences of being an African American male school leader in a predominantly white school district? The specific
research questions are: (1) How do participants perceive themselves as leaders in predominantly white school systems; (2) How do participants make sense of their race in relation to their experiences as leaders at predominantly white school systems; (3) How have racialized experiences shaped participant’s leadership identity; (4) What factors do the participants believe have contributed to their successful or unsuccessful personal, professional integration into predominantly white school and not sacrifice their authentic selves?

Research design

I am choosing to frame this research as a qualitative case study, which dissects the consciousness of what we think something is and moves to the more subconscious level offering an analysis of perceptions; this is a process to make meaning in the absence of facts or other absolutes. A qualitative approach is organic in that there is not a prescribed process to follow, as such, “researchers [must] emphasize subjective thinking because, as they see it, the world is dominated by objects less obstinate than walls. And human beings are much more like ‘The Little Engine That Could’. We live in our imaginations, settings are more symbolic than concrete” (Bogden & Biklen, 2003 p. 24).

A qualitative case study attempts “to get to the true essence of things without having to rely on any empirical evidence at all…by observing them, though in a peculiar way…one takes the contents of consciousness as they come, but suspends judgment as to whether it is true or false” (Collins, 1994, p. 269-70). This approach allows the researcher to study a variety of variables among participants all sharing a common experience and through interviews, describe the essence of the phenomenon via theme identification and clearly articulate the “what” and “how” of the experience (Creswell, 2007).
I am also adopting a more hermeneutical position premised on the notion that the human experience is invariably influenced by the external world (Heidegger, 1962; van Manen, 1990). Gadamer (1976) supports the notion of ‘fusing horizons’, whereby the researcher imparts their expertise or lived experience to those being studied. In my research, my experiences of having been an African American principal in predominantly white settings will lend itself well to the qualitative research gathered by interviewing research participants. Ultimately, I am striving for a level of reciprocal accountability (particularly in the data gathering phase), in that, through the interview process, program participants will gain a deeper understanding of themselves as will I and we will land on co-constructed understandings.

It is also important to note the broad social ecosystem that exists during the time which many of the participants, including myself, socialized their identity. Schools, play a significant role in shaping the broader ecology that encompasses personal identity and nearly every person has gone through a K-12 socialization process, including those in public, private, parochial and even home school environments (Tatum, 1992; Tatum, 1997). For decades, schools have been the medium by which significant social-warfare issues of our time have been waged (e.g., war on poverty, crime, drugs, etc.). So, it is not surprising the impact schooling has on identity development, specifically given how the PK-12 school communities are re-segregating and almost worse in a post Brown vs. Board era (Boger & Orfield, 2005; Kozol, 1991)
Chapter 2: Literature review

**Critical race theory (CRT)**

I am adopting a critical race lens in this research to not only gather the stories of research participants, but to apply the notion of ‘criticality’ to their stories. I am striving not to accept what is evident at face value and plunge deeper into the meaning behind participant’s stories. To do so, there are two points of consideration. First, is to challenge ideology and second, to contest hegemony (Brookfield, 2005). “Ideology maintains the power of a dominant group or class by portraying as universally true beliefs that serve the interests mainly of this dominant group” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 68). The program participant’s in my research are working in predominantly white educational systems, which will possibly be laden with an organizational ideology that is in direct opposition to who they are. By acknowledging and challenging this, participants will be able to make meaning of their role within their respective organizations. Failure to do so may lead to a state of hegemonic practice which is “the process by which we learn to embrace enthusiastically a system of beliefs and practices that end up harming us and working to support the interests of others who have power over us” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 93). This is very dangerous, as hegemony often exists unknowingly, yet willingly. “People are not forced against their will to assimilate to dominant ideology. They learn to do this, quite willingly, and in the process, they believe that this ideology represents their best interests (Brookfield, 2005, p. 94).

Further, it is important to overlay the notion of criticality with a racialized perspective because critical theory is derived from white male discourse and in isolation will support “white cultural hegemony, sustained and perpetuated in terms of the particularity of race and gender related institutional power” (Yancy, 1998, pp. 8-9). To do this, I will utilize critical race theory
By bringing racial value to the perspectives of the research participants, it honors their authentic voice by “recognizing the contributions and particularities of one’s racial identity” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 281, Woodward, 2011).

At its core, CRT is committed to advocating for justice for people who find themselves occupying positions on the margins – for those who hold minority status. It directs attention to the ways in which structural arrangements inhibit and disadvantage some more than others in our society. CRT spotlights the form and function of dispossession, disenfranchisement, and discrimination across a range of social institutions, and then seeks to give voice to those who are victimized and displaced; therefore, seeks not only to name, but also to be a tool for rooting out inequality and injustice across racial hierarchies (Lynn & Parker, 2006, Treviño, Harris & Wallace, 2008).

CRT, brings to the forefront, critical racial issues that are attached to everyday practice and offers counter narratives that are often suppressed (Parker, L., Deyhle, D., Villenas, S. & Nebeker, K., 1998). Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993) framed CRT around six central themes: (1) racism is endemic to American life; (2) legal claims of neutrality, colorblindness, and meritocracy are to be viewed with skepticism; (3) racism is rooted in a contextual and historical analysis of the law; (4) experiential knowledge of the oppressed is fundamental in analyzing the existing legal and social structures; (5) CRT is interdisciplinary and eclectic; and (6) CRT works toward eliminating racial oppression as well as ending all forms of oppression (pp. 6-7).

Critical race theory also illuminates America’s binary black-white system where many minority groups tend to gauge themselves by African Americans because the history of African Americans in relationship to their white counterparts is so pervasive that it often shadows other
groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). “The paradigm holds that one group, blacks, constitutes the prototypical minority group. ‘Race’ means, quintessentially, African American” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 67) and this casts the notion of whites being on top, while African Americans are at the bottom.

I believe that CRT will ultimately yield resolutions or at least next steps in my research by rejecting the master narratives that attempt to encompass all phenomena or dictate the construction of lives and highlight counter narratives offered by African American leaders that challenge dominant ideologies typically supplied by Euro-Americans (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, Jani & Ortiz, 2010, Witherspoon & Mitchell, 2009). A CRT perspective will help to analyze why and how it seems that African American male leadership is the rubric for diversity in predominantly white educational systems and deconstruct the false realities surrounding such an ideology. CRT also assesses power structures often associated with race and the ways that African American leaders within white organizations feel powerless.

Cornel West (2004), one of America’s leading contemporary pragmatists and critical race theorist terms this experience as nihilism, “the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important), lovelessness” (p. 26). Since being brought over to America, African Americans had to endure the most challenging times and bore witness to levels of cruelty, even death, that none of us can even fathom in 2018. West (2004) further argues that African Americans have a sense of tragicomic hope, which is the notion that in spite of peril, one must strive for what is to come that will deliver you from such peril. He believes, tragicomic hope “yields a courage to hope for betterment against the odds without a sense of revenge or resentment” (West, 2004, p. 216).
Tragicomic hope has its origins in the music genre of the blues. “The blues is the most profound interpretation of tragicomic hope in America. The blues encourages us to confront the harsh realities of our personal and political lives unflinchingly without innocent sentimentalism or coldhearted cynicism” (West, 2004, p. 216). I vividly remember growing up listening to my father playing the likes of B.B. King, Muddy Waters, Etta James, Ma Rainey, Ray Charles and countless others. Their music was somber and often times bleed sorrow. I never could understand his passion for this genre of music until I was mature enough to appreciate the explicit collective messages they all shared. Blues, as I learned, originated from the times of slavery (Giovanni, 2007, Kopp, 2005, Morrison, 2015). While working in the fields, many slaves would call upon God through spirituals engaging in a collective call and response. This was done to find beauty in sorrow; to instill a belief that through darkness will come light. To this day, a song that is forever etched in my mind is from B.B. King, entitled, *Why I Sing The Blues*. The following musical lyrics exemplify tragicomic hope:

```plaintext
Everybody wants to know Why I sing the blues Yes, I say everybody wanna know Why I sing the blues Well, I've been around a long time I really have paid my dues

When I first got the blues They brought me over on a ship Men were standing over me And a lot more with a whip And everybody wanna know Why I sing the blues Well, I've been around a long time Mm, I've really paid my dues

I've laid in a ghetto flat Cold and numb I heard the rats tell the bedbugs To give the roaches some
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Everybody wanna know  
Why I'm singing the blues  
Yes, I've been around a long time  
People, I've paid my dues

I stood in line  
Down at the County Hall  
I heard a man say, "We're gonna build  
Some new apartments for y'all"  
And everybody wanna know  
Yes, they wanna know  
Why I'm singing the blues  
Yes, I've been around a long, long time  
Yes, I've really, really paid my dues

Now I'm gonna play Lucille

My kid's gonna grow up  
Gonna grow up to be a fool  
'Cause they ain't got no more room  
No more room for him in school  
And everybody wanna know  
Everybody wanna know  
Why I'm singing the blues  
I say I've been around a long time  
Yes, I've really paid some dues

Yeah, you know the company told me  
Guess you're born to lose  
Everybody around me, people  
It seems like everybody got the blues  
But I had 'em a long time  
I've really, really paid my dues

You know I ain't ashamed of it, people  
I just love to sing my blues  
I walk through the cities, people  
On my bare feet  
I had a fill of catfish and chitterlings  
Up and down Beal Street  
You know I'm singing the blues  
Yes, I really  
I just have to sing my blues  
I've been around a long time  
People, I've really, really paid my dues
Now Father Time is catching up with me
   Gone is my youth
   I look in the mirror every day
      And let it tell me the truth
   I'm singing the blues
Mm, I just have to sing the blues
   I've been around a long time
   Yes, yes, I've really paid some dues

   Yeah, they told me everything
   Would be better out in the country
      Everything was fine
   I caught me a bus uptown, baby
   And every people, all the people
      Got the same trouble as mine
   I got the blues, huh huh
   I say I've been around a long time
   I've really paid some dues

   One more time, fellows!

   Blind man on the corner
      Begging for a dime
   The rollers come and caught him
   And throw him in the jail for a crime
      I got the blues
   Mm, I'm singing my blues
   I've been around a long time
   Mm, I've really paid some dues

   Can we do just one more?

   Oh I thought I'd go down to the welfare
      To get myself some grits and stuff
   But a lady stand up and she said
   "You haven't been around long enough"
      That's why I got the blues
   Mm, the blues
   I say, I've been around a long time
   I've really, really paid my dues

   Fellows, tell them one more time

   Ha, ha, ha That's all right, fellows
   Yeah! (King, 1969, song 10).
Identity formation

Years ago, I attended a conference sponsored by the National Association of black Psychologists. The keynote speaker was Dr. Thomas Parham. He opened with the following provocative, rhetorical questions: “Who am I,” “Am I who I say I am,” and “Am I all that I ought to be?” These three simple questions on the surface may seem mundane or easy to answer, but I believe they provoke an interpersonal inquiry into our identity development far deeper than we may realize. We all get to know ourselves through engaging with the external world, yet the externalization process is solely dependent upon who creates the reality in which we engage (Tatum, 1997). I continually hear my father’s voice stating that ‘I am a black man living in a white man’s world’. Unless I consciously insert who I am as a black man, I can live seemingly unaware that society reflects a view that is created by and for white individuals.

According to psychologist Eric Erickson (1950, 1968), we all go through a process of identity development during our lives where we explore alternatives to who we are and who we will become, specifically around the development of our ego (borrowing heavily from the psychoanalytic work of Freud). He notes that the fundamental question during adolescence is, “who am I?” (Erickson, 1968, p. 314). Erickson (1968) primarily focuses on central identity development that shapes both a personal and community identity, which he notes to being a “communal culture” (p. 22) that is often brokered between answering who one is in relationship to with ‘what’ a person has to work. Further, people’s ‘what’ (e.g., material possessions, opportunities, access, etc.) varies and valuation is often placed upon what others may have that an individual does not (vice-versa). This exacerbates the point between white people and people of color from an early stage of development, whereby historically, people of color have had (and
been treated) less than so that the inherent valuation of their ‘what’ was always diminished, thus negatively impacting identity development.

I expounded heavily on Erickson’s (1950, 1968) identity stages, because his work is widely known and accepted as a seminal identity theory. By providing depth of context, this will allow me to juxtapose additional theories to draw contrast and racial expansion from Erickson’s theoretical framework as it may be conveyed by the participants in this study. His stages range from trust and mistrust (beginning at birth) to integrity and despair (in late adulthood).

The first stage is trust versus mistrust. This stage takes place during the first year of life. Erikson (1968) describes parallels to Freud’s oral stage of development, at which time an infant interacts with their environment that consists mostly of interactions with a parental figure. Consequently, infants develop a secure trust of others translating into individual confidence or an unhealthy sense of mistrust, which translates into the inability to connect well with others.

Second is autonomy versus shame-doubt. Erikson (1968) related the second developmental stage to Freud’s anal stage of development which takes place during the child’s second and third year of life. The primary goal of this stage is to successfully become autonomous from their parent through their own cognitive and physical development. Such autonomy is attained through the child’s ability to establish “free will” (Erikson, 1968, p. 109). Erikson asserts that “a sense of self-control without a loss of self-esteem is the ontogenetic source of a sense of free will” (1968, p. 109). Alternatively, if this is not achieved, a child is thought to experience an overwhelming sense of shame for their unsuccessful attempts and doubt in their ability to succeed at future attempts for autonomy. Consequently, children who do not become autonomous will develop identities with internalized shame and doubt.
Third is *initiative versus guilt*. Between ages three and five, Erikson (1968) states that children face the crisis of “initiative versus guilt” (p. 94). During this stage, the child attempts tasks in an effort to explore the world around them and how they fit into it. This is beneficial for children who experience necessary correction that guides their continued exploration, though Erikson (1968) further asserts that if such correction limits a child’s desire to continue to explore the world around them, their ability/desire to engage in initiative will be threatened. If this happens, a child typically develops an overwhelming guilt that prevents them from progressing through this developmental stage and experience adverse identity development. A child’s ability to attain and seek initiative is crucial to reach their full potential.

Fourth is *industry versus inferiority*. Erikson believes that school aged children experience the crisis of “industry versus inferiority” (1968, p. 94). Industry is defined as “a sense of being able to make things and make them well and even perfectly” (p. 123). To achieve this sense of industry, children engage in various tasks where they attempt to exercise personal industry. Children’s pivotal entrance into schools not only extends their environments beyond the home; but consequently, provides them opportunities to develop through environmental interaction with adults, peers, and objects from various contexts (all be it within a dominant racialized context as noted earlier) (Erikson, 1968). If a child’s experience is not interpreted as a progression toward achieving industry, they may feel a sense of inferiority. Erikson (1968) asserts that such inferiority can lead to a feeling/belief of permanence within that mindset.

Fifth is *identity versus identity confusion*. He describes this crisis as, “the stage of adolescing [that] becomes…a way of life between childhood and adulthood” (Erickson, 1968, p. 128). The stage of adolescence is monumental because it is characterized by the child’s shifting perspective of the world outside of themselves. Erikson (1968) explains that this is distinguished by “morbid,
curious, preoccupation with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are, and with the question of how to connect the roles and skills cultivated earlier with the ideal prototypes of the day” (p. 128).

This is a critical stage of because this is the time when we are being socialized within a school context. Specifically, Erickson (1950, 1968) notes that during this time we are sorting through feelings of inadequacy and inferiority as well as establishing our philosophical view for our lives. When young people of color are doing this within an educational context not developed by them or for them, they tend to get problematized or viewed as those developing or living outside of the norm (Howard, 2010; Spring, 2001). This is evidenced in the disproportionality of K-12 discipline data or special education referral data between white and black students, which suggests, students of color overwhelmingly comprise discipline and referrals in schools (Sullivan & Artiles, 2011; Skiba, et. al., 2011; Gregory, et. al., 2010).

Erickson (1968) believes the development that occurs at this stage causes adolescents to move beyond their need for adults within their immediate environments, towards a necessity for affirmation from the larger society (e.g., peer influence). Adolescents’ seeking their sense of self and answering the deeper question of “am I who I say I am”, define this developmental stage. This pursuit takes place as they simultaneously establish a connection to and identification within a group with whom they experience “a sense of continuity and sameness” (Erikson, 1968, p. 128). The unintended consequence to not mastering this crisis is adolescents’ inability to develop a sense of self, connection to, and identification with a group, which Erickson (1968) terms identity confusion.

The sixth stage is *intimacy versus isolation*. Erikson describes the “intimacy vs. isolation” crisis as a stage beyond identity (1968, p. 135). He states that “it is only when identity formation
is well on its way that true intimacy—which is really a counterpointing as well as a fusing of identities—is possible” (Erikson, p. 135). He defines intimacy as “a true and mutual psychosocial intimacy with another person” (p. 135). Alternatively, when a person is unable to establish intimacy, it is believed to reflect their insecurity to share their authentic self with another (Erikson, 1968). Their failure at this stage is similar to that during adolescence whereby an individual experiences isolation and the inability to successfully connect with others.

The seventh stage is *generativity versus stagnation*. The goal of this stage is to achieve generativity, which is “the concern for establishing and guiding the next generation” (Erikson, 1968, p. 138). This stage of development is about truly understanding one’s wealth/value to greater society and the ability to access power to influence; it is about a “need to be needed” and to meet the needs of others (Erikson, 1968, p. 138). The needs at this time are characterized by desiring procreation; thus, children are necessary for successful progression through this stage of development. Failure to have children results in failure to progress through this stage, resulting in a “sense of stagnation” (Erikson, 1968, p. 138).

The final stage is *integrity versus despair*. Integrity is the penultimate experience here. By successfully progressing through each of the identity development stages, individuals are acquiring wisdom culminating their experiences and find value sharing it with others (Erikson, 1968). This allows individuals to answer the question “am I all that I ought to be” successfully. If individuals struggle during this stage, often they will experience disappointment and despair at the end of their life.

Erickson’s developmental model has been expanded by others, namely that of James Marcia (1966), who operationalized Erickson’s theories through typologies. His research demonstrated that identity formation is not static, rather, organic in nature and that we have the ability to
choose within a spectrum of how we encounter the external world versus a binary process outlined by Erickson (1968). Both approaches consider a more monoracial approach, specifically a linear white identity frame, thus, neglecting to include a racialized process for development. Since these identity development models, other emerged that are more responsive to the lived experience of people of color.

Erickson (1968) vaguely acknowledges the work of W.E.B. Dubois, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin in terms of the impact of race and identity by stating their theoretical racialized arguments were “supremely active and powerful demands to be heard and seen, recognized and faced as individuals with a choice rather than as men marked by what is all to superficially visible, namely, their color” (p. 297). This created the space for future theorist to expand upon a racialized view of identity development and carry broader relevance for people of color.

The need for racial identity expansion work is evident in the research. For example, during adolescent development, a number of studies (Aboud, 1988; Corenblum & Annis, 1993) depict that on self-reporting measures, children from majority groups (white) show robust in-group biases, while adolescents of color in-group attitudes range from mildly positive to out-group biases. The creation of self-hatred or negative self-narratives begins early and is typically reinforced throughout adulthood. Developing a model whereby a healthy racial identity can be explored and supported is critical.

To better understand this process, it is important to understand core frameworks for racialized identity development. The seminal work of Cross’ (1971) nigrescence theory (e.g., the process of becoming black) is widely cited and accepted. He revised it to include two distinctions, that of a group identity and personal identity along with parallels drawn to one’s self esteem (Cross, W., Parham & Helms, 1991; Cross, 1995). He asserts that there are five
hierarchical stages by which people of color progress, yet not all African Americans would progress through each stage in a similar fashion. The stages are “pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization and internalization-commitment” (Cross, 1991, p. 15).

First, *pre-encounter* is characterized by a level of embracing whiteness as a norm. Individuals tend to downplay a consciousness of ‘being black’ almost as if trying to be color blind or that color doesn’t matter. Within the black community, individuals who embrace this stage as the norm are often referred to as ‘selling out’ or as I term, committing cultural sacrifice. Cross (1991) notes a significant level of racial isolation occurs and individuals maintain very little to no connection to the African American culture collectively.

Next is *encounter*, whereby individuals often recognize their blackness by a stark experience that seemingly awakens them followed by a period of reinterpretation of the event until an internal recognition of being black emerges. Cross (1971) asserts that this is usually a traumatic experience and because of this, is ever etched in memory. This can lead to feelings of anger, confusion and even rage. Overtime, individuals seek a deeper understanding of the experience and what it means to be black. As I shared earlier, this occurred to me when our family moved to a first-ring suburb and through overt racial degradation, I learned quickly about being black and being different. To this day, because of this awakening, my pursuit of racial consciousness continues.

Third is *immersion-emersion*. During this dual process, individuals immerses themselves into everything and anything associated with a collective black culture while denouncing any previous acceptance of mainstream white culture. The notion of unity prevails and inspires deep introspection with other black individuals. The emersion process occurs when one’s black identity pursuit yields clarity of meaning and the former denouncement of white culture is
tempered to better understand white normality that surrounds them daily; the previous feelings of anger/confusion are resolved and are able to maintain pride in one’s black culture that allows an individual to co-exist in a dominant society (Cross, 1991).

I remember experiencing this stage during my teen years where I embraced anything associated with Africa and intentionally distanced myself from my biological identity of being mixed with white. Though I could never change the lighter complexion of my skin nor the loose texture of my hair, I psychologically embraced my black ancestry and feed this hunger. It was the mid 80’s to late 90’s and many African Americans were wearing symbols of the continent of Africa and displaying African colors of red, black and green, which symbolized the uniting blood of the people, the color of the people, and the land of wealth. The love for my blackness was evident in my music choice by embracing socially conscious hip-hop from the likes of Public Enemy and KRS-1. I would wear black-owned clothing brands such as Cross Colours and FUBU (For Us By Us). I did everything in my power to ensure I projected my blackness to the world.

By the late 90’s the societal drive within the African American community subsided somewhat, which also gave me time to reflect on who I had become juxtaposed to who I biologically was. I recognized the years of frustration and rage I experienced while finding my blackness and had to critically ask myself how well it was serving me. I remembered my father’s words again stating, “You are a black man living in a white man’s world.” Recognizing that the world truly was comprised of more white people than people of color and that power and social structures associated with it were inevitably going to continue, I realized the emersion aspect of Cross’ (1971) identity formation and the following poem I wrote captures this:
The Color of Life

When you look at me
Tell me…what do you see?
Biologically I’m different
Than the view of society

I am, as a matter of fact
A man from two cultures
One white and one black

Though the love of family is strong
It has been different
For me to get along

As a child, I would lay in bed at night
Debating whether I was black or white
I was too light for some – too dark for others
These thoughts I had, as I laid under covers

As I got older, I was forced to choose
Not black, not white, didn’t think ‘other’
It was a sad reality for me to learn
That I was not judged by the content
Of my character; rather, by my color

I am bi-racial in the true sense
Because to denounce on half
Would be to denounce my existence

Though I socially identify
As a black man
I know in my heart
Who I biologically am

I don’t have any regrets
For the choices my parents made
Rather, I thank God
For my life, which he gave

The fourth stage of Cross’ (1971) formation is that of internalization. During this stage, the awareness of being black is part of an individual’s self-perception. They are able to positively reflect from where they have been on their racial journey from a healthy perspective. Though this
may vary and others remain stuck in a negative perception, many embrace the adaptive nature of being black in America and are not dominated with thoughts of being oppressed.

