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African-American principals in the midwest: voices of the sojourner principal

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AFRICAN-AMERICAN PRINCIPALS IN THE MIDWEST:

VOICES OF THE SOJOURNER PRINCIPAL

by

David Byron Brown

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in
Educational Policy and Leadership Studies
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2012

Thesis Supervisors: Associate Professor Carolyn L. Wanat
Associate Professor Emeritus Scott F. McNabb

ABSTRACT

In an era of accountability and high standards for public schools, some African American principals decided to work in predominantly white schools. Their experiences were challenging because they were racial newcomers in schools with students different from their own race. In this case study, 12 African-American principals and assistant principals in one Midwestern state described their experiences working in schools with fewer than 20 percent African-American students. In semi-structured interviews, participants discussed motivations, perceptions, and experiences serving as principals in predominantly white schools.

Three primary research questions were investigated: How do African-American principals in predominantly white schools describe their daily work? Why do African-American principals continue to work in predominantly white schools? What opportunities and impediments have African-American principals in predominantly white schools encountered in their career advancement?

Although principals have similar motivations and experiences working in public schools, African-American principals tend to have distinct experiences and motivations while working in predominantly white schools.

Some participants in this study relied on guidance from their faith. Other principals relied on their professional training and experience to overcome challenges when they relocated to work in predominantly white schools. All African-American principals in this study had made a choice to work in predominantly white schools and had continued to lead on their own terms.

Three themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews. First, African-American principals relied on their spirituality for guidance to buoy or buffer them psychologically in their daily work. Secondly, some believed that they were constantly scrutinized by colleagues and superiors. Race played an important part in their

perception of feeling scrutinized, yet they felt scrutiny was sometimes self-imposed and affected their interactions with their white colleagues. Third, these African-American principals made a conscious effort to serve as role models for all students, but especially the few African-American students and faculty they led. In addition, these principals recognized that they served as racial bridge builders between the majority and minority cultures of the school. As school leaders and role models, the principals felt uniquely complicated tensions that were embedded in race and self-imposed perceptions about their daily work. All findings have contributed to the limited research on African-American principals in predominantly white schools and the reasons they continue to lead their schools.

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH. D. THESIS

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To Xavier and Sophie

He who is not courageous enough to take risks will accomplish nothing in life.

Muhammad Ali, Ebony (1985)

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There are few African-American principals in the United States, particularly in predominantly white states and schools. Experiences and motivations of the limited number of African-American principals are uniquely based on their cultural background and racial isolation if they work in predominantly white schools. To some degree, African-American principals share the same cultural values and educational backgrounds as white principals. However, their perceptions and experiences have distinct differences based on race.

African-American principals lead their respective schools with the same educational training as their white counterparts, yet they are distinctively unique in how they cope with different and similar stressors of daily work. As African-Americans, these principals have confronted personal and professional challenges as they interacted with their race, superiors, faculty, parents, and students. As the only racially diverse representative for their buildings and sometimes their district, the expectations placed on them tend to be overwhelming.

There is very little research into the area of the African-American principalship in predominantly white schools. Specific research about the socialization of African-American principals is also limited. Of the limited studies about African-American principals, there are even fewer studies that use qualitative methods. To fill this void in the research, this study investigated the experiences of African-American principals in predominantly white schools in one Midwestern state and the reasons why they continue to lead their schools.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate why some African-American principals in a Midwestern state have decided to work in predominantly white schools with less than 20 percent African-American student enrollment. This study presents and

analyzes the stories and personal experiences that these African-American principals shared. This inquiry explored factors that led these principals to decide to stay in predominantly white schools. Interviews of these African-American principals provided insight into their preferences and choices for employment. This study also was interested in minority principals who were not the same race as most students in their schools. Through this investigation the issues of what adjustments, if any, African-American principals faced due to personal, cultural, and environmental factors in their schools or districts were studied.