Finally, is the *internalization-commitment* stage. During this stage, individuals maintain a healthy identity of being black and very socially conscious of how they uphold pride in being part of a black collective and adopt a worldview of how they see themselves. No longer relegated to the structural racism inherent to America; rather, a global consciousness of racial and ethnic diversity.

Similarly, Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1989) developed the Racial/Cultural Identity Development Model (R/CID). Like others, it is a developmental model delineated by the following stages. First is *conformity*. At this stage, physical and cultural characteristics identified with one’s own racial/cultural group are perceived negatively and should be denied or changed. Typically, a strong desire to assimilate into a white norm is experienced at this stage. The second stage is *dissonance*, whereby one begins to understand that assimilating my not be helpful (or even allowed) and social experiences are had that may counter those experiences during conformity. Third is *resistance and immersion*. At this stage, pride begins to emerge and the recognition of social and psychological racism occurs that also empowers individuals to stand against it. There is a feeling of connectedness with in-group peers and often the extreme of hatred toward oppressors (often white individuals) occurs. Then is *introspection*, whereby individuals assert their autonomy of ‘who they really are’ and assess themselves against both in/out group associations. Lastly, when one reaches *integrative awareness*, they adopt a multicultural identity, thus having an integrated social identity (Atkinson, et. al., 1989).

It is important to note that whites also have an identity development process that is beyond that of Erickson (1968); however, the notion of a white identity is often not outwardly discussed
or even a conscious thought by whites. Helms (1990) outlines five stages, or statuses. The first is contact. This stage represents obliviousness to a white identity. Second is disintegration where whites first come to realize they have an identity. Third is reintegration where whites have a feeling of superiority about their identity as compared to people of color. Fourth is pseudo-independence where an intellectualized awareness of a white identity exists. Next is the immersion/emersion status when whites experience an internal critique of their identity juxtaposed to people of color. Finally, is the autonomy status when whites embrace and internalize a multicultural identity (Helms, 1995).

**Racialization process**

Within this body of literature, much is written. Being in a race-based country, it is long acknowledged, argued and studied that humans are stratified along racial lines; race is a social construction based on the skin color and visible features of an individual. By this process, social inequities are birthed and our great divide continues to perpetuate itself in a cyclical manner that never appears to have an end in sight. “To engage in a serious discussion of race in America, we must begin not with the problems of black people, but with the flaws of American society—flaws rooted in historic inequalities and longstanding cultural stereotypes” (West, 1994, p. 6). America is known as the melting pot; we are a nation of immigrants, all striving for a common dream (Takaki, 1993). It is a dream where one can come with little or nothing and find great prosperity in the long run.

For the majority of Americans, ‘American history’ is a narrative about an inevitable series of conquests…embedded in that conquest is a set of ideas about individual liberty, the ownership of private property and certain restrictions on the authority and power of central
government…to become ‘American’ is to accept the legitimacy of this master narrative (Marable, 2006, p. 2).

For some, this dream becomes a reality, but for many, the dream is a persistent nightmare. Presently, America is experiencing wretched times, whereby the capitalist foundation is severely cracked and many are falling victim to their own greed. One thing is evident and that is America (being a capitalist country) needs to have a system of stratification whereby some reap larger benefits while others sow deeper woes in an effort to support the structure of the ‘haves’ versus the ‘have nots’.

Historically, the social construction of race served this purpose, although with the election of our Nation’s first African American president (and his specific bi-racial background), one could question the longevity of race being a formidable process by which people are classified. Yet even the president, with positional authority, sustained racial attacks and epithets throughout his journey to the White House. I find it ironic that President Obama may be the first to have experienced personalized heckling during an address to Congress in 2009 when Representative Joe Wilson personally shouted, “You lie!” in response to President Obama’s comments regarding health care. Historically, many presidents experience communal gestures, but never has an individual stood apart to engage in such behavior. Did the representative assert his white privilege in response to an African American president? Race, over time, has been acquainted with power and those with power historically have been white Americans and they used this power of stratification to their advantage. As Steele (1990) notes,

The distinction of race has always been used in American life to sanction each race’s pursuit of power in relation to the other. The allure of race as a human delineation is the very shallowness of the delineation it makes. Onto this shallowness—mere skin and hair—
men can project a false depth, a system of dismal attribution, a series of malevolent or ignoble stereotypes that skin and hair lack the substance to contradict. Your difference from me makes you bad, and your badness justifies, even demands, my pursuit of power over you—the oldest formula for aggression known to man. Whenever much importance is given to race, power is the primary motive (p. 5).

If we look closer at America’s history with race, my supposition may be far removed considering the entrenchment of race and racism in this country. I dare to say that it is as synonymous as baseball and apple pie are to this country. There is no one in this country that has not been impacted by race and the many unintended consequences derived from it (if not consciously…subconsciously; if not overtly…covertly). “The darkest aspects of American history have often been hidden from plain view because of the power of the past—or at least the power of the popularly perceived past—to shape the realities of our daily lives” (Marable, 2006, p. 3). The social construction of race is very real and so are the impacts (Kitcher, 1999). We do not stand alone within our racial identity; rather are composites of processes of social interaction and community. This imparts itself into the psyche of many African Americans and in turn can shape their ideology of leadership. If you stand alone, which many times African Americans do in predominantly white organizations, you run the risk of being an outcast and the only way around this is by way of cultural negotiation. In Hacker’s (1992) classic work of Two Nations, he states, “If you wish to succeed, or simply survive, adapt to the direction and demeanor of the Anglo-American model” (p. 40). This prototypical suggestion clearly empowers and rewards a narrow margin of people and casts a gaze of uniformity and acceptance within a white supremist model. Yancy (2008) extends this by writing
The white colonial gaze is that broadly construed epistemic perspective, a process of seeing without being seen, that constructs the black body into its own colonial imaginary. Masking any foul play, the colonizer strives to encourage the colonized to embrace his/her existential predicament as natural and immutable. The idea is to get the colonized to accept the colonists point of reference as the only point of reference.

In reference to the great narrative of America, slavery is a significant chapter and it is hard to move away from this in terms of identity formation and socialization for African Americans. As Hill (1999) notes, “slavery has been the single most important factor defining the status of African Americans because it classified black people as subhuman in ways that continue to shape race relations [presently]” (p. 81). I vividly remember conversations as a child with my parents about my bi-racial background and how this may play out for me, as I get older. Even with such conversations, hearing and experiencing it are two different things. It is not a learned process, or a choice for that matter. It is an existence. I cannot pick and choose when I will be black. Being black is a visual representation beyond choice, irrespective of the inherent socialization processes by which it is bound (e.g., being visually black, yet socially white) (McWhorter, 2003).

**Binary consciousness**

“The Negro ever feels his two-ness—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” (W.E.B. Du Bois, 1903, p. 33). Du Bois could not be more prophetic, that in 2018, African American school leaders would continually negotiate their ethnic identity, mores and voice to maintain their respective levels of leadership in predominantly white systems, while risking sacrificing their authentic selves. This duality of being a leader of color emerged as
a means of survival in a world not created for them; one needed to code switch appropriately. By necessity, African Americans are often bicultural, moving back and forth between their predominantly white professional spheres and the African American community (Bell, 1990).

Institutional racism has a major impact on the development of African American self-esteem and inter/intra group identity (Allen, 2001). African Americans developed resilient concepts of self partially based on (a) the African culture, (b) philosophical retention, and (c) as a reaction to the historical injustices (Allen, 2001). African Americans reside in a society that expects them to adhere to the values, culture, and beliefs of European Americans. This binary consciousness, if not negotiated properly, will erode one’s authentic self for the sake of acceptance. “Individuals will positively evaluate those social groups that are positively portrayed in society, even when those groups are different from one’s ingroup” (Gibson, et. al., 2017). Additionally, there is extreme pressure to silence black counter narratives that threaten status quo. Marable (2006) asserts that “in a racist society—by this I mean a society deeply stratified with ‘whiteness’ defined at the top and ‘blackness’ occupying the bottom rungs—the obliteration of the black past is absolutely essential to the preservation of white hegemony, or domination” (p. 20).

Research and theory are needed to explain how the historically marginalized status of African American leaders in terms of race, gender, and social class interacts with power and influence in such settings. By doing so, I hope to unveil a process by which African American leaders can better understand how to bring their whole perspectives to the table and not sacrifice themselves while negotiating their black identity, and in turn, school districts will better understand how such perspectives will continue to enhance and expand the organization and more fully serve a very diverse stakeholder group.
Microaggressions

The term *racial microaggressions* is derived from both the subtle and overt form of racism that was first defined by Pierce and his colleagues in 1978, as "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs'" (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978, p. 66). This body of research is understood to be the subconscious racism that exists and when revealed, evokes a significant level of defense by the accused. Racial microaggressions have also been described as "subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed towards people of color, often automatically or unconsciously" (Solorzano et al., 2000, p. 60). Sue (2007) and his colleagues explain racial microaggressions as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, either intentional or unintentional, hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults towards people of color" (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007, p. 271). These acts are categorized into three distinct forms: microinsults, microassaults and microinvalidations (Sue, 2010). “Individuals who engage in racial microaggressions usually are unaware of their actions or the impact they have on people of color” (Constantine, 2007).

A study conducted about African American undergraduates on predominantly white campuses (Watkins, LaBarrie & Appio, 2010), showed that many of them experienced racial microaggressions that diminished their roles and that African American students are “repeatedly reminded that they do not belong or are not welcome in the university environment” (p. 41). Further, those students who were deemed successful experienced duplicitous forms of aggressions because they were not only ‘tokens’ or ‘sell-outs’ to the African American community, but faced the “spokesperson pressure” (Steele & Aronson, 1995) by the white community; this makes negotiating versus sacrificing a very fine line.

The long-term impact of racial microaggressions is significant to the health of people of
color. Studies show that the impact of such microaggressions is greater than general life stress experiences primarily due to the fact that general life stress is usually situational and time limited whereas microaggressions are continual and subconsciously re-occurring (Utsey, S., Hook, J., Fischer, N., & Belvet, B., 2008). There is a need “to broaden our understanding of the manner in which racism-related stress is embedded in measures of general life stress as it pertains to black populations” (Pieterse, A., & Carter, R., 2007). The research behind microaggressions is critical to my study in that it is the subtle occurrences of racism that often go unchallenged, yet are internalized by people of color, thus often subconsciously forcing the need to negotiate their identities. And when perpetually negotiating, it is easy to sacrifice yourself unintentionally.

**Aversive racism**

When I was younger, my family moved to a first ring suburb of St. Paul. We were the only black family with the exception of the Lewis’ who lived at the end of the block. I recall coming home one day very disturbed by a comment that I overheard a neighbor saying, implying that their family was going to move because they felt like an Oreo cookie (this neighbor lived in between the Lewis’ and us). I can recall having conversations about race with my dad at a young age with him sharing that these are the type of comments I would encounter growing up and that it was part of growing up black in a ‘white man’s world’; little did I know that such comments would be extremely common for me.

Some were subtler such as being in the grocery store with my white mom and hearing her being asked by complete strangers, “Where did you adopt him from?” These subtleties were even more damaging to me because even as a child, I could understand the underlying question really being asked. Though such comments were not as outwardly offensive, and perhaps not ill intentioned (given the lower numbers of multiracial families at that time), the ‘intent versus
impact’ argument ensued. Dovidio and Gaertner (2000) found that “these more subtle forms of prejudice, [are] expressed in indirect and rationalizable ways, but the consequences of these actions (e.g., the restriction of economic opportunity) may be as significant for people of color and as pernicious as the consequences of the traditional, overt form of discrimination” (p. 315).

Today, I do not experience as many blatant acts of racism. Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) note that the “principle of equality remains a fundamental social value and, since the civil rights legislation of the 1960s that made racial discrimination not simply immoral but also illegal, overt expressions of prejudice of Whites toward blacks in the United States have declined significantly over the past several decades” (p. 618). However, this is not to say that racism, in 2018 is completely eliminated. Racism still permeates the American experience both consciously and subconsciously (Blanton & Jaccard, 2008) and is often masked by ‘good intentions’. Adopting a colorblind approach or minimizing racial differences is referred to as aversive racism derived from Joel Kovel’s (1970) body of research. He suggests that although whites may embrace a liberal, democratic ideal, they subconsciously purport racism vis-à-vis statements or actions as I previously referenced. Dovidio & Gaertner (2001, p. 835) define it as “a subtle, often unintentional form of bias often found in White individuals who possess strong egalitarian values and who believe that they are nonprejudiced”.

Whites may desire to avoid interactions with other racial groups that may expose their racist attitudes. This may stem from guilt or the notion of whites experiencing themselves as non-racialized individuals, either way, whites “have been conditioned not to think about race and, especially, not to talk about it, facing the topic can be a challenging, frustrating, and even frightening experience for many” (Marx, 2006, p. 21).
Afrocentric leadership paradigm

I began my career in education as a school-based social worker in a mental health program for African American boys in grades 3-6. The program design was based upon traditional, westernized clinical and therapeutic practices to address the mental health challenges students faced; however, the program also utilized an Afrocentric focus of healing. The stigma of needing mental health support in the black community was high so shifting the paradigm was necessary for families to buy in and enroll their children. In the program, students learned about African history and the contributions of traditional customs and practices. The students were not in classes; rather, families to symbolize being part of a village. Everyone was called ‘Brother’/‘Sister’ followed by their first name to speak the notion of solidarity. Many of these young boys did not have strong family support systems so creating a village, if you will, was essential for their success. Learning about African ancestry helped them visualize positive contributions of Kings and Queens that looked like them and to not exclusively associate the historical African narrative only with being enslaved. Students learned to be proud of their heritage and were given traditional African clothing to wear for family and community events. They learned African dances, worship ceremonies and some language to empower them as future warriors.

Admittedly, I learned much about myself as a black man working with these young men and increased my knowledge and awareness of my ancestors. Over the years of working in this program, I felt more empowered and because of my community involvement with youth, I was also recognized as a leader (young warrior) in my own community. I recall walking several blocks away from the school, mind you this was a violent gang community, and came upon two young men squaring off to fight. I approached them to intervene and almost immediately, one of
my students said, “Here comes Brother Michael!” The significance and honor of my name, along with supportive words for the two young men, was enough to prevent them from fighting. It was evidence of how a village takes care of their own and how young people show respect for adults/elders and our obligation to model what is right with high expectations.

It has been many years since I worked in that program, but have vivid memories of the impact an Afrocentric approach had on all involved, including the adults. I am not an iconic leader, but I have been trained and learned the technical aspects of leadership; however, if it were not for the Afrocentric experience I had, I would not have the depth of cultural knowledge of self as it informs my leadership.

There have always been African American leaders, both formally and informally. From leading spirituals on plantations to having our Nation’s first African American president, leadership continues to emerge among African Americans. It should be noted though, that African American leadership in this country is cast in a Eurocentric mold that subversively gives permission for such leaders to exist, because white people in America historically hold the power to create a universal experience by which others are gauged. The intrinsic, ancestral, African bloodline that passed for generations is often omitted as a means of authenticating black leadership. Asante (2006) believes that the deliberate omission of an African ethos to leadership diminishes the value of significant contributions by black people in America, which then is often credited to dominant white narratives.

The body of Afrocentric research emerged in response to the “unconscious adoption of the Western worldview” that failed to acknowledge the origins of Pan-African leadership prior to the diaspora (Mazama, 2001, p. 387). Kwame Nkrumah’s leadership of Pan-Africanism aimed to uplift the significant contributions of Africans to the world after their enslavement in America
and is noted for four dominant themes in doing so, which are: “the [utilization of] resources of a modern state in the quest for organized continental unity, the assertion of a non-racial African Personality, the assertion of scientific socialism for all of Africa, [and] a liberated zone approach to Pan-African liberation” (Poe, 2003, p. 3). Without the centrality of African contributions, African Americans are susceptible to white hegemony and fail to recognize the true power of their leadership. Asante (2014) further notes that Afrocentrism is only realized by accepting agency of the African person as the basic unit of analysis of social and cultural situations involving African-descended people. This is a critical step in achieving community harmony. We must see ourselves as the center of our own experiences. Africans constitute the fundamental trunk of the human race and wherever Africans have been pushed to the margins it has been where others have assumed that Africans were juniors to the world (p. 9).

The repression of a positive ‘black body’ allows for one to be controlled and forever reminded of the historical trauma of a dominant enslavement narrative to frame the life story of many African Americans. I cannot recall, in my K-12 career, ever seeing images that looked like me in social studies or positive contributions of Africans or African Americans in history classes. Even the images of who was imparting knowledge to become great, were white teachers. My first encounter with a teacher of color did not come until college, and it was Dr. Harmon, an African American English professor, who helped open my eyes to hidden narratives about African Americans and the contributions we made to American history, culture, academia, etc. At that time, little did I know I was being given an Afrocentric lens by which everything could be viewed and reframed.
[Afrocentricity] is a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person…. It centers on placing people of African origin in control of their lives and attitudes about the world. This means that we examine every aspect of the dislocation of African people; culture, economics, psychology, health and religion…. As an intellectual theory, Afrocentricity is the study of the ideas and events from the standpoint of Africans as the key players rather than victims. This theory becomes, by virtue of an authentic relationship to the centrality of our own reality, a fundamentally empirical project…it is Africa asserting itself intellectually and psychologically, breaking the bonds of Western domination in the mind as an analogue for breaking those bonds in every other field. (Asante, 1991, p. 172)

The continuum of post-modern African and African American leadership is very diverse and even within the black community, there are distinctions among leaders, particularly about cultural representation and who truly/authentically has the voice ‘of the people’. Juan Williams (2006) and John McWhorter (2003) both write pointed views about the undermining of the American Civil Rights Movement and how African Americans went astray from its underpinnings fueled by a selfless drive to attain individual notoriety. They argue that black leadership is no longer a collective, or a modality of Ujima. Asante (2014) states that this is the consequence of relinquishing Afrocentricity from leadership development and becoming unconsciously aligned to a Eurocentric view of individualism. In an effort to overcome the unintended consequences of hegemony, we must acknowledge that African lives have been marginalized through a Eurocentric attack for cultural/ideological domination, which also fractures the African American community from within (Asante, 2014). Many are familiar with pivotal African American leaders such as Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., Booker T.
Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. They all played significant roles in shaping present day African American leadership, but all had very different styles while still maintaining a common purpose, which was the advancement of African Americans and upholding ancestral African values (Marable, 2006; White, 1990; Williams, 2006). Marable (2006) acknowledges this and shares that “the collective experience of pain and hardship, suffering and sacrifice has given African Americans a unique perspective for which our consciousness has been forged. Undeniably, the edges of that racialized sensibility have frayed as advances have been made, but its core values remain” (p. 39).

The core of African American leadership derives from African ancestry and narratives, though African American leadership emerged in a more formal and public fashion after the Emancipation Proclamation (Walters & Smith, 1999). Deriving from the south and transcending to the north, African Americans found that geographic location dictated the type of African American leadership necessary (and accepted). For example, in the south, many African American leaders (even though they were free), could not publicly assert themselves in such a manner in fear of retaliation or even death due to Jim Crow laws, whereas, African Americans in the north were more progressive, primarily due to the support of whites, with their leadership (Walters & Smith, 1999).

This spectrum of African American leadership is evident today. It is hard to define what being a black leader is. As I noted earlier, it is an experience, not a mere existence or depiction of phenotypic traits. Afrocentricity validates the African American leadership profile and is essential to carry forward as more blacks ascend into leadership roles in America and seek not the validation from whiteness. The counter narrative Afrocentricity offers moves blacks away from exclusive negative stereotypes from where we have come “leaving black Americans feeling
as if we are eternally just getting started, picking ourselves up after four hundred years ‘at the bottom of the well’. [Because] a people with no substantial source of inspiration from the past is one spiritually weakened, especially one in the process of reconstructing itself” (McWhorter, 2003).

**Racialized epistemology**

I recall early in my relationship with my wife, discussing race. After much discourse, she concluded by saying, “You have a limited perspective about what it means to be black.” To say the least, I was shocked, even upset that she would say such a thing. I wondered what basis did she have to make this truth claim? When pressed, she noted that from her experience growing up in California, contrasted to mine growing up in Minnesota (and being multiracial), it was clear that we formulated our identity differently. She further stated that while growing up, she was exposed to a broad spectrum of ‘blackness’ and to other people of color in general. It was not uncommon for her to be around a large group of black professionals, working-class and also those African Americans observed to be living on the streets. Obviously, being exposed to a greater populace of color allowed for a different type of reflective process than I experienced growing up in Minnesota, where during the 1970s, African Americans comprised approximately one percent of the total Minnesota population (Taylor, 2002).

The challenge we still face in 2018 is that we fail to realize the unique racialized identity we have and how this equates to a group identity, even for white individuals. There is still a desire for the narratives of people of color to be suppressed as if they do not matter and if people of color could just assimilate into a dominant white framework, we would not have the racialized consternation that exists in our country (West, 2001). The conversation between my wife and I is where we must begin. There must be an “acknowledgement of the basic humanness and
Americanness of each of us. And we must acknowledge that as a people—*E Pluribus Unum*—we are on a slippery slope toward economic strife, social turmoil, and cultural chaos” (West, 2001, p. 4). I fully acknowledge that this is not an easy conversation to have and to do so, one must be willing to experience discomfort, contend with non-closure and be open to outcome (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Pine and Hilliard (1990) state “discussions and debates about racism create anxiety and conflict, which are handled differently by different cultural groups” (p. 596). In absence of such conversations, we will continue the arduous socially constructed battle of racism in America.

When I watch a news story about an egregious act, I always hope that another African American is not involved. Why is that, one may ask? Primarily, it is due to the fact that I see myself as part of a collective group. As an African American, my reality is shaped collectively with other African Americans. When I share this sentiment with my white colleagues, they cannot comprehend this and in fact think it is quite strange. None of them can relate to this collective experience, and though it is something I relish and find comfort, it is also a survival mechanism, a way to escape a world that at times seems not for me, yet was defined or casted upon me and other marginalized groups in America as a means of power and control; it has long been advantageous to align yourself to being white versus someone of color in this country (Du Bois, 1935).

America’s historical narrative is written from a predominantly white male perspective (Takaki, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1997). People of color and women learn how to operate within this narrative with hopes of not being written out of the story. The fact that my white colleagues could not comprehend the notion of belonging to a ‘racial collective’ illustrates this point again. It is a perfect algorithm: power + right = truth (Foucault & Gordon, 1980). Tatum (1997) and
McIntosh (1988) assert that the white experience is the unexamined and unchallenged norm. Tatum (1997) further states that “because [whites] represent the societal norm, whites can easily reach adulthood without thinking much about their racial group” (p. 93).

Whites ability to impart a dominant worldview is inherent to being white in America. Scheurich (2002) says, “we [whites] do not experience ourselves as defined by our skin color. We especially do not experience ourselves as defined by another race’s actions and attitude toward us because of skin color” (p. 28). So, without the notion of being part of a collective, the ideology of individualism prevails and the interconnectedness of thought/action with others is nonexistent. In essence, if there is no foreseeable benefit to the individual (or even worse, a threat), then status quo is upheld. Hobgood (2000) believes that “[whites] maintain their privilege only insofar as they conform to the status quo and make significant contributions to promote it” (p. 12). The ability to define, shape or manipulate truth and reality is the epitome of power (Hanna, Talley, & Guindon, 2000) and encompasses both an overt and covert way of knowledge construction (Scheurich & Young, 1997).

To do this, whites utilize their gaze to ‘otherize’ people/experiences different from themselves. Evidence of the gaze are the five U.S. protected classes we have come to know today, which are European American, African American, Asian American, Native American and Hispanic American. George Yancy (2008) believes that “the European gaze [is] able to discern with ‘clarity’ and ‘accuracy’ the ‘truth’ about certain human bodies vis-a-vis a white racist discursive regime of truth” (p. 2). It is a process of displacement, whereby whites differentiate and authenticate phenotypic attributes and assign value to such difference accordingly. For example, a well-educated African American who speaks articulately may garner white acceptance over one who is under-educated and speaks heavily with black street vernacular. Or
how a lighter-skinned African American may have more acceptance than a darker-skinned African American. To this point, a common question I heard when President Obama was in office was, “Would he have been elected if he wasn’t biracial or light-skinned?”

The irony of the gaze is that it is omnipotent, often unsolicited. People of color risk becoming numb to it due to the affirmation and status received by succumbing to the gaze, which equates to a state of hegemony because people of color assume power only as it maintains the power of whites that are giving it to them. Yancy (2005) depicts the sentiment of being invaded by the white gaze “and then to have that body returned as distorted is a powerful experience of violation. The experience presupposes an anti-black lived context, a context within which whiteness gets reproduced and the white body as norm is reinscribed” (p. 217).

Regardless of who/what illustrates ideology and who/what exemplifies hegemony, the fact remains that a historical divide embodies the interaction between the two. Given the facts about repressive tolerance and its woven nature, how does one genuinely surmount the white gaze without feeling hegemonic? What is the pathway to liberation? Like Eric Fromm (1994), I believe in a central self, a core that remains untainted by external contexts. Zander & Zander (2000) outline a dual identity that humans experience as a ‘calculating self’ and a ‘central self’. A calculated self “is concerned for its survival in a world of scarcity” (p. 23). It tries “to find a safe and identifiable niche…and positions [itself] to survive” (p. 82). Contrary, the central self is “the remarkably generative, prolific, and creative nature of ourselves and the world” (p. 90). It is within the central self that purist thought allows one to accept authentic truths about who they are; however, within a racialized context, the purity of a central self is tainted with the endemic racism in this country and creates a further distinction between white people and people of color, whereby white people do not need to negotiate between the two due to the inherent power and
privilege of being white and people of color must leverage their calculated self often times for mere survival and in the face of direct racism, vehemently defend their central selves and/or allow their central identity emerge with pride to overshadow the white gaze, thus, illuminating the unjust reality caused by racism.

I see the central self more applicable to people of color in response to the interpellation that white ideology places upon them to continuously be in a state of racialized wonder. French philosopher Louis Althusser asserts that dominant ideology pre-supposes the reality of others in a manner that continually serves to uphold dominance and is often referred to as ‘hailing’ (Lee, 2018).

Ideologies “call out” or “hail” people and offer a particular identity, which they accept as “natural” or “obvious.” In this way, the dominant class exerts a power over individuals that is quite different from abject force. According to Althusser, individuals are interpellated from the day that they are born—and perhaps even before, since parents and others conceive of the role and identity that their child will assume. With this concept of interpellation, Althusser implies that there is no inherent meaning in the individual. There are no individuals: only subjects, who come into being when they are hailed or interpellated by ideology. Instead, the subject exists only as he or she is recognized in a specific way that has a social structure as its referent. The subject is thus preceded by social forces, or “always-already interpellated.” (Lee, 2018).

Marcuse (1969) also shares this belief to push against such a gaze, though his argument depends upon an individual to break free from oneself, and further states that it is through the process of education and attaining knowledge, that one finds liberation. “Education is more and other than training, learning, preparing for the existing society, it means not only enabling man to
know and understand the facts which make up reality but also to know and understand the factors that establish the facts so that he can change their inhuman reality” (p. 122). Brookfield (2005) also shares this notion of a central self and the criticality of maintaining such a place in order to remain authentic to self and others. “The only way people can come to a truly critical perspective is by distancing themselves in some manner from the stupefying influence of commonsense ways of thinking, feeling, and speaking” (p. 195). Both Marcuse and Brookfield set the stage through their arguments for true social change.

Marcuse (1969) asks the question of “what has to be repressed before one can be a self, oneself” (p. 114). This may seem oxymoronic, but in short, one must repress repression, so to speak. Similar to Bruce Lincoln’s (1989) notion of inversions of sociotaxonomic (ideological) orders “inversion can be an effective instrument of agitation, skillful use of which can prompt significant reform…or radical upheaval” (p. 159). This research will guide the conversation about the experiences of black administrators working within predominantly white systems because the reality constructed for them will, in essence, be constructed against them. Their views will challenge the dominant white ideology and force them to negotiate themselves against it and lead/live in their central selves. The challenge lies in their ability to know how far they can negotiate without going astray from who they are, never to find their way back.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This study is within the realm of qualitative case analysis; in essence I am looking at the subjective aspects of people’s behavior and experiences “to gain entry into the conceptual world of subjects in order to understand how and what meanings they construct around events in their daily lives” (Bogden & Biklen, 2003, p. 23; Creswell, 2007), specifically regarding the role of being an African American male principal in a predominantly white school system. Given my previous role as an African American principal in a predominantly white school district, I utilized a transcendental lens, where a researcher identifies a specific phenomenon associated with their own personal lived experience with such phenomenon then collects data from multiple participants that share this same experience (Moustakas as cited in Creswell, 2007).

I used a qualitative case study approach versus quantitative measures in order to capture the reoccurring story I heard told by many of my African American colleagues. According to Berg (2004, p. 7), “qualitative research properly seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings…and how inhabitants of these settings make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth”. Qualitative research is multidimensional and allows for a wide array of interpretation. Because of this, Bogden & Biklen (2003) note that a qualitative approach needs to be broad or encompass a worldview where nothing is trivial; qualitative research is organic or fluid. Every piece of data is critical and the broader the context, the more likely I will be able to generalize my findings across participants. The breadth of qualitative research can make it challenging to apply the data to a larger sample; however, the intent of my research is not to apply generally, but to open the conversation regarding racialized impacts of leadership within
white systems. Then, I believe additional research, both qualitative and quantitative, could continue.

**Sampling**

I utilized purposeful sampling techniques to identify participants for the study, based upon my previous relationships with all of them. Purposeful sampling is often employed as it involves intentional selection of participants who are likely to share rich information with respect to the study purpose (Patton, 2002). Additionally, I can utilize my own lived experience or expertise having been an African American principal in a predominantly white school system “to select subjects who represent this population” (Berg, 2004, p. 36) and conduct my own initial screen for eligibility. Initially I planned to conduct a single district case study, but after sharing my proposed methodology with others and by conducting informal interviews with subjects not participating in the study, I felt the need to broaden my participant base to include African American leaders from a variety of districts; however, I intend to choose participants from like school districts among outer-ring suburbs, not to include St. Paul or Minneapolis (the guiding assumption being that large urban districts/communities are more racially diverse and may not have the same dominant white ideology). I also utilized the snowball sampling technique (Berg, 2004), whereby I asked participants if they have connections to other African American male principals that would meet the criteria stipulated. I did this in the event I was not able to get a large enough sample on my own.

I utilized the following criteria to establish attributes of my participant sample. First, the participants must be male and African American (this would also include being bi-racial, such as being mixed with black and white ancestry). Participants must be working or have worked within districts that have student populations of color that are less than 50% and leading or have lead
schools that are also comprised of less than 50% students of color. I felt this percentile allowed for districts and schools to then be technically considered predominantly white. Lastly, participants must be or have been lead principals with at least three years of experience in the role. Some individuals may no longer be in a formal role as principal, but may draw upon their prior experiences as such. The importance of this distinction comes from my lived experience being a principal and understanding the significant difference in terms of what assistant principals do. Ultimately, as a lead principal, everything and anything must pass through you and assistant principals have a level of ‘cover’; therefore, the degree to which they must negotiate is often buffered by the lead principal.

Nationally, the Department of Education statistics estimates the number of African-American principals in the United States to be 17,932 of 169,171, which is approximately 10.6 percent and has not moved much in the past 25 years (Fiore, et al., 1997; Hill, et al., 2016). Because of the limited pool of African American principals nationally and even fewer in Minnesota, I interviewed eight participants. According to Creswell (1998), sample sizes of qualitative studies will vary, “the important point is to describe the meaning of a small number of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon [that you are analyzing]” (p.122).

**Interview questions**

Through interviewing and observations, each participant will share their story and relate it to their lived context; however, their stories may be interpreted autonomously or in relation with one another. This qualitative research allows me to gain deep access and attempt to describe and interpret social expressions between people and groups (Berg, 2004). Maxwell (2005) writes about two types of interviewing methodology formats, one being structured and the other unstructured. I adopted a hybrid approach with a heavier emphasis on unstructured techniques. A
structured approach will help guide my study as it will be a multi-participant case study and this will help to ensure a level of content validity across participants; however, I want to make sure I have an organic feel to the study where I will be able to critique a variety of phenomena and abstract meanings from them. I asked each participant the same questions (see Appendix A) and varied minimal prompts based upon the answers given. They were all scheduled for an hour, though the time varied slightly based upon depth of participant responses.

Creswell (1998) recommends shaping your study around central questions that are “encoded with the language of a tradition of inquiry” (p. 100). This should be followed by a subset of questions split into two categories: issue questions and topical questions; “issue questions address the major concerns and perplexities to be resolved, while topical questions cover the anticipated needs for information” (Creswell, 1998, p. 101). I will also give room for each participant to explore themselves through answering questions and allow them to guide the conversation. I believe this empowers and honors the risk each participant is taking. Additionally, if a participant answered a pending question in advance, I did not ask the question in an effort to keep with protocol; rather, I omitted it and moved on to subsequent questions.

Informed consent

For my first interview, I followed a very guided process to ensure I was compliant with the rules of IRB as it pertained to consent of each participant (see Appendix B). For example, each participant complete a consent form and I read the entire form with the first participant. I found that this actually created an awkwardness between us and it felt very formal. After that, I chose to review critical elements of the consent form, allowing them time to review it in advance, then after they signed, we began the interview. This process worked much better. Because I had relationships with each participant in some fashion, I felt very comfortable engaging them in the
interview. In fact, many of the interviews felt more like conversations, whereby one question opened Pandora’s Box, if you will, and gave space for each participant to reflect and deeply share.

I conducted “in depth interviews (IDI’s)” (Keegan, 2009, p. 78) face-to-face and asked to meet at the participant’s place of employment if possible. The importance of being on site allowed me to get a sense of the geographic location of the school and better understand what it felt like to me to drive through the community and also the feeling of their school/office space. Though I would not formally interview anyone except each participant, I observed how I was greeted and any small conversation I engaged in while waiting for each participant. I thought time might allow a building walkthrough with the principal to observe student interactions, staff interactions, general operations of the school and gather artifacts that may convey messages or meanings (e.g., taking pictures, copies of literature/posters, etc.), but this was not possible with any participant and upon further reflection, I felt may have been a risk interacting with others, particularly minors. In addition to qualitative data, I will also gather public quantitative data about the school such as student demographics, staff composition and data such as test scores, behavior/suspensions, etc. This allowed me to construct a broad profile and served more as field notes for me. With the permission of the participants, I recorded all interviews.

Confidentiality and data security

Due to the sensitivity of the interviews, I ensured that all of my notes, transcripts and recording remained confidential and for the sole purpose of this body of research. I notified that materials would be deleted after the required amount of time (if any) passed. I did inform each participant that the only others that would have access to my recordings and transcripts would be a transcriptionist and a research assistant, both of which, as required by IRB, signed
confidentiality notices (see Appendix C & Appendix D). The transcriptionist deleted all files once I received them and the research assistant stored all files on a secure digital source encrypted with a password only know to her. The participants also knew that my dissertation committee would have access to my notes if necessary and are also held to confidentiality by my sponsoring university. The data is all stored digitally on my laptop, iPhone and cloud space – all of which require a login name and password only known to me.

**Anonymity**

As mentioned earlier, there are limited numbers of African American principals in Minnesota and I was mindful about protecting their identity. I utilized pseudonyms for each participant as outlined in my consent form to ensure all identifiable information shared remains confidential. Their real name only appears in the recordings and transcription notes, which again are only known to me, the transcriptionist, research assistant and committee members if necessary. If a participant disclosed names of their respective schools or districts, I chose to bracket this information with my own terminology. This was also the case if they named a specific area of the state that may link their identities as well-known black leaders in small communities.

**Data coding**

I began with an open coding process as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990), which is “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (p. 61). I listened to the interviews several times, paying specific attention to tonality and cadence. I listened carefully to my questioning, prompts and responses to understand how I was showing up in the interviews more or less than my participants. Repeated listening allowed me to visualize the interviews and surface mental themes, patterns or reoccurring words and phrases. This gave
me tentative ideas in terms of the direction I would take as I began my coding process. I then reviewed my field notes as well as any pictures that I took of artifacts from offices and interview locations. I also used observer comments, designed to make connections to significant information shared during interviews that I felt was important to capture.

This initial coding structure was developed both from existing theory used to create the interview questions as well as “emic categories, or categories that naturally arose from the research participants and their stories” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 78). According to Saldana (2009) “narrative coding is appropriate for exploring participants’ intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences and actions to understand the human condition through story, which is justified in and of itself as a legitimate way of knowing” (p. 109).

Next, I established broad categories aligned to my general research questions; “categories were designed to be exhaustive, mutually exclusive, purposeful, and descriptive of content” (Merriam, 1998, p. 184). Strauss and Corbin (1990) stipulate to further refine the open coding process, utilize axial coding, which is “a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories” (p. 96). Essentially, I reviewed the elements coded under the broad categories and looked for common themes among them that would ultimately generate information for separate chapters in my research and expound more literature around those themes.

Additionally, I worked with a research assistant that had access to a NVivo license, which is a qualitative data analysis software package, to increase my efficiency and accuracy of data analysis (Alyahmady & Abri, 2013; Saldana, 2009). Welsh (2002) states that:

NVivo can add rigour to the analysis process by allowing the researcher to carry out quick and accurate searches of a particular type (the researcher may be reluctant to carry out these
searches manually, especially if the data set is large), and can add to the validity of the results by ensuring that all instances of a particular usage are found, this searching needs to be married with manual scrutiny techniques so that the data are in fact thoroughly interrogated (p. 4).

Once I framed my initial coding structure, the interviews were entered into NVivo, which then generated themes in the form of ‘Parent’ and ‘Child’ nodes. The technical node names of Parent and Child equate to dominant and subordinate themes, respectively. All interviews were re-read and pieces of the interviews were coded into themes, with particular attention paid to ensuring there was no context stripping (i.e. enough of the conversation was coded so that the surrounding relevant context was maintained) (Maxwell, 1996). During the coding phase, a few additional themes, or nodes, were created in order to ensure all data was captured in the coding structure. If additional nodes were created, previous transcripts that had already been coded were revisited and recoded if necessary.

After all of the interviews were fully coded, a report was built and exported from NVivo for interpretation (see Appendix E). The source category from the report indicates the number of interviewees who reported that theme (measure of breadth across data sources) and the number of references indicates the number of different pieces of text that were coded into that node (measure of depth or saturation of a category in the data). To determine which child nodes would be examined in further detail for purposes of reporting, an average reference frequency within each parent node was calculated. If the child node had more than ten scale points above the average references, it was selected for more detailed analysis and explanation in the findings section.
Participant descriptions

Even though each participant felt very comfortable sharing their stories and answering the interview questions, I assigned each participant a pseudonym for the body of this research to ensure their confidentiality. Considering many still maintain their positions of leadership, I also omitted data that might implicate their district or neighboring districts and if it was important to the context, I added additional pseudonyms or spoke in general terms to give participants space to share their truths. I am also adding various physical descriptors to help create an image of each participant, describing the setting and giving some background of their professional journey to date. Lastly, I also provided some contextual grounding regarding the relationship I have with the participants to include the tenure of our relationship, how we are connected and some additional information outside of each formal interview to increase the level of transparency of my role as a participant-observer in this body of research. The following participant descriptions are arranged in alphabetical order.

Participant 1: Ahmed

I have known Ahmed for approximately ten years. He is in his early 40’s, has a very dark complexion, tall in stature and a very athletic build. It was physically evident when shaking his hand; his grip is very intense and our embrace revealed a very muscular tone to his upper body. He has strikingly white teeth that vividly contrast against his complexion. Ahmed wore thick-framed black glasses and during this interview, was wearing a dark suit, crisp white shirt and a bright tie; Ahmed is known for his fashion. He speaks with a very slight accent, part of which comes from his family of origin. His father is from Ghana and his mother is an African American citizen. He mentioned growing up primarily with his mother and maternal grandfather, who himself was highly educated with a PhD and was a professor at a midwestern university. Ahmed
is also married with children and identifies as an African American.

He spent most of his administrative career as a principal in a first-ring suburban school system, though he also had a stint in a large urban system. Currently, Ahmed is a Superintendent in a suburban school system. I worked with Ahmed in a suburban school system while I was leading equity efforts for the district. I would interact with him, primarily on issues about racial equity in his school while he was a principal. I learned quickly, that Ahmed deeply cared about students of color and was steeped in critical race theory as it pertained to his personal and professional identity. I continued to work with Ahmed over the course of his career and hired him as an equity consultant when I was training new principals in a different district. I conducted this interview in his office. I observed pictures of his family along with multiple books and documents about race.

**Participant 2: Donte**

I have known Donte for approximately eight years. He is in his early 50’s, has a medium brown complexion and somewhat short in stature. He wears fairly thick glasses and has a professorial look about him. His hair is thin, greying and slightly balding. The texture of his hair is lose and wavy (he has white blood in his ancestry with his father being bi-racial). Prior to this interview, I assumed that Donte himself was biracial. He identifies as being black, he is married to a white woman and they have three children. I know his oldest son really well and he is an aspiring leader in college and throughout the community; one who publicly stands for racial justice issues. Donte spent the majority of his career in a large urban school system first as a social worker, then an assistant principal and eventually lead principal. I worked with Donte for about five years while he was in an urban school system, then he accepted a position in my former suburban school district where he has served as a principal for the past three years. His
story provides an interesting compare/contrast narrative of urban and suburban school systems. I also appreciate listening to how he experienced the same suburban school system I worked in for many years. This interview was conducted in his school office. Most notable about his office, was the significance of superhero action figures and posters everywhere. I arrived during dismissal so I was able to observe him interacting with staff and students, but this information was omitted due to confidentiality purposes.

**Participant 3: Jacob**

I have known Jacob for nearly seventeen years. He is in his early 40’s, medium stature and light brown complexion. Prior to this interview, I assumed Jacob was bi-racial, but he is not and identifies as black. Jacob always has a very close-cut hairstyle with crisp hair lines (almost as if he cuts his hair daily). He has a type-A personality, yet warm and inviting. Jacob is very friendly and gracious. He used to be married to a white woman, but recently divorced. He has two daughters and our kids used to be in the same basketball league for several years. Jacob grew up in a very tough environment in a large urban city, which he noted shaped some of who he is today. I hired Jacob to lead equity work in a district and was very impressed with his ability to develop the racial consciousness of teachers and other staff in the schools. I encouraged him to pursue an administrative role, which he did and became dean of students, then an assistant principal in a suburban school system and now is an out-state principal (about one hour from a metro area). Interestingly, he commutes one hour each way to work in order to live in a more diverse community. I wanted to conduct this interview in his office, but unfortunately, timing did not allow for that so I utilized a private conference room at a library by where we live. I believe the library privacy helped him share more deeply compared to if we were in his school and managing the distractions of running a building.
**Participant 4: Joseph**

I have known Joseph for about fifteen years. Ironically, we discovered some years in our relationship that our fathers knew each other years ago and in fact as very young children, our families would get together and we would play with one another. Neither of us remembered those days because we were so young and it was somewhat infrequent, but it became an interesting theme in our relationship moving forward. Joseph is in his mid 40’s, he is bi-racial (mother is white father is African American) with a light brown complexion, though he identifies as African American. He has a heavier athletic build (a former football player) and is bald. Joseph is married to a white woman who has extensive experience as an English Language Learner (ELL) teacher. They also have three children, one of which is potentially going to play professional football given his athletic excellence. Ironically before we knew of each other, I was asked to be his professional mentor when he became a principal, and have remained in contact personally and professionally ever since. Joseph worked for many years as a principal in a suburban system and for the last several years, he has been a principal at a charter school. His leadership has led the school from the lowest performing to a Mayoral award-winning status. I conducted this interview at a coffee shop, which allowed for a very relaxed feel, but it was somewhat distracting and wondered about the impact it may have had on his responses, though this is a location he chose, which was in his former neighborhood.

**Participant 5: Lamont**

I have known Lamont for eighteen years. He is in his mid 40’s, taller athletic build with a dark brown complexion (people say he resembles the rap star Jay-Z). He is bald, married to a white woman and they have children (Lamont also has a son from a different relationship). Lamont has a slower cadence to his speech and it is obvious that he reflects/processes while
speaking. He grew up exposed to tough community environments and this carries forward as part of his development narrative. Lamont is known to be well dressed and frequently wears signature bow-ties. He began his career in corrections then moved into education as a behavioral dean, became an assistant principal and a head principal out-state (about an hour outside of the metro area), then accepted a principal position in a very large urban midwestern district and is currently a principal in an urban district. Lamont is a key source of inspiration for this research because it was his vision to start ‘The Brotha’s Network’ that I mentioned earlier. I conducted this interview in his office. He has regalia noting his well-known large midwestern city of origin (e.g., professional sports teams, city skyline and actual name of city). I saw pictures of his family and professional books about leadership. He had posters of famous African American leaders and engaged me in conversations about student performance data, specifically isolating race (I did not include any this information in my research).

**Participant 6: Marcus**

I do not have a close relationship with Marcus, though I have known of Marcus for about six years. I first met him through The Brother's Network. He is in his early 50’s and has a medium brown complexion. His hair is turning grey and wears distinctly framed glasses, which gives him a more distinguished look. Marcus has a slightly heavier build and is a recognized former college football star. Given his physical appearance, he is very soft-spoken; his communication style is slower paced or somewhat calculated. He is not married, and has older children that do not live with him. Marcus was a principal in a large urban school system, a principal and assistant superintendent in a suburban school system and also served as an interim superintendent in a second-tier suburban school system. He recently returned to a large urban school system as a principal rather than pursuing a permanent superintendent position due to the need for a more
flexible schedule to help care for his aging mother. Marcus is very well known throughout the community and received a lot of praise coming back into a system as a principal. Marcus also has his Doctorate and did extensive research about black men in leadership. He serves as an adjunct professor at a local University and dedicates time to principal licensure certification courses. I conducted this interview in a meeting room at his apartment complex so I did not gather much observational artifact data as I would have liked.