Significance of the Study

There is a low percentage of African-Americans in the Midwestern state chosen for this study. In addition, fewer African-American principals serve students who do not resemble their own racial identities. Nationally, the Department of Education statistics estimated the number of African-American principals in the United States to be 17, 932 of 169,171 (10.6 percent) (Fiore, Curtin, & National Center for Education Statistics, 1997; Choy, Henke, Alt, Medrich, and Bobbitt, 1993). Furthermore, there were only 38 of 1,158 (3percent) African-American principals employed in nine districts in the Midwestern state of this study (Battle, 2009). Only 15 of the 38 African-American principals worked in schools that had less than 20 percent African-American students in their schools.

This study interviewed these principals to discover why they decided to work with students who are unlike their own racial identities. Since 24.5 percent of African-American principals currently work in urban schools, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (1997), most of the literature has focused on the efforts of these African-American principals. The focus through the literature has been on the need for African-Americans in the educational pipeline to help these growing numbers of minority students (Heller, 1992; Brown, 2005; Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010).

There were many studies focusing on the need for African-American principals to help with the growing numbers of minority students (Heller, 1992; Montenegro, 1993; Schaerer, Vickers, Hansing, & Harvey, 1996; Pounder & Merrill, 2001; Foster, 2004; Fultz, 2004; Rusch, 2004; Tillman, 2004; Brown, 2005; Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010). The importance of filling the pipeline with African-American principals, along with understanding the needs of African-American principals had been given special interest by school districts, state legislatures, and Departments of Education for the past decade.

Further research on African-American principals working in predominantly white schools may allow conversations to begin and provide a glimpse of perspectives of those telling their stories to this researcher via a qualitative study. This study's goal was to continue the dialogue in the literature to tell the story of these African-Americans who worked in racially different areas not like their own racial or community background. The more information provided to potential African-Americans and other minorities seeking employment in the country, the greater the understanding of their stories and perspectives. Lastly, as states continue to grow in diversity in the workforce, so will schools and principals across the country.

The more information made available to policymakers, school districts, and educational leadership training programs, the better they can gain insight into factors of recruitment and retention, the teacher pipeline for employing minorities, and the supports that state organizations can provide to assist these principals. Without studies like this, these African-Americans' stories as educators and administrators in the Midwest may be lost. These stories will provide information of their professional experiences and their thoughts about the key issue and role that race plays in careers of African-American principals.

Research Questions

The primary research questions that guided the research in this qualitative study were: How do African-American principals in predominantly white districts describe their daily work? Why do African-American principals continue to work in predominantly white districts? What opportunities and impediments have African-American principals in predominantly white districts encountered in their career advancement? Through the principals' stories, it was possible to explore the issues that have affected work environment and shaped the careers of African-American principals in predominantly white schools (Leonard & Papalewis, 1987; Shakeshaft, 1989).

Limitations

Several limitations existed in this study. The findings of this study should not be generalized and compared to other principals who did not participate in the study. The findings for these African-Americans should not be compared to other African-American principals because their backgrounds, attitudes, and reasons for working in predominantly white schools were unique. Only twelve African-American principals from a Midwestern state participated, which limits the amount of data to be collected and analyzed to make a broad interpretation. The principals who volunteered had varying reasons for participating in the study. Even with similar backgrounds and shared experiences, these African-American principals had different perspectives and attitudes on race and their profession.

Like the principals, the researcher is African-American, which could have led the principals into feeling pressure to speak or decline questions. There were both positive and negative biases that related to the researcher being African-American. One example of bias was the fact that the researcher felt he had a connection with the participants, which could have clouded his judgment and caused him to be subjective. Positively, the recognition of the researcher's shared racial identity provided prompt agreement to participate in the study as 80 percent of eligible principals agreed to be interviewed. The

participants initially acknowledged verbally their sense of racial pride in the fact that an African-American would be interested in their stories and experiences as principal. Along those lines, the participants appeared to openly to discuss deeply any racial or personal issues that they wanted to share.

Definition of Key Terms

As schools and districts vary in terms of their school classifications and titles, this study used the following key terms:

Predominantly white school was a school with a white student and faculty population over 80%.

Principals and Assistant Principals were terms used interchangeably to refer to the administrators of the school.