**Participant 7: Tyreese**

I have known Tyreese for seventeen years. He is in his early-mid 40’s, medium athletic build and is a highly recognized former college football star. He has a darker brown complexion and wears glasses that rest half-way down his nose, which gives him a more distinguished gaze as talked with him (e.g., he would look at me above his eyeglass line). He is extremely extroverted, and his energy is infectious and could feel this as we embraced while we greeted each other. Tyreese is no longer married, but has children, one of which recently graduated from college. I first met Tyreese while he was working with a local non-profit and I hired him to do racial equity work in a suburban school district. He quickly made a name for himself and advanced his professional development and role to that of a dean of students, assistant principal and eventually lead principal within the same suburban district. Tyreese also has a Doctorate in Educational Leadership with an emphasis on black male resiliency and has published several books aligned to his life story and dissertation research. He currently is a consultant and motivational speaker and has clients all over the country. I conducted this interview while he was in town visiting in a private meeting room at a public library.
Participant 8: Walter

I have known Walter for almost nineteen years. He is in his late 40’s, shorter and smaller in stature and speaks with a very fast cadence; it is almost as if his mouth is always catching up to his thoughts. Walter identifies as African American, has a medium brown complexion, been married for many years and they have children in high school. His family is from the deep south and you can actually hear a little of that in his voice as he speaks. He is filled with positive energy and eagerly answered the questions during our time together. It was almost as if he were waiting to tell his story. Walter was in the Navy, where he also played basketball for the Naval Academy. He pursued a career in college coaching and fell into public K-12 education. He was a teacher in a suburban school system, then taught in a large urban school system, returned to a suburban school district as an assistant principal, became a principal in another suburban school system and currently is a superintendent in an out-state school district outside of a large metro area. I conducted this interview in his office and saw many pictures of his family. I took a picture of a very large framed print of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on his wall with King sitting in a Birmingham jail cell looking out. The title above the print read ‘Dedication’ with a quote below the image reading ‘Your self-sacrificing devotion to your purpose in life and unwavering faith will carry you through times of difficulty’. This picture literally captured the essence of our conversation together.
Chapter 4: Research findings & themes

After synthesizing all of my coding, there were three Parent (dominant) themes that emerged, which are: Personal history and identity; Support and motivation; and Navigating white systems. Within each, there were many Child (subordinate) themes that could be explored, but for the sake of this body of research, I again selected the Child themes that had statistical significance utilizing a quantitative measure ($\geq 10$ points above average within each Parent node) to establish a cut score that allowed me to select five dominant Child themes.

Personal history and identity

The significance of this theme is that who the participants are as individuals clearly defines who they are as professionals; the notion that they appear differently as black principals outside of their daily lived experiences as black men in America was not the case. Each participant upheld historical narratives of their families (e.g., life lessons, warnings, biases, etc.) and how this shaped their personal and professional identity. This directly ties to research questions one and four in terms of how each participant situates themselves as being a black principal in predominantly white spaces and the messages received growing up that supports their ability to successfully navigate their roles.

Similarly, to my opening narrative, many of the participants felt as though their personal, local and immediate family shaped their identity development as individuals. I was impressed with their level of trust and candor with me; this set the stage for depth in their sharing. Each participant shared amazing stories about their respective histories, almost as if they were never given permission to do so in the past. This may stem from their experiences needing to repress their authentic selves in fear of lack of acceptance or retribution. As Mead (1934) notes, the self
"develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process [social experience and activity] as a whole and to other individuals within that process" (p. 135). If society denies the lived reality of black men, the likelihood of presenting fully is carefully calculated (Zander & Zander, 2000). The participants carefully gauged themselves between their natural frame and social frame to determine how in depth they could be during our interviews (Goffman, 2010). I believe the fact that we mutually identified as black men together in other spaces, they were more inclined to present through a natural/non-calculated frame.

The level of emotion associated with their sharing was intense and invited me to really lean in and found myself embedded within their stories. I was curious what narratives would emerge as we opened the conversations. Far too often, mainstream thought and media focuses on the travesties of African American history and does not leave much room for hope (McWhorter, 2003). My opening question regarding how they racially identified spurred an outpouring of not only their racial identification, but ‘how they came to be’. Every participant shared a grounding identity of that being an observer of their respective families and who was present with them during this time, which had a significant impact on their development. The contextual struggles they each disclosed also paralleled one another and wove their experiences together into a shared oral tapestry, if you will, about discovering their blackness and how this was the crucible for who they are today as black principals. Equally, the family life lessons gained while growing up directly fueled their white navigational skills.

Ahmed articulated the significance of his family of origin. When asked about how he racially identifies he stated:

I would joke around with people, saying I’m truly, like, African-American. And the way I say that is I’m the son of a West African immigrant from Ghana, right? And my mother
being – you know, I guess an American citizen by the way of Africa through slavery and all those things. So, I identify as a black male, but I also recognize that, in the truest sense of the word, or phrase, I am African-American because my father is an African immigrant. My mother, you know, American citizen. So, it just depends on the social construction that you wanted to use.

The recognition of his biological duality brought me to my own development shared earlier, being both white and black, and how I negotiated this based upon context and how I wanted to construct myself to others. “The history of the American Negro is...this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost” (Du Bois, 1903, p. 9). Ahmed further shared about being raised with significant influence from his maternal grandfather, who was highly educated and was a professor at one point at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale during a time where very few African Americans had such positions. “So, as a black male professor at that time, [he] had a very intimate understanding of what it was like to be black and to be in predominantly white spaces” (Ahmed).

Ahmed’s grandfather’s teachings were significant to helping him develop a mental framework for how the world would define him and the impact it would potentially have. He shared a story about his first recollection of being different, of being black and how this story signifies his identity to this day:

So, from a very early age, [my grandfather] would talk to me about what my life would be like and the decisions that I would have to make if I wanted to be able to exist in this [world]. I distinctly remember one time when one summer, my neighbor, who lived across the street, became my best friend growing up. His name was [Nick]. White young man.
His family was Irish and he and I were – you know, we did everything together, primarily playing sports and stuff.

My grandfather had a crabapple tree in the backyard. And right behind that was this cornfield. And one day, for whatever reason, Nick and I took all of the crabapples off of the tree and just were throwing [them]. Now, granted, I never saw my grandfather use these crabapples ever. I generally would just rake them up when they would fall off.

I distinctly remember, when [my grandfather] got home, that – you know, I never got many whoopings from him. And it wasn’t even the whooping that I remember most. It was his words when he was just, like, look…as a black man in this country, you can’t do the same thing your white friends do…as I’m getting this whooping, he’s saying these things to me. And he was, like, they can take crabapples off of somebody’s tree and throw them and there won’t be no harm…and they can go home. You can’t do that. If they’re doing something, you get pulled in the car [referencing a police car]. You don’t want to go into jail. So, at a very early age, I recognized that there were differences in which the world treated me compared to my white friends.

Not all of the participants alluded to a story such as this, but many referenced how they were ‘put in their place’ as black men, most attributing this to a family teaching or value passed on to them. Geography was also a significant theme in their stories. Almost all of them noted their families of origin coming from the south and/or highly concentrated cities with African American people (e.g., Atlanta, Arkansas, Chicago, etc.) and several noted direct lineages from Africa. Walter shared:
So, in my world, [I’m a] black man, but African-American male. My mother and father would say that there’s a little Choctaw Indian in us, but my parents are from the deep south…about 45 minutes outside of Memphis. I’ve only known being a black man. Mom and Dad [said] “that is who you are”. My mother is the oldest of eleven. My dad is the oldest of seventeen. Deep South. So, we’re talking outhouses, picking cotton, dirt roads. My parents moved from Arkansas because they said, “we are not going to raise you in that”. And so, they moved to Minnesota just for opportunity.

Jacob had a similar response:

I racially identify as a black male. Chicago native, born and raised. Both African-American mom and dad. My grandparents from my mom’s side, are from Atlanta. When I trace back my history, we came through the slave trade around West Virginia and migrated from that part into Georgia. And I’m coming from specifically family values…black family values…southern black family values [laughs]. And my family, after Georgia, kind of migrated to the Midwest to get away from some of the racism down in the South.

Lamont also conveys his story being rooted in geography and closely tied to his family of origin:

I racially identify as a black man – 100 percent. Mom was born in Arkansas. Dad’s from Mississippi. They migrated to the north to Kansas City when Kansas City was a happening spot for black folks. And they didn't migrate together, but they met there in Kansas City.

And, you know, it’s 100 percent black. All my experiences [are] black – cultural, everything about it. You know, I should say everything about it, up until a certain point, was black. I married a white lady, which comes with different dynamics and different
things to navigate, but me personally, myself, and my kids identify as black, 100 percent.
I was born in Chicago and raised in Chicago.

You know, actually, our family reunions were in Chicago [laughs] and those were some
good times. You know what I mean? Those were some real good times. Because my mom’s
brothers – and she was one of the last ones that migrated to the north. All her brothers and
sisters, with the exception of one – and you’re talking 13 of them – were in Chicago, so
family reunions and get-togethers, parties – whatever, the whole nine, everybody was
together.

When I probed deeper about how he discovered the fact that his identity was that of a black
male he stated:

It was ninety percent through family and ten percent through TV. We used to watch The
Brady Bunch and different things like that, and we used to make fun of them, like, nobody
lives like that [laughs]. I remember plain as day, we were, like, they drink milk with
dinner…where the Kool-Aid at [laughs]? The neighborhood I grew up in was probably
sixty percent black and forty percent Latino. The only time I really seen white folks was
my teachers in schools.

Many participants referred to the social construct of race and based upon the context of its
use, heavily shaped their history and identity development. Marcus’ story conveyed this well.

I identify as an African American male. There have been social constructs that have been
put into place that have hurt or hampered kind of the process. So, I mean, basically, that’s
all I identify. And a lot of that I had to learn for myself along the way. I’m from Athens,
Georgia. So, the railroad tracks helped identify kind of the city and how it was divided.
And through that, when you’ve seen everything from the Klan march as a child, to your
father still being called ‘boy’ as a man, you quickly understand and see the impact of race as it relates to who you are and understanding who you are.

Lamont noted that about ninety percent of his identity came from his family and his comments further suggest the social construction of race within his family:

One of the first times I remember [race] being discussed is when Ronald Reagan ran against Jimmy Carter. I think that was 1980. I was 9 years old. And I remember my family just sitting and talking. Because, you know, adults would be in one place, and the kids are supposed to be in another place. That’s kind of tradition. But we was always listening. And I remember, in the kitchen, they was talking about, if Ronald Reagan wins this election, we got to move to Africa. I remember that just like it was yesterday. I mean, I’ll never forget that. At the time, I didn't know what that meant. But it struck me. It was something about that was, like, hmm. You know. So, I remember that conversation. I remember Muhammad Ali, different boxers, they would also say beat the white – you know, beat up that white boy. You know, it was always a – you know, don't really trust white folks, you know, to keep, you know, us safe. I’d say those are my earliest memories. Probably – yeah, probably around 9 years old.

Donte’s story is very similar with the overlays of geography and direct conversations that help shape his identity, situated in a larger family narrative. Additionally, Donte speaks about the influence of spirituality and religion based upon his father’s role in the family:

I identify as a black man. I go back and forth with whether or not I say African American, sometimes because I think there’s some power just in the word ‘black’ and some history around that. I like to celebrate and acknowledge that history. My dad is actually biracial. That’s something we don’t quite talk about too much, just because of the circumstances
around that. He and his brother are biracial, and his mom was basically seduced by a 
married white man in the South. And, I mean, he – my dad talks about it, but it’s just not –
that part is not something to be – you know. Kind of that – kind of that family history [he
stopped sharing do to comfort at this point].

My identity growing up was – part of that is some religion because my dad is a pastor. We 
traveled, and part of my experience as a black man is seeing his experience as a black man.
Particularly because – he has a similar experience because he’s a black man in the Lutheran 
church. And the Lutheran church is very white. He was raised Baptist, but there was a 
missionary church that opened in Chicago, where we lived at the time, and so it was right 
in the heart of the projects in Chicago and he became very much involved in that and got 
into the ministry that way. He became a deacon at the church and all that type of stuff and 
he told the pastor he was interested, and they gave him scholarships to go to Iowa.

So [we] went from Chicago to Iowa, I would imagine that it was even harder for my sibling 
– my older brothers and sisters because the context of white people and whiteness was not 
within our personal, local, and immediate in Chicago. We were at black schools. They were 
in black neighborhoods. We spent a lot of our time – most of our time with family. And so 
then, coming out of that context and going to the new context, was a bit of a challenge.
And I think the first time I got called a nigger was in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

I was probably, like, second or third grade – knowing the context of the word. And, you 
know, as black folks, we own the word, right? [laughs] So – and to have one of – one of 
my friends at the time say that, was just – it was kind of interesting. It was, like, oh, you 
can’t say that. And then it didn’t really dawn on me that he really couldn’t say that until
my brother says, “You have to beat him up for that.” Then we got into a fight, you know.

But then, two or three days later, we were friends again.

So, as you know, as you develop your identity as a black person, family is really a big part of that. And you start to build that – you know, that social construct, you know and what it means to be black. And you have to defend that word [nigger]. You know, your brother may have just called you that in the house, you know – although not in front of my mom [laughs]. Couldn’t use that [word] in front of my mom, but – you know, but a white person saying that, that was – you know, that just wasn’t okay.

I inquired more about the element of Donte’s father’s being biracial and how that was not openly discussed and the impact this had on his identity. Donte further shared:

So, I think part of that [being biracial] was in Tennessee at the time. I can’t remember if it was Memphis or Chattanooga. There’s no line between whether you’re mixed or white, you know, or black. You are…black. So that’s his identity in growing up. And I think the shame was more family shame with his mom and how that all took place.

The dude [white person] came across the railroad tracks and it was – like I said, it was a married white guy. And messing around with this teenage black girl. And really taking advantage of this teenage black girl. So that’s kind of the [story]. It wasn’t like a tragic love story or anything like that. It was – it was really manipulation. I didn’t really hear that full story until I was older. So – and probably wouldn’t have actually understood it until I was older [laughs]. But, yeah, he fully identifies as black. And I think, you know, like I said, you know, it was not an option to identify as a mixed-race, biracial person or anything like that.
This theme contextualizes the importance of black identity formation so that an analysis can be made as to how the intersection of race and leadership exists for the participants in this study. Although each participant formulated their identity in various ways, all of them noted a deep regard for family in an effort to situate their blackness and how their family constructs served as a source of strength in understanding their blackness in a white world. This early point of family clarity also served as a source of strength for each of the participants in their roles as black principals leading in predominantly white schools/districts because the same themes and experiences they each had growing up, manifested in their adulthood.

Each participant identified both explicit and implicit messages about their blackness and how they observed white people in their experiences having privileges and realities far different than they did. The cumulative internalization of these messages still impacts them as adults and they use these messages to make meaning and further interpret the continual white privilege they observe and its impact on their roles, specifically as it pertains to being black and leading in white spaces. Additional analysis and discussion of this theme is offered in chapter five.

**Reflections on own leadership and or advice**

Based upon the first identified theme of personal history and identity, the participants were able to use this to reflect on their own leadership and recount the advice given to them to date. This Child theme clearly aligns to research questions two and three; giving the participants a space to make meaning of their racialized identity and how this shaped their leadership experiences. Remembering the three questions posed earlier in this body of research by Dr. Thomas Parham, I was curious to know how participants viewed themselves and was this static or did they, like me, embrace a growth mindset, whereby, I continually asked myself who I was and how I could become better? Early in my life, my gauge for becoming better was validated
externally and it took many years for me to understand that validation must come from within, not at the approval/permission of others, particularly from white people.

My participants spoke to overcoming challenging obstacles/statistics (often times racialized) in their lives growing up, which strengthened them as individuals. What also became apparent was that many of my participants early on found themselves to be on the outside looking in; they worked multiple angles for acceptance – but by whom? West (1993) shares as long as black people are viewed as a ‘them’, the burden falls on blacks to do all the ‘cultural’ and ‘moral’ work necessary for healthy race relations. The implication is that only certain Americans can define what it means to be American – and the rest must simply ‘fit in’ (p. 6-7).

Delpit’s (1995) work surrounding the ‘otherness’ that kept research participants on the outside was at the core of their responses and closely linked to systems they would seek to ultimately validate them as black men. She refers to this as ‘the culture of power’ and highlights five elements to consider, which are,

1. Issues of power are enacted in [social environments]; 2. There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a ‘culture of power’; 3. The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power; 4. If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier; 5. Those with power are frequently least aware of – or least willing to acknowledge – its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence (Delpit, 1995, p. 24).

The culture of power, in this case, is also associated with race, specifically as Critical Race Theory (CRT) defines such alignment and acquisition. CRT attempts to abolish the ways that
race and racial power are constructed by law and culture by normalizing racism in America, but also attacking the notion of white supremacy that seeks to maintain this level of privilege (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Further, the ideology of race-neutrality is a deliberate attempt to silence the impact that race has in substantiating and perpetuating disparate outcomes and experiences for privileged and powerful homogenous populations, who in America, typically are white individuals (Gotanda, 2000). My participants spoke frequently about their experiences of exclusion and oppression and how often they negotiated their own sense of what it means to be a person of color in the face of racial/ethnic stereotypes (Ospina & Foldy, 2009; Ospina & Su, 2009). As a person of color, having the authority to racially be who you are should never be fundamentally challenged, but this is a common occurrence for people of color because they are not the racialized prototype of normativity.

The participants in my research alluded to being molded by others in their lives and upon reflection of a quote, I wanted to know how they would respond? I asked each participant to think about the following in terms of their leadership and identity development, “I have learned that success in life is not to be determined by what one has attained; rather, by the obstacles one has overcome while trying to succeed” (Booker T. Washington). This quote speaks to one’s reflective journey, but also how it can propel a future. Each participant’s response demonstrated a source of pride in this quote, noting the inherent resiliency it captures.

When I interviewed Joseph, he often drew an analogy to his journey being that of a marathon; however, he noted that he found himself always sprinting in life, then questioning why he was so fatigued. As a black man, there was always a sense of pressure to perform (no pun intended) and if not performing, defending yourself or position in life; it is daunting:
[Booker T’s] quote is something that could go on your tombstone. I have learned that, when you do things for selfish reasons and try go to be the savior of everybody, to try to prove to the man [meaning white people], it’s a – it’s a very selfish cause. And [black men] kind of hide behind that. Because of the obstacles I’ve been through, I am a success story. I don’t need to gain another thing [or] prove to anybody. From what I’ve been through, from just even before I began entering the world of education to make a difference for other kids, I come from a situation where I was in foster homes. My mom was shot. My dad was on drugs. He was in prison. I was cast around house to house. But I have a – you know, two degrees, a master’s – I don’t have to prove shit to anybody. If you can’t see that there’s many success stories, you got – you got issues. I don’t worry about that now. I used to try to fit in and prove to people – I’ve done this…I’ve done this [he strongly emphasized the word I’ve both times]. And I still have to do that sometimes and say, look at the evidence. Evidence indicators. Without getting into the emotion, you know? I have to bring the emotion without the commotion [chuckles].

Lamont responded similarly, though emphasized that he has not ‘arrived’ so to speak. He grew up in very challenging situations and shared on many occasions during the interview about gang issues in his neighborhood and the stereotypical images of black men he had to follow:

By that quote, I’m successful. And I’m real quick to say “by that quote,” because I don't want to think, like, I arrived or I’m better than anybody else or – that’s not me. But by the quote, being that – looking at it from a statistical standpoint, I shouldn't be sitting in this office right now. I should be six feet under, in jail, or, you know, living in a halfway house.

And I’m not just talking about black men in general.

While responding he reflected in the moment about recently going back home with his kids
and driving down the block from when he was younger:

I just drove there Sunday and drove around. And it’s like, man, you know – why me? How did I make it? You know, but how did I – how am I doing as well, you know, as I’m doing? So, I was saying, from the quote, I definitely made it. I still think there’s work to be done, though. Don't let anybody else define or take that dream away from you.

Marcus extended this conversation by sharing:

Get people to think on their journey. Because [my former district] is now on a journey. Becoming a little more diverse, a little more Latino than African-American. But asking those reflective questions so that people can see and understand, not only who you are, but what you believe in. I just believe that leadership – you know, it’s not – it’s not necessarily as much of a philosophy, but as a belief. Because, as a leader, if you believe in the work of racial equity, if you believe in equity – racial, gender, transgender students – your questions guide that work. And the people in the system understand what you’re looking for and what’s expected and begin to move the system. Because the system begins to reject what isn’t [the norm].

One of the things as a leader that you kind of do after a while, you begin to anticipate the questions. So, as you’re putting presentations together, as you’re about to speak to principals, the community, you just begin to anticipate the questions. Because they like to make you feel invisible – whiteness does – until you do something to make yourself visible. So, I would say to my black boys – my black children, you don’t have to act this way to be safe. I got you. I see you. You can stand down on that defense pose. I’m trying to model the behavior I want to see. Because when I talk to my daughters and my son, and I can say to them – because I’m sure they’re saying, you’ve known this, and you haven’t done
anything about it? They won’t have to say that to me. I’ve seen the whiteness. I’ve seen what it does to our people, socially, emotionally, academically. And I’ve done everything I can to make an impact and disrupt and reflect excellence along the way.

The participants made it clear that they all had dreams to be successful in life and received messages that they felt were intended to thwart them from achieving their dreams. I believe Lamont said it best when he shared, “Don't let anybody else define or take that dream away from you.” Far too often, as black men leading in predominantly white spaces, we find ourselves in situations where in a moment’s time, we have to ask ourselves if we have gone too far in our actions and the backlash from whiteness can be overwhelming. I am not overstating when I say that every day of my life, I find myself in situations where I am consciously questioning what my next action should be or what words I should use simply because I know the message my black body sends in white spaces. I wonder what it feels like to not have this psychological burden? The closest I can come is to consciously think about my male privilege, but even then, I highly doubt that I am afforded the full amenities of being a male because my blackness will always overshadow my maleness.

I was most moved by Marcus’ comments “I’ve seen the whiteness. I’ve seen what it does to our people, socially, emotionally, academically. And I’ve done everything I can to make an impact and disrupt and reflect excellence along the way.” Marcus’ cadence when making this statement reminded me of Dr. King exclaiming that ‘he’s been to the mountain top’ and in spite of not getting there with those following his leadership, he casted a strong vision of a promised land. Being a black leader in predominantly white systems, you have to be visionary and see beyond the moment. There will be junctures at every turn pushing you to veer off course from what you know in your heart is right. The participants acknowledged this and stated that by
overcoming such obstacles, they were able to remain in their roles and find success. But the success they spoke of was not about themselves; rather, those they were serving…even the predominantly white staff. I will expound upon this more in the next chapter.

**Support and motivation**

This theme spoke directly to the research question about what participants identified as being necessary to being successful as a black leader in white spaces. My grandfather used to always say that no one person ever stands on an island unto themselves. It took me a while to understand what life lesson he was teaching me, but after many years of trying to figure out life on my own, I realized that his teaching was about the larger collective, specifically about being part of the African American community. This was critically important for him because when my grandparents migrated to Minnesota from Georgia and Tennessee, they moved into a large black community in St. Paul called Rondo. It was a thriving community that hosted many black families and black owned businesses (Cavett, 2017; Fairbanks, 2009). In the 1950’s, America was waking up to a new reality of transportation and the American highway system was created. Not unlike many urban centers across the country, these highways strategically went through communities of color, decimating their collective wealth, support and ultimately power (Avila, 2014; Halsey, 2016; Semuels, 2016).

My grandparents lost their house to Highway 94; they never experienced the touted efficiencies it created; rather, the travesty of having their home and neighborhood torn down. My grandparents shared stories about their old community and what it was like. They always noted the support throughout the entire community, even when class divisions existed. There were two distinct neighborhoods, one was Oatmeal Hill and the other Cornmeal Valley, the first being wealthier (Cavett, 2017; Fairbanks, 2009). Irrespective of income differences, the common
denominator was that everyone was part of the larger black collective and everyone had a way of looking out for one another. My father shared with me this notion of collective responsibility while growing up and that if he were found doing something wrong, not only would he be disciplined by the adult who observed his behavior, but upon being taken home, my grandparents would also “get in his ass” as my father would say.

Those days and types of communities no longer exist as they once did. This is not to say black communities are extinct, but that deep collective nature seems to have subsided and the notion of individuality has more permanence. As I shared earlier, whether I choose to associate with other black people or not, the world will always make that association for me; the power structure in this world never lets me stand as an individual. I proudly believe in the collective consciousness of the African American community and accept the responsibility placed upon me either directly or indirectly to ensure that as a black people, we are able to prosper in this world, in spite of systemic pressure and dominant ideology saying otherwise.

The participants in this study shared multiple experiences regarding the lack of support or isolation they experienced as black principals in their respective school systems. I also heard how each participant was on their own journey in terms of who they were as black men and how this impacted their professional roles and each spoke in terms of the importance of collective support. Take Tyrone for example. He offered a distinction when we spoke about ‘code switching’, which is a term highlighting a strategy or process by which many black individuals use to gain acceptance into predominantly white spaces. Tyrone spoke instead that “black people have a range” of who they are, meaning that the cumulative black experience is organic; it is ever changing based upon one’s personal awareness and life experiences. Tyrone believed that the term code switching implied “becoming something/ [someone] else” versus being adaptive in
your existence. His need for support was very high and it was evident in our interview from the early stages of his life to now:

[Expectations] tend to be very, very low, whether it be in the classroom or outside the classroom. Even in households sometimes they tend to be low. As an African American male, you were constantly fighting against those expectations to try to be better than the low expectations that have been set for you. So definitely in school, I felt I had to work three and four times as hard as the other white kids in my class, particularly in high school, who were often privileged and were given opportunities to succeed. And I had to, you know, go in overdrive to – you know, to even get C’s.

Tyrone went on to share how his experiences growing up continued into his professional role:

So, as an African American leader, we’re dealing with the microcosms of a society. In society in general, we’re forced to have range [i.e., code switching]. In our buildings, we’re forced to have range, or you’re not going to necessarily succeed or do well as a leader. So white colleagues, they’re – for the most part, the folks they’re leading have the same mindsets. Many of them may be coming from similar backgrounds, what have you, so there’s not a lot of negotiating that needs to take place. There is not a lot of negotiating that we have to display as African American leaders, because we have to justify so many of the decisions we make, we have to kind of walk through the whole rationale piece before we’re even able to make a decision. Whereas, a white colleague could simply…make a decision.

Lamont spoke to his early college experiences at Iowa State, drawing parallels to needing the same level of support as mentioned above by other participants:
Yeah, it was predominantly white. It was probably 30-some-thousand kids there. I don't know. A couple percent black. But it almost seemed like there was more black [students] because we was all together.

So, we created our own affinity group…safety net, you know. You had the Greeks, you had the D1 athletes and then you had, you know, just regular students. And even though they were all kind of sanctioned off, we were still in one group, you know, hanging out in the same place. So, it made it seem – even though it was 90-some-percent white, we found a way to connect and make it – make a safety net.

He continued to share his experiences at the University of River Falls:

But the same – River Falls. I mean, at the time, it was 4,000 or 5,000 students. Not that many. I think it’s, like, 10 [thousand] now, but it was smaller then. I don't know how many black students – about 15 or 20 of us that hung – and we still talk. We hung tight. And, I mean, we walked the campus together, and we went to parties, went to class – we did everything together. So even though there was only 15 to 20 of us, it felt like 500 because we were always together. And we just kind of blocked the – blocked the outside. Blocked everything else.

Tyrone hit the nail on the head when he stated in schools, “we’re dealing with the microcosms of a society.” Think about it – the war on poverty, the war on drugs, *A Nation at Risk*…all were grounded in schools. Schools have long been the place where societal wars are waged because there is immediate access to a dedicated experimental participant base. This is the same foundation as the common school movement in this country (Spring, 2001). In essence, schools are social factories attempting to standardize an experience that will ‘keep America
great’ and often, principals serve as social engineers, if you will. The fundamental questions are, how is greatness defined and for whom?

The participants accept the responsibilities of being a leader and it is often stated that the principalship is very lonely, but being a black principal, the isolation is compounded. Within the field of education, it is believed that as a principal, you possess a level of knowledge and authority that allows you to make key decisions on behalf of staff, students and your broader community; you are the engineer for school-based outcomes. I always say that principals organizationally sit at the fulcrum of educational systems because if the central office wants to push an initiative into schools, they must get support from building principals. Similarly, if the community wants to see change in their schools, they too must get support from the building principal. Anything and everything that touches school communities is heavily influenced by principals.

Culturally, principals are similar to law enforcement, there is an unspoken code to ‘get each other’s back’, but being a black principal, rarely did you have commensurate support. As a principal, when I challenged the social engineering that was occurring in my district, it was made clear to me that this was not accepted. The organizational defense typically referenced the classic ‘my best friend is black’ mindset. I would hear rebuttals such as, ‘we have a State approved integration plan’, or ‘we value ALL students (not wanting to isolate racial disparities)’, or ‘we don’t see color’, or the worst, ‘we hire great people of color like you’, as if these statements invite me (or students who look like me) to be a member of the club!

The challenge raised by participants is that as black men leading schools, they were not supported by their white colleagues. Often the perspectives they held vis-à-vis a racialized equity lens interrogated the core of white leadership ideology; therefore, were also shunned or pushed
to the margins of the organization, not unlike the very students they were attempting to support. In the absence of such collegial/organizational support, the participants formulated communities within the dominant organizational community, hence, The Brothers Network and the like. It was a space where, as black leaders, they could go for validation, empowerment, inspiration as well as be pushed/challenged respectfully without fear that such challenge was coming simply because of their views as a black leader. This theme was pivotal to the participants and much needed to negotiate their roles in white spaces.

**Student centered**

I am not surprised that this theme emerged as a critical factor for the participants to remain successful. Unlike many other professions that people choose for lucrative reasons, many who go into education do so because of a greater purpose. As was surfaced in other themes, the participants found that their roles as black leaders tied directly to inspiring black students to achieve in predominantly white spaces and this was the participant’s primary source of success.

I will never forget a young man named Reggie, he literally changed my life forever. I met him while I was in college. I was never a serious student during my early college years and rather than getting money through illegitimate ways, I accepted a position at a local YMCA working in an afterschool program with young people for several hours each day. Reggie was a ten-year-old African American boy. He was tall and thin for his age and fairly popular with all of the staff. Reggie was that young person that had such an amazing personality that one could not resist engaging with him. Unfortunately, I learned that this was a mask for a much darker lived home reality.

Reggie and I would literally play foosball every day when I was at work. It was not something that I enjoyed, mainly because he would win every time, but needless to say, he
would always talk me into playing with him. One day after a game, he said, “Man, I wish I had a
dad like you at home!” I was speechless to say the least. Being married and having a child was
far from my mind as a young twenty-something person, but it made me pause with great
reflection. I thought to myself, I am using Reggie as a paycheck and he was using me as a father
figure…what is wrong with this picture? At that moment, I realized I was looking at a mini-me; I
was, in fact, Reggie. Similarly, to Reggie, as a young person I remembered wanting to have the
same adult support and love in my life that I had not received.

It was shortly after that encounter that Reggie’s dark past was revealed to me. On a separate
occasion, child protective services (CPS) came to our YMCA branch requesting to meet with
Reggie. I had no idea what CPS was at the time, but my supervisor asked me to get him. I found
Reggie upstairs and let him know that there were some people here that needed to talk with him.
I later learned that Reggie disclosed to someone about being abused at home and also learned
that he was being removed from his family and put into foster care. I eventually lost track of
Reggie, but I knew from that moment moving forward, my purpose in life was to serve and
support the Reggie’s and Regina’s of this world so they would not have to experience what
Reggie or I had as young people. To this day, I carry Reggie’s spirit with me and guesstimate
him to be in his mid-thirties. This research is dedicated to him and how he grounded me to do
what is in the best interest of young people for the rest of my life.

Many of the participants in this research feel equally passionate about young people and
through my interviews and informal conversations with them, I am humbled to know that there
are many black men who share a similar experience and have dedicated their lives to
empowering future generations of black youth. What became evident is that even through the
struggles of being a black male principal in predominantly white school systems, their daily
drive to succeed came from the experiences of their students or other young people in their lives, especially those that looked like them.

I’m student-driven, student-centered, and that’s what my purpose is, you know. That’s it. That’s what you want. So, all the fighting for kids that you do, and the battles that you put up in the system, put up within systems – in white systems, is that you’re trying to make that pathway for the next generation. And I don’t necessarily ever consciously think about that until you sit down with somebody and have an interview about that (Donte, 2018).

The success piece, for me, is specifically that kid that might come to school and might not see education as an opportunity for them and helping change that mindset that, here’s where I could be successful if I get a good education. I think that’s, in itself, for me, the success. It’s about the kids. It’s not about my gratification of what I consider success. It’s about helping create – or, interrupt systems and giving kids – all kids opportunities to do whatever they want to do (Jacob, 2018).

It was always the kids. There was always the focus on the kids. And I knew that my plight in being an educational leader had more to do with them than even myself. And I – and I felt the same education that my [own] kids were getting at a much better school was the same education [kids] deserved at this high-poverty school as well. So, I wasn’t going to bend. I wasn’t going to compromise my values, my expectations, as related to staff, whether it be staff of color or white staff, when it came to serving my kids (Tyreese, 2018).

The participants in this study are unapologetic to do what they feel in their hearts is the best for students, especially for black students. They are not far removed from their own personal experiences being young black students in school systems that were not designed for them, or
had low expectations placed upon them. Because of this, the participants seemingly had a moral obligation to assert their black identities in their leadership and as Tyreese sated, “I wasn’t going to compromise my values, my expectations, as related to staff, whether it be staff of color or white staff.” Many were ridiculed and received comments such as, “You’re treating students of color differently because you are black.” The truth of the matter is that often was the case. I recall my time as a principal and being asked by black students why I was so hard on them. I told them that if they cannot accept reality from me…someone who likes them, shared similar experiences as them, authentically cares about them…then how would they respond in a world of whiteness that essentially does not value them? As Donte stated, I too was “trying to make that pathway for the next generation” just like a black college professor did for me.

I believe that young people in 2018 fully understand the need to embrace a global mindset and that being around people who look different than them or speak languages other than English is more common than not. I would even go so far as to say students tend to have an appreciation for this reality. The greatest challenge they have, not unlike students of color, is overcoming the dominant white oppressive ideology that governs public education and learning how this normative socialization process inhibits their success in life especially as globalization expands and people of color begin to comprise the majority in various markets. It is equally important that white students see leaders of color, and in this case, black leaders, challenge inequitable norms, because the inherent rites white students will soon discover they have, will then have an additional lens, by which they will have the obligation to do the same; black leaders indirectly build white allies.
Navigating white systems

Growing up, my dad would draw attention to the fact that simply because of the color of my skin, I would be treated differently. Of course, as a young boy, it took me a while to fully comprehend what he was saying, but also how he was trying to prepare me for a lifelong battle to be accepted and valued. I soon discovered how the world was seemingly set up for some to succeed at the expense of others and those that typically succeeded were white. It brought clarity to the ‘white world’ my dad would often reference and solidified my position within that space. My understanding was not limited to the physical color of individuals, although, that is where my understanding began. Eventually, I learned that the white world was an existence; whiteness was a way of being. “White functions not only as a color but also as a culture and a consciousness” (Singleton, 2006, p. 203).

Birthed out of the social construction of race during the formation of America, whiteness served as a gauge by which normativity would be established. European immigrants that arrived and slaves who were delivered to America’s borders experienced a similar ethnic cleansing, if you will, whereby who they were was to be stripped away and left portside to start anew (Takaki, 1993, Hannaford, 1996, Blassingame, 1979); however, unlike newly enslaved Africans, European immigrants were afforded the additional blessing of social advancement if they were willing to assimilate into mainstream values premised in domains such as religion, language and culture (Brodkin, 1998; Kivel, 2002). “In this regime, power and knowledge combine to allow a small group of White Europeans to assign worth and status to other human beings on the basis of phenotype (people’s facial features, hair, and skin pigmentation)” (Brookfield, 2005). Even the Italians, Irish and Jews, who were initially denied the same privileges associated with whiteness (due to their darker complexion), eventually gained access to the inherent rites of whiteness with
the continued enslavement and denouncement of Africans (Brodkin, 1998; Hannaford, 1996; Takaki, 1993).

According to Sleeter (1994), whiteness is a “system of rules, procedures, and tacit beliefs that result in whites collectively maintaining control of wealth and power” (p. 6). I am sure this was an attractive offer to European immigrants that were coming here with nothing other than to chase their dreams in the land of bountiful wealth and opportunity. Today, many white people I know are often unconscious of the omnipresence of whiteness. It is almost as if they are born into a drift and are not able to recognize the intended or unintended consequences of being a beneficiary. White people often see race and ethnicity to categorize people of color, not themselves, and in turn, experience a sense of colorlessness and culturelessness (Perry, 2001).

Because of this, whites inadvertently make their ways of being the norm for everyone (Bergerson, 2003). So as a person of color, I found myself not fitting into this norm and struggled to get my footing in the ‘whiteness drift’. When I would push against this norm to influence change or get other whites to recognize the ceiling placed over me, I quickly was reminded that as a person of color, my voice, my perspective, my power was almost nonexistent. I am reminded of the question: When does a fish realize it is born into and requires to be in water? Answer: When it is taken out. Becoming racially conscious of whiteness is not relegated to people of color. In fact, it is more detrimental that white people understand whiteness and their unintentional subscription to it because whiteness is a self-fulfilling construct; it does not require active perpetuation. In an effort to admonish such unearned privilege and power, one must be able to recognize and be willing to do something about it; they must be able to get out of the water and feel the struggle for air.
It’s quite difficult to change something in order to produce a different result if we don’t even see what it is that we’re doing now. It’s only after we observe something, notice something, that we can be conscious about either changing it or leaving it (Brothers, 2005).

Let us argue that white people do recognize whiteness, the choice still remains within their sphere of control if they want to relinquish the benefits or not. Peggy McIntosh’s (1988) work unveiled fifty privileges associated with being white and has since served as a marker for contextually defining whiteness.

I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was “meant” to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks (McIntosh, 1988, p. 291).

Given the unearned privilege, especially if it has been customary to a way of life, letting go of it is much easier said than done. White privilege discourse expanded to white supremacy with the surge of critical race theory in academia, not so much in the sense of historical hate groups, but that of the ‘privilege plus power equation’ and the exertion of this power over others to get desired outcomes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

[By] “white supremacy” I do not mean to allude only to the self-conscious racism of white supremacist hate groups. I refer instead to a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings. (Ansley, 1997, p. 592)
The notion of white supremacy gained significant popularity recently, with President Trump being elected to office and extending the term to his way of being and political tactics. Prior to his presidency, the ideology associated with whiteness has long been present, but in more covert ways. Being seemingly omnipotent and untouchable, President Trump essentially gives America full authority to embrace the negative aspects of being white, stemming from ancestral oppression to present day overt racism (Coates, 2017). This can make the need for critical white discourse much more complicated as it evokes fear and guilt and inadvertently sustains the inherent power and privilege of which such discourse desires to eradicate (Singleton, 2013). So, “Whiteness continues to be a living, breathing historical construction, a social ontological performance that has profound, pervasive, and systemic oppressive consequences for nonwhite people” (Yancy, 2004, p. 14).

The overall theme of white systems defines the educational spaces the participants found themselves in as black principals. Three sub-themes surfaced from the participant interviews that spoke to all of the questions this body of research attempted to answer.

**Practicing navigating whiteness, system strategy**

I did not receive much direct support and motivation growing up, especially within my K-12 experience. It was almost as if I was simply living ‘in’ the world, not ‘with’ the world. Even though my brown skin reminded people that I was present, the content of my character was often overlooked because of who they saw. It was a very isolating experience and negotiating this on my own caused significant challenges for me. Moving to a predominantly white community when I was young created fear within me even though my mother was white because the collective whiteness I experienced did not emulate the same love and support that I received from my mother. I learned to disassociate my mother from the whiteness I observed on a daily
basis, but did not have a conscious sense of what I was doing or why.

Quite frankly, I do not remember directly observing my mom having the privilege of being white, and as I got older I began to understand why this was. I observed a greater appreciation for our family from my dad’s side versus my mom’s; I saw my mom more as part of the black collective, surprisingly. We attended St. Alban’s Church of God In Christ and my mom was one of two white people in our church and revered by so many. Similarly, at large family gatherings on my dad’s side, she was one of two other white women and was fully embraced by my aunts, uncles, etc. At similar gatherings on my mom’s side, my dad was often isolated and I found myself staying close to his side and observably, we looked and it felt different.

Multiracial families were not that prevalent during this time. Again, miscegenation was just deemed unconstitutional in Minnesota (Loving v. Virginia, 1967), which no longer made it a crime for whites and blacks to marry one another. Hearing the stories of my dad needing to have one of his white friends pick up my mom from her neighborhood (heavily German/Polish) to bring her to his (all black community) further enforced my mindset that whites were accepted by the black community, but my dad was never afforded that same acceptance in white communities…even by members of my mom’s family.

Later in life I realized the sacrifice my mother made to marry a black man and have biracial children. The privilege she had, I believe subconsciously, was her whiteness and unless she disclosed her family composition, she could live under the supposition that she is entitled to the dominant power and privilege inherent to being white in America. Much the same for white individuals who are of the LGBTQ community. Unless otherwise disclosed, they can live a life of straight privilege similar to my mom, although not their authentic (whole) selves. My point being, the inherent power of choice is real for white individuals in America and how they
exercise this can substantiate their position, whereas, people of color, and specifically African Americans, are not afford the ability to choose when to be black or not and whether or not they have power or privilege.

The participants in my research noted similar themes while growing up and recognized how whiteness showed up in their lives. To this day, many of them still acknowledge its presence and have learned to accept it as part of their ongoing reality. Though the theme of isolation did not emerge as a stand-alone code, nearly every participant spoke to this in some fashion directly linked to their need to navigate whiteness on their own for survival. Based upon our shared lived experiences as black men and what I know of the participants outside of interviews, I felt it was important to bring the theme of isolation forward. This is where the strength of a researcher’s qualitative contextual data can permeate to deepen understanding and strengthen other elements of research themes moving forward.

Isolation was spoken to along with the need for support to successfully navigate whiteness. Donte shared his experience interviewing for a principal position in a suburban school system and being coached by a black Assistant Superintendent about how he should portray himself during the interview. Donte recalled going into a room for the interview and shocked by the lack of diversity, yet this district served a very diverse student population.

I pulled my name out of [this search] because, when I saw the interview team, I don’t think there was one black person in the room that I – oh, there was – my good friend Wilbur. He was the only person [of color] in that space. And Wilbur said, “You know, just to make you aware that I’m kind of the Jackie Robinson out here.” They hadn’t had any black administrators in [this district]. But I withdrew because, in my questions, [Wilbur] said, “You’re a finalist, but you have to tone down some of the racial comments.”
Just for the record, he was saying that, as a black man, if you want to really take the next step with this interview team, that I needed to tone down the conversations and maybe not isolate race so much and speak more in broader generalities and basically saying that I needed to tone down my black identity. It was a good conversation, and he respected what I had to say, which was that I’ve done that long enough in my life, and I can no longer do that. I have to show up as my authentic self. And I – you know, I just can’t do that. And he respected that, and I did withdraw, which was hard to do because I really respect Wilbur and I was looking forward to working with him again and things like that. But I just couldn’t – could not do that.

I think [Wilbur] used the Jackie Robinson analogy just for himself because I think he had to do that as well. As we know, Jackie Robinson had to hold his punches, so to speak, you know, both physical and verbal and really could not come back on some things. And I just – I just couldn’t do that any longer. As a black leader – as much as you can say that you identify as black, within that system – because it may be black leaders there, but it’s still a white system...you can only go so far.

Similar to a mentor of mine noting the expansion of whiteness as you accelerate in your career, Joseph experienced this in his professional advancement and linked it directly to the need for support.

And when you’re in the majority culture and you’re the ultra-minority as you move up the ladder in the world of education and business, you have less strength. Because strength lies in numbers. I still recall, we got together, and we started to meet (he was part of The Brothers Network). And then I go, what the hell are the black principals getting together
for? I still remember that. I mean, like, how do they know [we need this]? And there’s a
certain amount of strength, and there’s a certain amount of concern. I think you just have
to look at it – to answer your question specifically – situation by situation and day by day.
And I wish I would have done that – like I said earlier. But you know what’s funny,
Michael, is when I talk about strength in numbers – and this is a very incredible, you know,
reflective piece that I thought about by being gone – when I went down to [a more rural
district], I knew, in the very first month, when I called you – I said, I can’t do this. This is
crazy! I should have waited. I should have let God lead me instead of just worrying about
having the J-O-B and the money.

Ahmed also shared some of his challenges navigating structural racism perpetuated by
whiteness.

So, I approach the work from a standpoint of interest convergence because I’m operating
under the belief that there is such a thing as the permanence of racism, right? And I look at
racism as like physics – like, so what do they say…an object in motion stays in motion until
there’s a – you know, another object with it and traveling at a faster rate …yeah, that can
knock it off. I’ve not yet found that other object to knock racism off its course continually
for any extended period of time. What I’ve seen all across the state is the work you all were
doing in Minneapolis, the work that they were doing in St. Paul, what we were doing in [my
district]. You can hit [racism] and kind of shift [racism], but that junk is powerful so it gets
back on course. So, what I’m recognizing is that I’m going to meet the needs of students of
color and marginalized people while having the dominant social group believe that it’s
benefiting them as well. Which takes relationship. It takes time. It takes a school board that
actually also supports and has a level of racial consciousness.
Jacob recalls at a very early age that he would need to navigate whiteness as a strategy. “So, it’s like, going from Chicago to an all-white world of putting the inner-city kid in Mayberry, basically.” As he pursued an administrative career in education, he spoke freely about the challenge whiteness presented and how he needed to lead around and with it to be successful.

I took that opportunity and really started to see how that – when you have the multiple populations coming into a predominantly white system, white school, it’s basically traditionally middle-class white values in those school systems. So then, getting into the school system, I started to see the structure. I went into where I could really make a huge difference in being at the table where I can lead in those buildings. Where I can really look at those systems and how I can interrupt them. As you know, being in the administration, it’s not that easy, because culture and climates are set up in those schools already. It’s only a few black folks in the school, and specifically black males. We know in public education K-12 – it’s predominantly white female-driven. That’s the lay of the land. And that’s tough for folks, though. You know, I currently work in [district north of the metro], and most of the teachers are only from [the immediate area], so they only are bringing one perspective.

Lamonte also reflected on his experiences and it was evident in his tone that this was still very raw for him. He mentioned being a leader in an alternative school for a brief period of time and about his concern of being ‘typecast’ as most leaders of color usually end up in alternative or other highly diverse settings. He was visibly amped to share about his ability and need to navigate whiteness.

Oh, oh. It was my first assistant principal job. That was very interesting for a number of reasons. It was a very white space that had a lot of racial – a lot of prejudice racial things going on. And thinking back on it, I could have done some things differently. You know,
because I was more radical [then]. And I’d go into principal meetings with about four 50-
something-year-old white men [assistant principals] who probably didn't want me there
anyway. I was [also] at the ALC. So as soon as I got there, I knew I had to get out for a
number of reasons. Because being at the ALC, as a black man, I didn't want to get typecast.
You know, as being ALC or that type of principal. I knew what kind of school I wanted to
be in, but [this northern district] was a very white, white space. And through that, learning
when to not be silent, but when to – when to really push the envelope. When it might be best
to let somebody else push the envelope and not having it be myself. Because everybody will
still know where it’s coming from. But just being more politically savvy.

Marcus is probably one of the older participants in the study and it showed through his wisdom
and reflection from the time he was young, based upon what he witnessed growing up shortly after
the Jim Crow era. His articulation of navigating whiteness was more reformed versus reactionary;
it came from a deep sense of self.

I wanted to go to a historically black college because that’s what I saw, but I knew I had to
work with our people. So, in the anticipation of going into any kind of profession, I knew
white folks were going to be involved. And to better understand, and to go deeper, so that
they don’t – not only understood me, but I understood them, and this exchange that we had
made me, I believe, a much better person. And now, when I see resistance and hesitation, I
know how to address it because I’ve experienced it in conservative [names a midwestern
state and chuckles]. So, I can see it on someone’s face, and I know either what question to
ask and how to direct it. So, it’s helped me, still to this day.

Marcus also stressed the importance of transferring this skillset to his students of color during
his administrative tenure in a predominantly white system stating, “I’m going to teach you how to
navigate this teacher and navigate whiteness so that you can be successful. And you can have options. So, teaching them also how to navigate the system, how to navigate whiteness, was imperative.” Walter captured his navigation skills by incorporating lessons growing up and leveraging that learning today. “That same skill set that I struggled with growing up, being the only piece of pepper in the salt shaker, all the sudden, this is easy to me.”

All of the participants spoke to their life stories growing up navigating whiteness to survive and this ability to survive transferred into their ability to thrive as black leaders in white spaces. They all recognized educational spaces being governed by a white ideology and even heavily staffed by primarily white women. Similarly, to a black mentor of mine, several of the participants acknowledged their awareness of racial isolation the farther you advance in your career. Each willingly chose to accept being a black principal in a predominantly white school/district and spoke to their intentionality to disrupt a system that was not serving students of color well. The participants led through an equity lens that ‘happened’ to be in the role of a principal and were comfortable about doing this. Admittedly they navigated whiteness their entire lives and doing so in a professional role was no different. These men deserve to be honored for taking the position they are. They represent a body of leaders that is becoming rarer given the overt surge of white supremacy in America.

The consequences the participants face for navigating whiteness by challenging it is losing their jobs. Additionally, they weather the daily storm of their white peers questioning their work and even going so far as to undermining them. The participants refused to be silenced or boxed and when they suspected they would be, they openly spoke to it or by their actions, walked away on their own terms. They are strategic and as Lamonte stated, recognize “when it might be best to let somebody else push the envelope and not having it be myself.” Being a black leader in
predominantly white spaces is extremely challenging and it requires a savviness to navigate well and not commit cultural sacrifice.

**Racism in school and district staff and community**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) acknowledges the permanency of racism and many of the participants embraced CRT as part of their core ability to be effective. They were not naïve to the fact that by actively choosing to be in a predominantly white system, they would have to endure the inherent racism associated with dominant, white, oppressive ideology. This theme highlighted the research questions about the racialized experiences of the participants and how it shaped their leadership identity.

I started my administrative educational career in a large suburban system coordinating equity efforts for the district. Specifically, I was responsible for addressing the racial segregation in schools and working with staff and community to develop strategies to foster more integrated learning environments and to address the disparity in achievement with regard to students of color and their white peers. I was in a very conservative white system and if you were a woman or a person of color, your voice did not matter. People would often refer to the district as the ‘Old Boys Club’. This was very challenging work and I questioned why I accepted the position for my first two years. I distinctly remember someone coming by my office shortly after my one-year anniversary saying, “Congratulations on your anniversary. It’s been one year and you’re still here?” This was not a statement of gratitude, this was a direct question of my existence/value. I thought to myself, if this system can treat adult black men in this manner, what is happening to our young black males in schools?

If it were not for my supportive wife, I would have left, but she reminded me about staying true to my faith and who I was called to be and where I was called to serve. That was the
encouragement I needed to continue, which I did for twelve years. I eventually became a principal in the district and not surprisingly, was assigned to the most diverse and economically challenged school. Post Brown vs. Board, many teachers and leaders of color were stripped from their roles in education and backfilled with whites. Upon their return, many have been relegated into schools directly reflecting their ethnic background (Fairclough, 2004). I recall being told that there was great excitement for me to come because I was black and would be able to handle all of ‘those kids’. This was a school enrolling about seventy percent English Language Learners (EL’s), about ninety percent students of color and about eighty percent free and reduced lunch. The community demographic was primarily Liberian and Mexican.

I knew going in, that I was typecast from my previous role at the central office as an integration coordinator and that I needed to set the record straight, if you will. During my staff welcome week, I stood before a predominantly white female staff and stated, “Just because you’re white, doesn’t mean you’re not right. Don’t think you’re exonerated from engaging ALL students simply because I am black!” There was a noticeable shock in the room and a teacher asked, “What do you mean?” I shared the incoming narrative about me that I heard and explained how disappointing it was, which then opened the door for me to engage them in a racial equity journey for the duration of my time as their principal.

I lost fourteen staff after my first year. I took this mass departure personally. My initial thought was that I am a very ineffective leader, but upon further reflection, I found myself being guided by a negative narrative linked to my being black. It was the voice within that we all have that is essentially running a tape of our lived experiences to make meaning of present situations. When you have positive archives, the tape played to contextualize your present reality is very helpful, but when archives have been tainted, it is hard to remain positive about daily lived
experiences (Brothers, 2005; Flippen, 2008). For me, my tapes were racialized through whiteness and my lived experience as a black male was always questioned so, gauging my own self-worth was not uncommon as it pertained to racialized interactions.

Fortunately, I began to hear from staff that remained in my building, expressing gratitude for ‘cleaning house’. Through conversations with them, I learned that these were my “believers” and that it was my “fundamentalists” that left in droves. Muhammed (2009) states:

Believers are educators who believe in the core values that make up a healthy school culture. They believe that all of their students are capable of learning and that they have a direct impact on student success. They are actively engaged in a constant battle of ideas with another group, the Fundamentalists…Fundamentalists are staff members who are not only opposed to change, but organize to resist and thwart any change initiative. They can wield tremendous political power and are a major obstacle in implementing meaningful school reform. They actively work against Believers (p. 29).

Being one of very few black administrators in the district was hard. I felt like each day was a battle to engage staff and my principal colleagues in conversations about race and the disparate learning outcomes for students of color. In fact, at a principal meeting, I was impassioned about the topic of culturally responsive practices and I overheard a principal colleague say, “Here goes Michael with that black stuff again!” I was shocked, that in 2005, a blatant comment like this would be made in a professional educational setting! I did not stand alone in this kind of treatment. A few participants in my study worked in the same district at one point in their careers and through conversations with them, these types of comments did not cease.

Donte was challenged to hold his emotion regarding what he observed coming into his suburban school as the principal. Donte followed a white principal who had been there for
several years. It was clear to him, that having a black principal was not only the first for this staff, but the types of conversations he pushed were also foreign to them.

My goal was to try to get – change mindsets and really get staff to think about what biases they have with our kids. Whiteness is property…that this is our school as white teachers. The students need to adjust to us. You know, families need to adjust to us. And lots of bias, but it’s – it’s explicit, but it’s implicit because they’re not really – the actions are – [chuckles] – I want to say this. In my mind – in my observations, there’s some overt racism that happens in this building and in this district. But the racism that I see is a – again, whiteness is property. That there’s more willingness to put their hands on a student of color here than I’ve ever experienced. You know, so – but if you really, truly respect who that student is, you’re not going to do that, right? Because you’re going to treat them like – like you care for them. Like you love them. Like you – you know, they’re not somebody who you can grab by the arm and drag down the hallway.

So, I had to put that in check when I got here. Because I saw more incidents of that. And I said, that’s not okay. Now, I didn’t bring the race piece out of that. I did not. Because when I got here, many of the teachers had not gone through Beyond Diversity [national diversity seminar]. So, we did not have the common language around having these conversations. It was like crickets in one of my first staff meetings when I was bringing some of the work back and introducing the reason for an equity team and introducing kind of the urgency of now around the work. I did an article from the Gloria Ladson-Billings … So, the ‘I ain’t readin’ nuttin’ article. And I don’t know if you remember that one, but it’s a really, really powerful article. And I thought, in my assessment of the building, and talking to the previous principal, that more teachers had gone through Beyond Diversity. And it’s
crickets. And it was literally only that article. And it was just a text-based discussion on the article. It was dead silence. It’s, like, okay. So, they’ve never experienced really going and talking about race.

For example, on a micro-level of that. Last year, I had an issue with my white ESPs being worried because I was only hiring people of color – whether they were Hmong or black. I haven’t been able to add a Latino person to my staff. But have they asked the previous principal, who was a white male, why do you continue to hire white females? You know, and so they don’t see the bias even within that question. They don’t understand that that is racism, you know, that you’re perpetuating. You know, you’re questioning me as a black man in my hires, but did you ever question the previous principal in his hiring and continuing to perpetuate the staffing situation?

Joseph experienced even more blatant resistance than many other participants. He received it from staff and his direct supervisor when he was in a more rural community:

But being – actually, in Minnesota, it was much tougher than it is now being in Indiana. In Indiana, I think people are more – well, at least what I’ve experienced thus far – they’ll just come out and ask you. Whereas, in Minnesota, there’s a sense of, I want to ask, but it’s not politically correct. So, I know there’s a lot of – I call it assumptions by empirical observation. A lot of subjectivity in Minnesota. Whereas, in – where the North meets the South down in Indiana, it’s, like, hey, how do you roll, and where do you come from? And once you give the explanation, it’s just – it just gets the minutiae out of the way. And I think, in Minnesota, when I lived here – and I loved it. I think there’s just much more minutiae.
And I – the funny thing is, I know what I know. But what I didn’t – what I don’t know sometimes in a professional environment is what people are truly capable of when they get pissed off. And that is – that has been a life lesson for me that I have had to – that I’ve used now in my new opportunities to say, okay, I’ll be a lot more – you just – you just don’t know what people are capable of behind the scenes. I think the critical factors that were involved of the things that I learned – there’s a level of degrees of – I like – there’s a level of degrees of the minutiae. So, when I was at [names suburban school district], there was a lot of stuff that happened where they were more astute and knew how to play the game within the game. And there was a lot more Minnesota nice to it. So, they can make a point without making a point. They knew the game within the game.

Whereas, in [names rural district], there were this – it was just blatant. You do it this way, or it’s the highway. You couldn’t mention terms like “white privilege.” I was written up for that. They thought that was racist against white people. And I was told that anything that I showed – hell, I brought an African-American female with me down there to [names rural district]. And when she interviewed, she had her hair down, but then, when she got the job, she wore her hair in cornrows – in braids. And they said, well, when we hired you, you didn’t wear your hair like that. And my ex-superintendent would say things like, you’re a good guy. We know you’re a – you know, you’re not just a good black guy. You’re a good guy. And I had to go through all that. But that stuff doesn’t work down here. All that Malcolm X, Martin Luther King bullshit does not work down here. That’s a direct quote from my superintendent. And you know that he was just ignorant, but he – you know, but at the same time, he had pressures to be, and no one wanted – I was told that – when I was
hired in [names rural district], that, from day one, their goal was to get me fired because they didn’t want a nigger principal. That’s how deep it was.

Now, can I substantiate those claims? I can with – after my first month down there, there was an eight-page – literally an eight-page list of complaints after 30 days of what I was doing and what I wasn’t doing. But when you know that you have to change mindsets at a professional level, and you call people out, everyone was resistant to the fact that they were in denial. It can’t be me. I’ve been working – I mean, I’ve got black friends. But then, when it got out – it got out, I lost friendships. [Names long time white colleague] stopped calling me. He goes, “Well, I can’t be your friend because, you know, what are you doing?” And I’m, like, what do you mean? It hurt. You know? That doesn’t – that doesn’t actually help my, you know, cause, you know? So, you know, hell, you know. It’s way different. It is. And even my wife has stated, you know, baby, I know the truth. And I’ve even had – a crazy example. I even had – you know, all this crazy stuff that happened, I even had the individual that all these accusations were made [by] actually called my wife and said, you know, I did this, this, and this. I tried to do this, this, and this. And you need to know your husband was true to you and your family. Blah, blah, blah. No one knows about that conversation except for you now, and the family.

Lamont was a principal in a neighboring rural district where Joseph was and recounted very similar treatment even with a superintendent of color leading the system:

Long story short, [names Superintendent] – black man – who had his own things going on down in [names rural district], but I had the school itself, the data, everything in the school was moving. Everything was good. But I had a major, major target on my back. And part of it was – and I think, looking at – even in different places – I don't know if I invited the
target, but they want black men – they want black men to act a certain way and be a certain way. [Lamont had a long pause rubbing his face]. Assimilate to what’s going on. Just being happy that you have a job. But not – just being happy. Speak when spoken to, or when they want to hear my opinion, or a black man’s opinion, they give it to you.

But it was so, so many things in my career – or I’ll just stick to [my former school] – that were going on for black and brown kids that were just completely unfair. And if we’re talking about the black experience, what I do know is I was removed out of that position by a Latino superintendent who identifies as white who’s still there. HR director, who has since moved to a different district, the HR director moved me out and put a white male friend of hers in my position. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out what happened there. You know, so school’s doing well. I’m not conforming. I’m not close to conforming. I’m probably – at one point, I felt like I was getting picked on. I was probably more hard-headed than I needed to be because I knew they was messing with me.

So, then they moved me out, and they put in a white man who was fired as a district-level person – [from a different district]. Put him in my position and hired, like, three deans that was white to replace me. They … [laughs]. You can't make it up. I mean, I think anybody in the building knows what I believe in. But even – I got those pictures up there, but when I first got to [names rural district], and I still got it at home, a big Malcolm X, ‘By Any Means Necessary’ poster. And I remember my boss at the time [a white woman], came in and said, do you think you should take it down? Because there was staff complaining about it. And I’m, like, no, I’m not taking it down. Why would I take it down? There has to be – most of the time, black folks and white folks with a equity lens are brought in to work with
a – to help, not just with that group but because there's a need, or a perceived need to help out with a certain demographic. And if that demographic doesn't exist, they can hire a white leader to do the job. They wouldn't need us. I don't agree with that notion, but that's what’s out there.

Tyreese’s experience growing up anchored his perceptions that carried forward as a black principal in a suburban school system. He grew up in a very impoverished community with significant drug and gang issues. It was a predominantly black community, but he notes that his school experience was primarily led by whites who never displayed an ethic of care or urgency to interrupt the challenging experiences many of the students brought into the school:

And then, certainly in our schools – the neighborhood schools – we were a predominantly African-American neighborhood going to schools where we had predominantly white teachers. And those teachers weren’t seeing anything out of the ordinary in terms of – out their windows, they were seeing gang members and drugs and violence. And so, they were kind of facilitating and just kind of keeping us in a holding pattern before we were going to actually go out those same doors and join those same activities. I think that’s what many of them felt.

When Tyreese accepted a principalship, he noted the issues of racism he observed and experienced by school/district staff:

I knew there were going to be some biases [staff] held coming in the door as well. But, again, the vast majority of them, the staff of color were in the assistant roles, so – and many of them were coincidentally people who lived in the neighborhood or came in from the inner city. So, it was a – it was a – it was a interesting dynamic that took place between, not only the staff and students, but also staff and other staff members as well, which caused a lot of conflict
with them as well. And I had to kind of intervene, which became very, very difficult. Because often times, when you see educators demeaning those teaching assistants, who just happened to be the same racial identity [as me]. So, I think there were, you know, messages that were being sent that – sometimes that I was not suspending kids because they were African-American and – you know, which was absolutely ridiculous. That was – that happened to be a group that was the highest in terms of our suspension rates, with them – the same thing had it been white females. But there was always this assumption that, whenever you were doing something, because you were a person of color, even though the data showed that the – that the decision was being driven by the data, people would try to always link it to a race component, unfortunately.

Yeah. Primarily white staff. Yeah. Who were resisters and who wanted to keep the status quo going. I think it – I think it was similar to many of the challenges many leaders and many women face in those buildings. Because there’s always an element to question whether you were actually worthy of the position. So, you have to come in and kind of really showcase that you are able and willing to be confident enough to show the – you know, you were deserving of the position. So, I think that’s a challenge that many people of color meet in the – in the role.

Walter’s experience growing up was much like Tyreese’s stating, “You know, you’d be the only kid in a class – forget a honors course. But you were the only one – and you had teachers tell you that you don’t deserve to be here. And, you know – yeah. In 9th and 10th grade, yeah.” Once he became a principal, the same childhood narrative was observed in a professional setting:

So now you’re that first black administrator. So, within the district, the district was fine. Of course, you’re going to have, you know, a couple – you know, they wanted the other assistant
principal or they’re set in their ways. Every community has that. But now you go to be at the principal meeting with [names four prominent suburban districts]. You’re walking in with superintendent-type folks. And who’s this little – who’s the darkie? Okay. I mean, there’s – you know – the vibe is there. But not as – they were sophisticated about it. When I was in [names very large suburban district], okay, and dealing with [names two suburban districts] and that kind of stuff, they were just straight “Yee-ha” about it. You know – you know, it felt like I was dealing with the ‘Clampetts’ and … And that was – like I was in the South. Here, it was more, you’re in a different state. People have money. They’re looking at you saying, “Okay. Let’s see what you got.”

The participants all faced racialized micro/macroaggressions and essentially were numb to this reality due to experiencing this their entire lives. They did not dismiss the reality, though. They all spoke to the challenges they faced by being outspoken about the racism they experienced and observed in their schools. There was such a strong pull for their staff to uphold status quo, but the participants were insistent to continually call out hegemonic practices.

Considering the themes that emerged, this one by far elicited the most emotion from the participants. It was obvious to me and I could empathize that the psychological and physical challenge of leading through racism takes a toll. Several participants pushed through tears speaking to this theme as well as managed their anger by taking long pauses, just to finish a sentence about confronting racism with their staff, some of which was directed directly toward students. Similar to the students Dr. Yancy (2018) spoke of at PWIs (Predominantly White Institutions), the participants in this research may not have been called a nigger to their faces [as black principals in white schools], such white spaces position them as inconsequential, deny their Blackness through superficial
concerns for ‘diversity,’ and take their complaints as instances of individual problems adjusting to new spaces...Black people and people of color undergo forms of deep stress within those white spaces. I bear witness to Black pain and suffering because the deniers are out there. For we are told that what we know in our very bodies to be true isn’t credible, which is a different kind of violence, the epistemic kind (p. 47).

Because racism is endemic to our society, it is questionable how many African Americans persist in the face of being reminded daily that our blackness is not valued. Admittedly, there are many days where I feel it would be much easier to not die on hills for my blackness, but then when I return home each night and stare into the eyes of my daughters, I am reminded why I continue to fight and that every instance is a worthy instance worth dying for. I have an obligation to model for my daughters what it means to engage in daily battle against racism and help them learn strategies to win. I can also share the truth in the pain it causes and the strength that it takes to endure as young black women. In the end, this is what keeps me motivated...to know that my actions will help make their journey a little easier than mine. Further discussion about this theme can be found in chapter five.

**Strategically navigate self and blackness**

This theme is one that directly speaks to the fine line of participants’ ability to successfully navigate their roles as black principals in predominantly white schools/districts, but not at the expense of losing themselves, or as I termed, committing cultural sacrifice. Strategically navigating self and blackness addresses the research question of participants’ self-perception and how they make meaning of the intersection of race and their leadership roles.

Life for me growing up was a bit of dramaturgy and seeing the world as my stage allowed for great opportunities to audition for many different roles. Early in my life, I learned that my being
biracial had its advantages; I would try to read context to see who and how I brought myself forward. History told me that I risked too much exposure if I did not think about the construction of my identity and how this would be viewed by others. Many young black men go through similar experiences as they develop their identity. Majors & Billson (1993) found that young black males would adopt a ‘cool pose’ that proclaimed their identity to the outer world and served as a visual counter-narrative to the white gaze that would often suggest a lesser-than status in America (Yancy, 2008). Visibly, this would be one’s walk, rhythmic mode of speaking, handshakes, head nods, etc. Striking a cool pose would yield a “competence, high self-esteem, control and inner strength that helps them to hide self-doubt, insecurity and inner turmoil” (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 5).

I remember watching my dad when I was younger and his patterned greeting with many black men, or walking down the street I noticed him nod at many black men. I asked him, “Do you know all of these guys?” He would say something to the effect, “No, that’s just what black men do. There’s not a lot of us here, so when you see another black man, it shows respect and acknowledgement…it’s kind of our code.” My dad was modeling a “sense of control, symmetry, correct presentation of self, and sophistication” (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 57). This brought me back to my grandfather’s teachings as well and soon realized that by adhering to the unspoken cultural code of black men, there was comradery being established and that notion of being part of a collective. Even if I saw a complete stranger, our mutual pose would signal that we are here, at this moment of time, together. The feelings of comfort and reciprocal acceptance I received helped solidify my public identity as a black man.

The participants shared multiple perspectives of their identity as black men and how this was brought forth in public spaces. They all had similar roles as black male principals, but based
upon their upbringing and their own racial identity formation process, each varied in response to negotiating their blackness. Nevertheless, all of them understood the power of pose and the unspoken code; it was at the basis of the Brothers Network, of which all participated at some point. I characterize Ahmed as the most intellectual of the participants. He would often pause before sharing his responses and I sensed he processed as he spoke. When asked about his identity as a black man he shared:

So, what I do as a – as a leader is that – and not that – and I don’t want to pretend like I’m – I can outwit racism, because you can’t. But what I’m always doing is looking at every single move, every single thing that comes out of my mouth, through an interest-convergence-type of lens or mindset.

Ahmed went on to share recent graduation data from his district and how his role as a black male has a direct impact:

We got the graduation data back. We had black students last year graduate at a higher rate than white kids in [our district]. Now, here I am, black male superintendent. I’m not – I’m not putting that out there, right? Because what happens then is, a unconscious perception will be, well, hold on a second. What do you mean? Right? That’s not supposed to happen. So, what are they doing? What is this racial equity coach and stuff happening here? And then it gets to this, oh, wait. They’ve lowered their expectations. I haven’t found interest convergence in what that is [higher black graduation rates], what I’m doing with that is I’m just holding onto that right now. Right? I’m holding on to that, and I’m going to figure out how to leverage that at some point. But it’s not going to be something I’m going to throw out in the public because I don’t believe – you know, you heard me say it before that, yeah, this is a relatively liberal community until it impacts their child. They don’t understand
what we have to give of ourselves to negotiate whiteness. Because, at the end of the day, we’re going to lose out. Racism will beat you either way. So, you can – you can, you know, stand and square it face up and try to go on. And I’ve seen how racism just continues to topple. So, for me, it’s – I’m out to try to sustain this – sustain what we have here for as long as we can. And I wasn’t in the job more than three weeks, where people are already talking about, we’re spending a lot of money on racial equity coaches. And we’re cutting this and cutting that, right? So, there’s a constant attack on the systems that we’ve developed to interrupt the racism, right? So, then what I do is, I start pushing the conversation about race, right? So, I don’t – I don’t try to shy away from it. But I try to show how it’s showing up in this larger context. Because sure we spend a lot of money on racial equity coaches. But we also spend a lot of money on IB. And why aren’t we talking about IB, right? So, let’s have a conversation about all of it, but more importantly, why is it that the racial equity coaches were the pieces that – that piece that you brought to me as the concern? You see what I’m saying? So, it’s – and that – and that – as a black male, that makes me feel like I’m having to defend my humanity, right? I’m having to defend my value and the fact that I matter and the kids that look like me in this school matter. Because I’m constantly having to negotiate their access. You know?

Donte recounted his first interaction as a black principal in a suburban school system, having spent most of his career in a highly diverse urban school system:

Standing up in front of my staff for the first time, I never felt more exposed as a black man standing in front of this white group of teachers. I have never, never, in my career, even at – even at [names a school in his former district], which had a fairly white staff, I had not – you know, I still had some sprinklings of black folks over there. Or, you know, East African
black folks. But here, when I first got there, I think we had a Hmong teacher that had just been hired that summer that I came, and then we had a couple of black [paraprofessionals]. And that was about it. And they weren’t even at that meeting except for the Hmong teacher.

So, I’m standing here. I’m thinking, well, what the hell did I get myself into? Because I knew the school – you know, okay, all right, you know that this is [names suburban school district]. So, they’ve never experienced really going and talking about race. Talking about black kids. And then, the black man bringing this to them. So then, what has been the narrative, literally probably since that meeting, that we’re only talking about race because we have a black principal. I’d say, for the folks coming up, don’t be fooled. Do not be fooled that having a degree, a master’s degree, a doctorate, you know, your administrative license – don’t be fooled. The struggle is still there. And you need to have eyes wide open with that struggle. And know that racism, implicit bias is – I would say even overt racism is alive and well.

Joseph emphasized the tension negotiating his blackness and at times even reflected where he could have done something different. He mentioned several other black principals he knew and acknowledged what they experienced and how it was parallel to his journey:

You know, I try and take myself out of it and look at others. And I’m thinking of – I’m thinking of a [names another black principal in suburban district]. I won’t mention his last name. I’m thinking of even a [names another black principal in suburban district] and what he had to go through to get where he has to be. And then I think of myself and what I went through. And I think the difference is, is that the more vocal you are – which I am very vocal, very strong, very passionate – the more vocal you are, the more risk you put yourself
in being attacked, lied on, people make assumptions of what you did and what you really
didn’t do.

Interviewer: Because you’re black?

Hell, yeah. Hell, yeah. Because it’s – because if you are perceived as – if you are perceived
as – if you’re passive and a person of color, you have – you are – if you’re passive and a
person of color, you are okay. But if you’re – if you’re – if you exude internal strength for
what you believe, and that goes against the power structure – the infrastructure of the status
quo, you put yourself at risk. So, if you call it out, and they don’t want you to call it out,
even though they know it exists, it’s about fixing the problem their way versus a different
way. And change is – change is hard. And so, when you’re truly a change agent, there’s a
lot of – there’s a lot of friction and politics that go behind that.

And then you experience firsthand, the higher you go up the ladder, the more – the more
your own folk expect of you. And then, if you let them down, you’re a sellout. And then,
if you try to step up and do what’s right for kids, then the power base of the infrastructure
says, you need to tone that down. And depending on proximity of where it’s allowed or not
allowed, you – it’s either overt or more hidden within the minutiae. It’s debilitating. It’s
really – it’s debilitating. It feels like – it feels like you’re on a slave ship, and you have
shackles. And even though you can’t visually see them, you know you’re in an environment
that – you know they’re on you. And, you know, the master has the key. And you know
that you have to do things in a way – you kind of – you want him to unshackle you.

Lamont has a very boastful demeanor and speaks with high emotion. During this portion of
our conversation regarding his blackness, he was noticeably quieter, and realized in his closing
comments, that as a black man, as a black leader in his system, he was almost in exile with no one to trust:

At the school, I had a young black female principal who was trying to navigate and figure out her space too. So that was a weird dynamic. You know, a young black principal, all white 50-something-year-old white men [assistant principals], and then you had me. And the AP who I was replacing was still there in my looking over my shoulder. So, you know, it was interesting. You know, I wasn't – it was things going on that clearly – and I think they still go on today – that clearly weren't okay for black and brown students. And I think I'm politically savvy now, but [then] I would scream loud and would turn people off.

And it wasn't a real positive experience for me at [names suburban school]. You know, you got to be true to yourself. You got to know – I feel like I have a good equity lens about what’s – you know, about leadership and about school leadership. And not compromising that. Being proud of being a equity leader. And wearing it, but maybe not wearing it – I’m wearing it, but it’s not as loud as maybe it once was. You know, and she wasn't saying I should. But it was just a conversation as my boss. Like, you know, maybe you should take it down. And just being outright about what we’re doing for black kids or – you know, it’s kind of hard to put in words for me. But knowing when to speak and when not to speak. Knowing how to have somebody else maybe help you carry the work and not it being you – me, 100 percent. But as far as assimilating and selling out, that’s – I don't know. It’s just not in my DNA. I can't do it. I can't do it. And if anybody asked me to do it, it’d be time to move on. Because I just – I can't do that.

I probed deeper and asked if there was a distinction between his experience as a black principal with that of his white colleagues need to negotiate their identity as white leaders:
No. That’s who they are. They don't have to assimilate to something that’s already theirs. The world is theirs. Leadership is theirs. Especially white men. White women might be a little bit different. But you don't have to assimilate to what’s yours already [laughs]. I’m real guarded. I’m extremely guarded. Even in principal meetings, different spaces. You know, I’ll joke and, you know, and say hello to people. Or, I might – maybe say something in a silly and a loud – you know, just – you know, to keep things light. But as far as really getting to know somebody or getting to know – have other leaders get to know me, there’s very few people in the district that I talk to on a personal level or associate with beyond work.

The ability to negotiate blackness is stressful because you are always wondering how much of myself do I have to give away just to be recognized, yet at the same time remain true to who you are. It poses a racial dialectic that white people never have to experience. Being white and in white spaces is synonymous with being at home, while the participants in this study express feeling like an uninvited visitor in someone else’s home. This theme elicited the most anger by the participants. They were often visually upset and even expressed their frustration trying to address interview questions that were aligned to this theme.

I believe Donte’s comments about being black and delivering messages about racial equity captures the collective sentiment of all of the participants when he said, “Do not be fooled that having a degree, a master’s degree, a doctorate, you know, your administrative license – don’t be fooled. The struggle is still there. And you need to have eyes wide open with that struggle. And know that racism, implicit bias is – I would say even overt racism is alive and well.” Dr. Yancy (2018) extends this sentiment by saying
We must not forget the ways in which Black bodies are considered in our contemporary moment to be ‘surplus’ bodies, ‘disposable’ bodies, ‘nigger’ bodies….White America, as a whole, has never been hospitable toward Black people, but hostile to our very being. Being Black in white America has always raised the question of the validity and legibility of our existence (p. 8-9).

I was intentional choosing the name of this study, playing off the classic Sidney Poitier movie, Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner? In the movie, Poitier’s character, John Prentice, is an African American physician engaged to a white woman who comes from a liberal wealthy family. The story centers on her bringing John home to meet her parents and the racial tension caused by his being black. John essentially has to prove himself worthy to be accepted by her family, all the while the family’s black maid watches in disgust. I believe this body of research depicts the interactions of this movie and I can empathize with the lived experiences of being a black male negotiating my ‘blackness’ before whiteness declares I am too black and am no longer welcomed in its presence.

I will never forget the late Dr. Kramer, who was my first advisor when I started my doctoral studies. I submitted a paper for his course and upon return, the grade was much lower than I anticipated. When I inquired about it, he essentially said that he believed I wrote the paper for what he wanted to read, not from who he heard speak up in class. Dr. Kramer said that if I simply wrote like I talked, my writing would be much more powerful.

I recognize that I negotiated my blackness throughout the process of writing this dissertation. The continuous check against my authenticity juxtaposed to the perceived interests of white academia was a struggle for me. I found myself perseverating over vernacular that naturally flowed to the keys on my laptop, but then as I reviewed my writing, I cannot negate the fact of
my wondering about how my writing may be perceived, which resulted in stressful revisions of my written vernacular to conform my literary style into more proper prose…and why, one could ask? Should I have upheld a level of authentic vernacular throughout or would the primarily white institution frown upon this and force me to start over? The negotiation of blackness is exhausting.

The participants are clearly mindful of their blackness in this context and acknowledge the struggle to justify their value in a system that historically dismisses them and the very students that look like them. There is also the underlying fear of being perceived by the black community as that ‘uppity nigga’ that white America so eloquently upholds as the prototype of ‘good black people’. The participants speak to the challenge of reconciling this dichotomy and finding comfort erring on being true to self and to black students in spite of losing capital within a white system.
Chapter 5: Discussion, summary, implication for practice, conclusion

This qualitative body of research explored the lived reality of black male principals in predominantly white school systems in an effort to better understand the challenges inherent to being black in racially isolated school environments, specifically remaining culturally authentic and not sacrificing self. Further, it analyzed the cultural negotiation skillsets exhibited by participants to maintain their professional roles as principals in predominantly white schools and what factors attributed to their resiliency. Previous chapters provided an introduction and rationale for research regarding the cultural negotiation of black male identity in predominantly white systems. A review of relevant literature provided a rich context framing this body of research (i.e., racial identity formation, critical race theory, Afrocentricity, etc.) that helped identify specific areas of focus and general approach to answering research questions.

A scholarly professional narrative provided an auto-ethnography of the researcher’s life experiences and his role as a black principal in a predominantly white school system. Through a phenomenological lens, eight in-depth interviews were conducted to better understand research participants’ experiences as black men and as black male principals in predominantly white school systems in an effort to address four research questions. Through a manual open-coding process, along with the support of NVivo qualitative data analysis software, three dominant themes emerged and five subthemes emerged that were shared in the findings chapter. This chapter provides a summary of the themes that emerged, answers the four research questions and provides insights/recommendations for additional research and implications for practice.
Summary of themes

Personal history and identity

Even though all participants identified as black men, it was clear that each participant had a unique personal narrative that distinguished their lived experiences from others, including my own. Participants were influenced by their family of origin with regard to racial identity and were enculturated by family values and core beliefs about their roles as black men in this world. They all shared explicit messages given to them that was to equip them for the type of treatment they may receive from others in the world, specifically by white people. Family messaging was not disparaging of white people; rather, noting the power and privilege they receive at the expense of black people being denied the same; these were clear messages about the notion of ‘whiteness’ and their unearned privilege. The common family message to each participant was essentially to be aware of this reality and each received the encouragement and support from their families to survive in a world that was not designed with their best interests in mind.

Conversations about race happened early for the participants, but notably, participants whose formative years were in the south (e.g., Georgia, Arkansas, etc.) spoke more specifically about direct experiences and understanding of life in a post-civil rights era. These participants observed Ku Klux Klan members in their communities and other Jim Crow treatments of black people being denied the very inalienable rights noted for all in the U.S. Constitution. Participants who grew up in the Midwest, even if their families migrated from the south, had a general theoretical understanding of post-civil rights, but never directly experienced the overt negative treatment of black people; they spoke to more covert racism and practices. It is important to note, though, that their family members would bring more overt conversations to them to help deepen their
understanding of what it meant to be black in America. None of the participants identified their privilege of being male. They exclusively looked through a lens of being black and the awareness of any such privilege was not evident in any of the participant interviews.

All of the participants grew up in very diverse communities and noted how their lives as black men was something they thought about every day, both consciously and subconsciously. They identified strength in their respective communities and viewed them as a source of validation. Even the participants who were bi-racial or had white blood in their extended families spoke about their blackness, not their bi-racial identity. Three of the participants married white women and have bi-racial children, but spoke of their children as being black. This illustrates that even with a biological composition of white lineage, the social construct of race defines them as black and all participants acknowledged this and found comfort in identifying as black.

The participants noted that the same messages they received growing up were also being shared with their own children, further sharing that nothing has really changed for black people in this world and they all expressed a desire for their children to be prepared for the type of treatment they will receive simply because they are black and help them to recognize the same unearned privilege that white people have that existed for them growing up as young black men.

**Reflections on own leadership and/or advice**

Each participant spoke about strong encouragement from their families to achieve at high levels and it started at a very young age, not unlike many parents who want their children to do better than they may have. The difference expressed to them, though, was rooted in the fact that as black people, they would have to work twice as hard to get the same outcomes as white people; the family messages were to empower them and to strengthen them for a journey that was inevitable, which was to overcome racial and cultural barriers that would not only remind
them of their place in this world, but would put limits on their accomplishments. This served as a springboard for the participants to embrace the inner drive to succeed and propelled them on a lifelong journey to pay homage to family, but to also demystify the narrative of successful black men in this country.

Every participant spoke about significant challenges in their K-12 educational careers and the overt racism they had to endure in predominantly white learning spaces. Whether it was finding and making friends, the types of academic pathways offered to them or simply not seeing themselves as part of America’s intellectual story, they all were challenged at some level to embrace their authentic selves and relied heavily upon the family messages they received not to negotiate too far and sacrifice their black identity. All of the participants were successful to go to college, they all have at least a Master’s degree and two of them have attained Doctorate degrees. All of the participants were or still are principals in schools, while two have continued their roles as a superintendent and a motivational leadership speaker. They all worked in multiple district settings, including predominantly white school systems. For the sake of this research study, white school systems are those that enroll under fifty percent students of color and/or are in schools within a district that enroll less than 50 percent students of color. Typically, these will be first-ring suburban districts or rural/out-of-metropolitan school systems.

As the participants reflected on their roles as leaders, all of them referenced a significant person in their life that signified to them, what leadership looks like, which was empowering to them to do the same in their careers. Again, all of the participants received a principal license that prepared them to be school leaders and this is where they commonly shared experiences, but they also spoke heavily about how their identity as black men characterized their leadership. They shared how their perception was first as black person and then as a leader, but often,
Participants shared that this exemplified the unearned privilege they learned about growing up and how they, as black men, would have to work twice as hard simply for the same recognition as their white counterparts. None of the participants were ever discouraged by this reality. In fact, all spoke about how this served to fuel their desire to compete and breakthrough the stereotypical barriers of being both black and in a leadership position.

Lastly, they were intentional about carrying a message of racial equity forward in their roles as leaders. They all noted the importance of doing so to overcome the narrative they battled to being a black leader in predominantly white school systems. Their collective message stressed the importance of diverse perspectives being included in how students were supported, especially given the research that America’s classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse and the need for culturally responsive practices often times comes from staff and leaders of color, so to ignore them is essentially ignoring the very students by which many are called to serve.

**Support and motivation**

The participants in the study spoke about the significant support they each received from their respective families of origin. Often times, this support was essential for them to survive in a country that was built *by* people that looked like them, but *for* people that did not look like them. As shared earlier, much of the same support that the participants received, they are now offering their own children and extended that support to a broader context. Each spoke about their significant spheres of being surrounded by other black males via racial affinity groups, such as the Brothers Network. They stressed the importance to be in spaces where they are not feeling judged or devalued by their blackness, but instead being empowered and assured of who they are
as black men. The importance of this is to be able to have strength to presenting your wholeness and not to sacrifice the totality of who you are and what you have to offer. The participants want to be recognized as being black and are proud to be black. They say being colorblind is unrealistic and in fact another form of oppressive tolerance. The richness of diversity that exists in this world is what can strengthen individuals and should be recognized and valued.

**Student centered**

The theme of being student centered emerged from the conversations about support and motivation. The participants noted that the lived experiences of students, specifically black students, is what often keeps them going as leaders within white systems. The research shows that public education still primarily employs white women as the prototype of classroom educators, yet the students of color will soon comprise a majority of enrollment in our classrooms across the country. The fundamental notion that the common school movement in this country was designed to stratify people into essentially two different tracks (e.g., the scholarly educated and the skilled laborer) is alive and well, according to the participants in the study, and their focus to ensure that students of color are recognized as being scholars is very important to them. Over fifty years passed regarding *Brown versus Board of Education* and the participants remorsefully reflected upon the fact that very little has changed since they were in school. Even with more representation of diverse staff and leadership, the overall experience of whiteness still exists in 2018 for many students in schools.

**Navigating white systems**

All of the participants acknowledge the notion of whiteness and offered a distinction about being white compared to whiteness, whereby being white is associated with the phenotypic
composition of who you are, similarly to saying that I am black, based upon the melanin content in my skin. Whiteness is a dominant, oppressive ideology or framework aligned to Eurocentric values by which anyone can subscribe, including people of color. The participants spoke about recognizing whiteness at an early age through family support and messaging. As stated earlier, this was in preparation to survive in a world that was not going to validate them as black men. Essentially, every system in which the participants interacted required them to navigate effectively to be successful. Often times, this navigation skill was done subconsciously, because the notion of always being black was front of mind. With this being a primary filter, the participants felt the need to question every interaction juxtaposed to being black. Often, subconscious questions stemmed from micro aggressive acts, forcing them to wonder if what occurred in their lives was natural or simply because of who they are as black men.

This repeated subconscious questioning can also serve as a delimiter, because the participants felt it caused significant stress to be in a perpetual state of wonder about self-worth versus immediate validation in life. This body of research did not explore the psychological/somatic consequences of constant racial navigation, but there is a clear impact displayed by the participants in doing so. It is this stress that often makes people of color sacrifice themselves not so much to be accepted, but simply…sick and tired of being tired.

**Practicing navigating whiteness, system strategy**

The notion of navigating whiteness at a systems level derived from the participant’s role as lead principals in predominantly white schools/districts. They primarily spoke of whiteness governing the district and the schools. One participant even acknowledged the significant level of diverse leadership within a specific district where he worked at one time, yet, the notion of whiteness still prevented the intentionality of racial equity demanding a shift in practice.
Essentially, as he pointed out, people of color that were in high level positions within the district, still had to answer to a governing board and community that was predominantly white and subscribe to the ideology of whiteness. Professionally, the participants identify that navigating at a systems level was most consequential for them because it forced them to not only negotiate a system, but how they were viewed by the system. In an effort to maintain employment, there was a need to assess how much of themselves they could bring forward as it pertained to racial equity before they would push too hard and possibly lose their job. In fact, all of the participants identified the common fear of maintaining employment to support their families. Heifetz (2003) speaks to the notion of leadership being on a razor’s edge where one must temper the notion of change and have credibility leading and doing simultaneously and often the participants spoke to this reality, but also with the added layer of their racial identity on the razor and death by a thousand cuts. The participants struggled with the fact that ‘holding back’ who they truly were to maintain employment was a far greater cost than not having a job. Unfortunately, many of the participants had this breakthrough far too late in their careers and admit to having lost some of who they were never to be regained as they move forward.

**Racism in school and district staff and community**

Research by Spring (2001) and Takaki (1993) was explored in the literature review of the research essentially noting the significance and permanence of racism in schools and school districts. All of the participants recognized that even with their roles of authority, they were treated differently as black leaders compared to their white professional peers. They further observed that many students who looked like them (focusing on black youth) were experiencing some of the same direct racism that they experienced growing up and even though many mentioned how this fueled their passion to be strong racial equity leaders, they were essentially
fighting a losing battle because in 2018, they recognized that nothing has really changed. One participant pushed by saying that it is not just about the battle, but looking at the entire war. The participants understand and can accept that racism will not end in their lifetime or even their children’s lifetime, but their role in the battle is essentially to winning the war.

**Strategically navigate self and blackness**

How much each participant embraced their blackness to navigate themselves within predominantly white systems varied greatly. In general, all of the participants were willing to put their lives on the line, if you will, for the greater cause of eradicating the structural racism that governs public education; however, each participant leverage their unique experience to find spaces where they would be able to sustain success for themselves and for the students about whom they cared deeply.

Through learning from the interviews, some participants had families that were intentional about breaking them free of being tethered to a singular lens of development within a primarily impoverished African American community with the message focusing on integrating their learning so that they developed the proper skillset to navigate life successfully; life in the case for most participants consisted of living and leading among whiteness. The more focused intention early in life that each participant expressed, the more successful they felt in their role as a principal in a predominantly white school system. Additionally, each participant spoke about a line that couldn’t be crossed and recognized what I termed as ‘cultural suicide’, which equated to the participants calling in ‘selling out’. None of them, by their narrative, have sold out. In fact, several participants recognized that their districts were asking them to essentially sell out to maintain their positions or advance in the district and those participants chose to leave before
losing themselves in the process. The ability to uphold strong personal and moral values about one’s blackness was a strong perspective held by each participant.

**Response to research questions**

**Research question 1:** How do participants perceive themselves as leaders in predominantly white school systems?

The research shows that participants in the study positively viewed themselves as leaders. All of them have gone through rigorous state licensure programs to receive a principal license and have defended competency-based portfolios outlining their readiness to becoming a principal. All of the principals have at least a Master’s degree and two of them have Doctorates. Their self-perception is very positive and all spoke to high levels of confidence for who they are as building principals who happen to be black. Even though each had very unique experiences within their respective district, they all spoke to the notion of what it felt like to be in a predominantly white school system. They spoke to resistance to who they were as black men (and their associated beliefs/values) more than they spoke to resistance to their professional roles as principals. They do see themselves as part of a larger collective, specifically representing black leadership.

**Research question 2:** How do participants make sense of their race in relation to their experiences as leaders at predominantly white school systems?

The participants see themselves as highly effective leaders of color that can not only model the necessary support for students of color, but also stressed the importance of white students, staff and communities to see what healthy models of black leadership are in an effort to breakdown racial stereotypes that still exist about who black men are or can be. The belief that
race is real, even though a social construct, dominates the narratives of the participants. Being in predominantly white school systems isolates this variable often times in negative ways and creates a reality by which the participants in this study needed to negotiate to find success in their roles as principals.

**Research question 3:** How have racialized experiences shaped participant’s leadership identity?

The reality and permanency of race heavily influences the professional leadership identity of the participants in this study. This is evident by their narratives noting the importance of being viewed as a racial equity leader. They all spoke to their strong desire to ensure students of color are supported and to do this, will require more culturally responsive practices from staff in their respective schools. The participants identified the structural racism that exists in public schools and their desire, based upon their personal experiences, to help eradicate the systems that maintain levels of isolated power and unearned privilege based upon one’s social construct of simply being white. Every participant noted their desire to push against the racial inequities they experience and observe; they are uniquely positioned to use what has been racially negative in their lives to strengthen and inspire them to becoming their best and to model to the world, the greatness they possess.

**Research question 4:** What factors do the participants believe have contributed to their successful or unsuccessful personal, professional integration into predominantly white school systems and not sacrifice their authentic selves?

The participants noted a variety of themes that they felt helped them be successful as principals in predominantly white school systems. The research expounded upon the dominant themes that surfaced, but other success factors were identified by the participants such as: one’s
faith. The notion of believing that there is great purpose for being called to such a role as a principal provided inner strength to the participants to persevere through very challenging situations; being exposed to or partnering with another adult black male that successfully navigated similar systems was mentioned by the participants. They also felt that this helped prepare them to also be that model of success for younger black students who would ultimately be purposed in roles of leadership in their lives; and lastly was the need for comradery in safe places whereby the participants could let their guard down and be ‘fully black’. This was not necessarily directly spoken by all participants, but in some fashion, all participants expressed having an outlet that allow for such an opportunity to occur either directly or indirectly. I also believe the pressure placed upon them from the black community to be a leader for the greater collective also saved them from sacrificing who they are as black men. The price to pay for ‘selling out’ is far greater than the turmoil of negotiating the range of who they are as black male principals.

**Implication for practice**

This body of research is not conclusive of the experience for all black male principals in predominantly white school systems, but certainly it opens the conversation about the intersection of race and leadership and the impacts that stem from such intersections. This research points to the importance to diversify all staff levels within Pk-12 education to mirror the types of racial changes occurring in America’s classrooms. This is not to say that white people cannot meet the needs students of color have, but intentionally seeking diverse perspectives adds a richness and authenticity to the experiences of students who are also able to see visual representation of role models that look like them and are likely to share common histories and
experiences. For the staff recruited, they will also be coming into school systems where they will not be racially isolated and increase the likelihood of them staying.

In an effort to do so, it is important for public education leadership (i.e., legislators, higher education, local school boards, superintendents, etc.) to develop comprehensive staffing pipelines that will increase the numbers of educators of color. I personally experienced being at many educator recruitment fairs and over the course of a day, I may be lucky to see upwards of five to seven candidates of color in a convention center full of white candidates. This illustrates that even if a district positively intends to recruit educators of color, the pool is very limited. Partnerships with local philanthropy to fund ‘grow your own’ initiatives are proven to be very successful.

In a large urban district, I worked closely with our Human Resources department to create alternative licensure programs in partnership with higher education and several local foundations to increase our leaders of color as well as our teacher ranks. I also managed a Federal Turnaround School Leadership grant in partnership with the Federal Department of Education to attract candidates of color to receive their principal licensure with specific training on turning around our lowest performing schools. Through partnerships such as these, we were able to get upwards of fifteen principals licensed and over twenty-five teachers licensed. Approximately 75% of the candidates we brought through the program were of color.

This body of research also conveys the importance of racial identity formation during early years of development. Because of this, I recently developed a partnership with one of the largest privately held foundations and with the business community to replicate a similar program to Call Me Mister®, which focuses on attracting African American males into the teaching profession to ensure that young black students, especially young black males, can have positive
black male role models in schools who can bring both an Afrocentric perspective and mentorship model into learning. Additionally, it is important to have a critical mass of teachers and leaders of color to create a support structure by which they will be empowered to emerge more authentically and have the comfort to challenge systems of whiteness. Again, acknowledging the permanency of racism in America, eradicating racism will never happen in my lifetime, but enough racialized opposition from a critical mass of staff and leaders of color will choke a system enough that they may be able to make some advancements for themselves and the students that look like them.

A focus on staff of color retention is another important aspect this research notes to be of importance. Many of the participants left their roles at some point due to the racial isolation they experienced. Two specifically spoke about being in rural districts working with larger Somali and Latino populations and their respective district were challenged getting anyone of color in their systems and these two participants shared that they valued the work they were doing, but were not supported to push a strong racial equity agenda to ensure all students’ needs were being met. The level of resistance they faced was common with all participants so the importance of school systems to develop support structures for staff of color is very important. Recruiting people of color for positions in education is a great strategy, and typically, recruiting them is much harder than retaining them. I used to frequently tell my students, “Getting an ‘A’ is much harder than maintaining an ‘A’,” because maintenance requires a lot of effort and invest of resources. Often, there are very small things that can be done that have a large impact. For example, working with many candidates of color over the years, I learned that finding a church or barber is very important, or where they can live in neighborhoods aligned to their culture and
even connecting them with fraternities and sororities proved beneficial to retaining high quality leaders of color.

**Conclusion**

On my way into work, I often listen to a show on SirrusXM channel 126 called Urban View. Joe Madison, or the Black Eagle as he is often referred, hosts a daily morning talk show covering various topics about politics, finance, entertainment, etc. Recently, Senator Cory Booker was on the show discussing the Kavanaugh confirmation hearings. The focus of the conversation with Senator Booker was about his decision to release documents and emails that were marked as ‘confidential’ in an effort to inform the public about significant concerns surrounding Mr. Kavanaugh’s candidacy as a Supreme Court Justice. These concerns centered on Kavanaugh’s ability to remain impartial around gender equality, race and abortion laws.

Like many in my social circle, Senator Booker is concerned not only about Kavanaugh’s background, but also the brevity of the hearings and the speed at which he may be confirmed. Did we ever see such brevity of process when President Obama wanted to confirm any position? Senator Booker stated to a judge during his opening statements, "It seems so clear that in your court the same folks seem to win over and over again: the powerful, the privileged, big corporations, special interests…this is why so much is at stake" (Seidman & Tamari, 2018). Senator Booker is widely known for his outspoken nature, which I call, truth-telling nature and it is very clear that when he speaks, people listen, but not necessarily for the same reason. On the show that morning, Senator Booker said that he is prepared for being brought up on ethics violations and if it costs him his job, then job well done. In fact, he is directly quoted saying, “Bring it!” I have read and listened to various politicized interpretations about Senator Booker’s actions and one thing is evident, white media will never credit a black man for challenging whiteness!
I can point to a similar topic, which recently regained another life cycle, and that is Colin Kaepernick’s new commercial with Nike. Kaepernick’s choice to kneel during the 2016-17 NFL season during the national anthem garnered significant backlash that ultimately cost him his NFL career. This was his silent protest against senseless police killings of black men and other racial inequities. His actions were widely followed across the country from other NFL players, to fans and even in public schools and community events. The controversy this caused went all the way to the White House and President Trump’s reaction was to be expected from a white supremacist point of view. The newly released Nike ad features Kaepernick’s voice inspiring people to be their best in spite of multiple odds holding them back. Then, a clip with the iconic imagery of Kaepernick himself appears stating, “Believe in something even if it means sacrificing everything.” Then a few seconds later, the ad closes with Kaepernick saying, “Don’t ask if your dreams are crazy, ask if they’re crazy enough.” (ABC13EyewitnessNews, 2018).

When I first saw this ad, my reaction was, “WOW…WOW! I wonder how white media will react to this?” It took no time for this ad to spark significant controversy. People are burning Nike apparel and shoes in response to this ad…how crazy is that! I highly doubt Nike cares what you do with their product once they have the profit of sale. Again, this features a prominent black man challenging whiteness through an iconic company. Was this a stand for social justice or a stand for capitalism? I will not debate this question here, but I will take a position that in both recent media incidents, the backlash occurring when whiteness is challenged is very real and this same backlash is what the participants in this body of research experience on a daily basis being black principals in predominantly white school systems. It is the same backlash they pushed each participant to the edge of negotiation; yet, avoid the death of committing the ultimate sacrifice of negotiating the entirety of their blackness.
Think about white normativity in this way. It is so taken for granted that it is like breathing. You just do it. Whiteness, as a site of normativity, means that it is unmarked, unraced, unnamed. As white you are deemed ‘normal.’ Yet as Black, I am marked, named, raced, and deemed ‘different’ and ‘deviant’ (Yancy, p. 57, 2018).

This body of research looks at the intersection of race and leadership as to how black male principals negotiate their racial identity to remain successful in predominantly white school systems and avoid cultural sacrifice. Though there are limitations to this study, primarily due to sample size and the phenomenological approach, the findings section provides a rich context that serves as a source for further research along multiple themes. It is evident by the shared experiences of the participants that their roles as black male principals in predominantly white school systems was challenging, yet each of them persisted and admittedly became stronger in who they are as black men and as building principals because of what they endured.

We are living in a time where white supremacy is endorsed directly and overtly from the White House, which creates a very toxic and contentious environment for people of color. As I think about my former role as a black principal in a predominantly white school system, I echo every theme that emerged in this body of research. In fact, I feel like this research frames the conversations I have been having for years with many of the participants and every person of color in my life, for that matter. I am now a Superintendent in Colorado Springs. It is a position I aspired to have for many years.

Professionally, I feel that all of my experiences prepared me for such a leadership position, but it is not far removed from my days as a principal. The district I serve is just over fifty percent white, so according to my research parameters, the district would be deemed predominantly white. I am also in a city that is predominantly white and has historical issues when it comes to
race and leadership and guess what…I am still black. So where does that lead me? How will I, a black man who ascended to the highest level of educational leadership possible in still a predominantly white school system, thrive and be the voice of reason, the voice of racial equity, the voice for students who have been waiting for someone who looks like me to arrive?

Recently, Spike Lee released his new movie BlacKkKlansman. This is based on a true story about Colorado Spring’s first black police cadet accelerating quickly into an investigator’s role, infiltrating the Colorado Springs’ KKK. This is a powerful movie and in classic Spike Lee fashion, spurs significant socio-racial-political conversations. The most memorable provocative quote from the movie is from the scene when Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) is speaking in front of the Black Student Union body at Colorado College. His general message was to inspire black students to stand up for racial justice and he is quoted saying, “It’s time for you to stop running away from being black” (Lee, 2018). The timing of this quote aligns to the conversations above with Senator Booker, Colin Kaepernick, the eight participants in this study, and my own personal narrative. All of us are examples of black men who refuse to run away from who we are. Being a leader in predominantly white school systems takes the faith to believe that you are purposed for this work at this time, at this moment. And, it takes the courage to stand when whiteness pushes you our tries to lure you away from that which you are called to do!

Dr. Yancy’s (2018) latest book, Backlash, depicts the significant work yet to be done, most of which falls on the shoulders of white America. This initial op-ed piece gone viral engages the reader about the depths of racial hatred spewing from the mouth of Mother America (including people of color). The appeal for white people to understand the unearned privileges associated with whiteness is remarkably stated and outlined in this book and rightfully positions itself almost as a means for black people and other people of color to feel vindicated about their lived
realities of whiteness. Far too long, the burden of proof has been on people of color to justify their reality and like Senator Booker noted, the court of law seemingly never is in our favor.

When I think about my two daughters – my two intellectual, talented, beautiful, unapologetic for who they are in black bodies daughters – I am inspired that the negotiating skills I modeled will serve them well in life because unfortunately, as I see it, not in my lifetime and perhaps not even in theirs, will whiteness ever go away. People of color will never have an option to stop doing their part in racial reconciliation, and it is time for the public court to uphold accountability for the efforts of white people’s part for racial reconciliation.

What I am asking is you first accept the racism within yourself, accept all of the truth about what it means for you to be white in a society that was created for you. I’m asking for you to trace the binds that tie you to forms of domination that you would rather not see (Yancy, p. 23, 2018).

All of the participants, except two, have moved away from predominantly white school systems and are now building leaders in more diverse school districts, while one has become a superintendent in an out-of-metro area district whose demographic is moving more toward students of color and another is a highly sought motivational speaker specializing in conversations about racial resiliency. None of the participants sacrificed who they were as black men due to the strong narratives, solidified identity and supports from other black men they received in their personal and professional lives. The participant’s narratives are powerful and add to the field of education.

It is my desire that these narratives can be cross-examined with young black males’ lived experiences in education to identify correlational themes that may prevent them, as students, from cultural sacrifice at a very young age. I also believe that the emerged themes by the
participants can add to the body of continued research for closing the achievement gap between students of color and their white peers.
References


Loving v. Virginia, § 388 (1967).


Appendix A: Interview guided questions

1. How do you racially identify and what composes this identity for you?
   a. Minimal probes: Social construction of race, family of origin, etc.

2. How has your racial identity impacted you personally?

3. How has your racial identity impacted you professionally?

4. Please describe the organizational culture in which you work (e.g., how many people of color, what are then gender compositions, environmental/social structures, etc.)?
   a. Minimal probes: Does racism or sexism exist in your organization?

5. How is your racial identity aligned or not to the organizational composition you just described?

6. As a leader of color, what helped you get to where you are and what barriers did you encounter?

7. Do you find yourself negotiating your identity in your current organization?
   a. Minimal probes: Selling out, living/leading bi-culturally?

8. From your perspective, how are your experiences as a leader of color alike or different from your white colleagues?

9. What are your aspirations in your current role and does being a leader of color impact your ability to advance your career?
   a. Minimal probes: Racialized glass ceiling?

10. What sustains you in your current organization?
    a. Minimal probes: Racialized isolation, resiliency factors?

11. Given your understanding of your organization, how does it compare to others in terms of your role as a leader of color?

12. What cultural sacrifices do leaders of color make to succeed in organizations such as
13. Please describe your leadership philosophy?
   a. Minimal probes: Does your racial identity inform this?

14. Please respond to the following quote by Booker T. Washington: “I have learned that success in life is not to be determined by what one has attained; rather, by the obstacles one has overcome while trying to succeed”

15. Do you think you are successful?

16. What advice would you offer younger generations of leaders of color entering into organizations such as yours?

17. Is there anything you would like to share that I have not covered during this interview?
Appendix B: Consent form

CONSENT FORM
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

Guess who’s coming to dinner: How African American administrators in predominantly white educational systems negotiate cultural sacrifice

I am conducting a study about the cultural negotiation of African American principals in predominantly white school systems. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you meet the requirements of being an African American male serving or having served as a principal for at least three years in a district where total enrollment of students of color was 49 percent or lower. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Michael J. Thomas, who is being advised by Dr. Stephen Brookfield at the University of St. Thomas, School of Educational Leadership.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is: To critically analyze the impact of race and leadership with African American male principals who work in predominantly white educational systems by conducting qualitative interviews and aligning such data to a wider body of theoretical research on this topic.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: Be willing to participate in an audio recorded, structured interview process where you will be asked a series of questions. Plan for the interview to take approximately an hour. If additional information is needed, such as to clarify information provided, I may request a follow-up interview with you.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
This research will involve participants to disclose personal and professional information about themselves, their identity and their respective organizations. To minimize potential risks, everything and anything you share will be kept confidential only to you and me. All information will be incorporated anonymously or by pseudonym. I am asking that you share as much personally and professional as you are comfortable.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The types of records I will create include: recordings, transcripts, master participant list and computer records (e.g., Microsoft Word documents). All electronic information will be securely stored by password protection on my personal computer only accessible to me. I will retain all information for three years after I complete my dissertation and defense, which is projected to be August, 2018; therefore, all information will be destroyed by December, 2021.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with me, your school district or the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until the research gathering is complete. Should you decide to withdraw data collected about you, I will refrain from using any data gained by you and it will be immediately destroyed/deleted. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask, though I may ask to restate my question differently to gain the type of information necessary.
Contacts and Questions
My name is Michael J. Thomas. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at XXX-XXX-XXXX or you can contact my university adviser, Dr. Stephen Brookfield at XXX-XXX-XXXX. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6035 with any questions or concerns.
You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study and have all of my interviews recorded and stored by the researcher per the stipulations above. I also attest I am at least 18 years of age.

Signature of Study Participant ______________________________
Date ______________________________
Print Name of Study Participant ______________________________
Signature of Parent or Guardian (If applicable) ______________________________
Date ______________________________
Print Name of Parent or Guardian (If Applicable) ______________________________
Signature of Researcher ______________________________
Date ______________________________
Appendix C:

Institutional Review Board
Grants and Research Office

Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

A. INSTRUCTIONS

Please read through the entirety of this form carefully before signing.

Electronic signatures are not valid for this form. After completing the required fields, please print and sign this form in blue or black ink. After this form has been signed by the transcriber, it should be given to the principal investigator of the research study for submission. After receiving the Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement, the principal investigator should scan and upload the signed form to their IRBNet project package.

The transcriber should keep a copy of the Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement for their records.

This agreement is for transcribers only. However, if your duties as a research assistant include transcription, you will need to review, sign, and submit the Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement as well as the Research Assistant Confidentiality Agreement. Confidentiality agreements can be found in the document library in IRBNet.

B. CONFIDENTIALITY OF A RESEARCH STUDY:

Confidentiality is the treatment and maintenance of information that an individual has disclosed in a relationship of trust and with the expectation that it will not be divulged to others in ways that are inconsistent with the understanding of the original disclosure (the consent form) without permission. Confidential information relating to human subjects in a research study may include, but is not limited to:

- Name, date of birth, age, sex, address, and contact information;
- Current contact details of family, guardian, etc.;
- Medical or educational history and/or records;
- Sexual lifestyle;
- Personal care issues;
- Service records and progress notes;
- Assessments or reports;
- Ethnic or racial origin;
- Political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs.

As a transcriber you will have access to research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) that include confidential information. Many participants have only revealed information to investigators because principal investigators have assured participants that every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality. That is why it is of the upmost importance to maintain full confidentiality when conducting your duties as a transcriber during a research study. Below is a list of expectations you will be required to adhere to as a transcriber. Please carefully review these expectations before signing this form.

Revised: 08/08/16
C. EXPECTATIONS FOR A TRANSCRIBER

In order to maintain confidentiality, I agree to:

1. Keep all research information that is shared with me (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) confidential by not discussing or sharing this information verbally or in any format with anyone other than the principal investigator of this study;

2. Ensure the security of research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) while it is in my possession. This includes:
   - Using closed headphones when transcribing audio taped interviews;
   - Keeping all transcript documents and digitized interviews on a password protected computer with password-protected files;
   - Closing any transcription programs and documents when temporarily away from the computer;
   - Keeping any printed transcripts in a secure location such as a locked file cabinet;
   - Permanently deleting any digital communication containing the data.

3. Not make copies of research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) unless specifically instructed to do so by the principal investigator;

4. Give all research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) and research participant information, back to the principal investigator upon completion of my duties as a transcriber;

5. After discussing it with the principal investigator, erase or destroy all research information (e.g. audio or video recordings, DVDs/CDs, transcripts, data, etc.) that cannot be returned to the principal investigator upon completion of my duties as a transcriber.

Name of Transcriber:

IRBNet Tracking Number:

Title of Research Study:

Name of Principal Investigator:

By signing this form I acknowledge that I have reviewed, understand, and agree to adhere to the expectations for a transcriber described above. I agree to maintain confidentiality while performing my duties as a transcriber and recognize that failure to comply with these expectations may result in disciplinary action.

Signature of Transcriber

Date

Print Name

Revised: 08/08/16
Appendix D:
Institutional Review Board
Grants and Research Office

Research Assistant Confidentiality Agreement

A. INSTRUCTIONS

Please read through the entirety of this form carefully before signing.

Electronic signatures are not valid for this form. After completing the required fields, please print and sign this form in blue or black ink. After this form has been signed by the research assistant, it should be given to the principal investigator of the research study for submission. After receiving the Research Assistant Confidentiality Agreement, the principal investigator should scan and upload the signed form to their IRBNet project package.

The research assistant should keep a copy of the Research Assistant Confidentiality Agreement for their records.

This agreement is for research assistants only. If you are a transcriber, please fill out the Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement. If your duties as a research assistant include transcription, you will also need to review, sign, and submit a Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement in addition to the Research Assistant Confidentiality Agreement. Confidentiality agreements can be found in the document library in IRBNet.

B. CONFIDENTIALITY OF A RESEARCH STUDY:

Confidentiality is the treatment and maintenance of information that an individual has disclosed in a relationship of trust and with the expectation that it will not be divulged to others in ways that are inconsistent with the understanding of the original disclosure (the consent form) without permission. Confidential information relating to human subjects in a research study may include, but is not limited to:

- Name, date of birth, age, sex, address, and contact information;
- Current contact details of family, guardian etc.;
- Medical or educational history and/or records;
- Sexual lifestyle;
- Personal care issues;
- Service records and progress notes;
- Assessments or reports;
- Ethnic or racial origin;
- Political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs.

As a research assistant you will have access to confidential information pertaining to the research study. Many participants have only revealed information to investigators because principal investigators have assured participants that every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality. That is why it is of the upmost importance to maintain full confidentiality when conducting a research study. Below is a list of expectations you will be required to adhere to as a research assistant. Please carefully review these expectations before signing this form.

Revised: 08/08/16
C. EXPECTATIONS FOR A RESEARCH ASSISTANT

In order to maintain confidentiality, I agree to:

1. Keep all research information that is shared with me (e.g., flash drives, notes, transcripts, data, etc.) confidential by not discussing or sharing this information verbally or in any format with anyone other than the principal investigator of this study;

2. Ensure the security of research information while it is in my possession. This may include:
   - Keeping all documents and/or data related to the research study on a password protected computer with password protected files;
   - Closing any programs, documents, or data files related to the research study when away from the computer;
   - Keeping any printed documents and/or data related to the research study in a secure location such as a locked filing cabinet;
   - Permanently deleting any digital communication containing documents and/or data related to the research study.

3. Not make copies of documents and/or data related to the research study unless specifically instructed to do so by the principal investigator;

4. Give all research information/data and research participant information/data back to the principal investigator upon completion of my duties as a research assistant;

5. After discussing it with the principal investigator, erase or destroy all research information that cannot be returned to the principal investigator upon completion of my duties as a research assistant.

Name of Research Assistant:

IRBNet Tracking Number:

Title of Research Study:

Name of Principal Investigator:

By signing this form I acknowledge that I have reviewed, understand, and agree to adhere to the expectations for a research assistant described above. I agree to maintain confidentiality while performing my duties as a research assistant and recognize that failure to comply with these expectations may result in disciplinary action.

[Signature of Research Assistant]  6/10/2018

Jenelle Akerstrom Zumbusch

Print Name

Revised: 08/08/16
## Appendix E:

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<td>54</td>
<td>+23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Hiring Staff of Color</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-26.9</td>
</tr>
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