African-American is the term to used to define minority populations for the purposes of this dissertation.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the importance for investigating the experiences and perceptions of African-American principals who decided to work in predominantly white schools with less than 20 percent African-American student enrollment. Also revealed were some of the complicated issues and limitations that these African-American principals confronted in their daily work and interactions in a predominantly white school. A review of this study's guiding research questions disclosed how the study explored how African-American principals perceived their opportunities and potential impediments as they led their schools.

Chapter two will discuss the relevant literature on African-American principals in predominantly white schools. Chapter three presents the design and methods that were used to investigate the experiences of African-American principals who chose to work in predominantly white schools in one Midwestern state. Chapter four will discuss the findings of the common themes found in the interviews. Lastly, chapter five concludes

this study of African-American principals who work in predominantly white schools. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section will summarize the three major themes. The second section will present conclusions and analysis of the findings. The third section will present contributions this study makes to the literature on African-American principals. The fourth section will make suggestions for further research and discuss limitations of this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is very little research about African-American educators, particularly research that explores specific topics about African-American principals. Research about the socialization of African-American principals is also limited. There are very few studies of African-American principals in predominantly white schools with few minority students. There also are few research studies of African-American principals that use qualitative methodologies. Benham (1997) and Tillman (2002) articulated the lack of attention to the different stories of school leadership presented by ethnic minorities. Benham's work focused on ethnic minority women. Tillman's work provided a guideline for other researchers to conduct African-American qualitative research through a culturally sensitive framework.

Benham's (1997) qualitative study examined the tensions of three African-American women principals. Benham described her study as creating several dialogues through texts that included "self" versus the school's institutional governance norms. Her texts also included the professional "self" as well as the personal and cultural "self." Benham described her research as a way of writing personal and public textual expressions that were deeply influenced by gender, race, culture, and history. These texts of "self" were considered to be composites of history, family, profession, and cultural memories. Through her work, Benham argued that each woman would describe her "self" as an advocate for respect and equity.

Tillman (2002) believed that research approached from a culturally sensitive perspective acknowledges the complexities of African-American principals' experiences. Tillman's work enabled many researchers to understand that African-American cultural perspectives should not be considered fixed or linear. Instead, Tillman argued that the

perspective of the African-American represents one facet of the totality of one's human experience. Tillman's (2004) research emphasized the underdevelopment of the literature on African-American school administrators. Her research also pointed out that the historical and contemporary contributions of African-Americans have not been documented in the traditional literature on educational leadership and administration (Tillman, 2004; Brown, 2005; Horsford, 2008; and Wrushen & Sherman, 2008).

Several common themes emerge from the literatures that are useful in my study of African-American principals in predominantly white schools: (1) intrinsic/extrinsic perceptions, (2) sojourner effects, (3) mobility preferences, and (4) affirmative action's impact on employment of African-American administrators. These themes reveal how their work environments affect African-American principals personally and socially. Also revealed are systemic policies and practices in the work environment that motivate some African-Americans to find employment in schools that may be different from their own racial or social backgrounds. Following is a discussion of the four themes.

Intrinsic/Extrinsic Perceptions

The theme of intrinsic and extrinsic perceptions emerges from the research of Leonard and Papalewis (1987), which provides an understanding of factors that contributed to the underrepresentation of women and minorities among educational administrators. According to Leonard and Papalewis, intrinsic factors include the psychological aspects of an individual's personality, values, and attitudes.

Some factors that exist in an individual's intrinsic perceptions are negative perceptions individuals hold about advancement in their careers or their aspiration levels. This research revealed that all principals have intrinsic and extrinsic perceptions that allow them to operate as individuals and within a system. Individuals also may experience a certain lack of confidence and initiative, which are constraints imposed by self, family, and a low self-image. Whether an African-American principal perceives employment opportunities as being equal and/or fair in a predominantly white school, as

opposed to same race schools, depends on the experiences of the individual. The individual personalities, values, and attitudes may be similar among all African-American principals; however, their approach to dealing with working in a predominantly white school may be quite different.

Leary (2005) argued that self-esteem plays a significant role in how African-Americans perceive their role in their community, family, or profession. She states that vacant esteem is persistent in many African-Americans. Individuals who have vacant esteem believe they have little or no worth. Doubts about self-worth are exacerbated by society's attitude that African-Americans as a group are inferior. Leary believed that society influences people through its institutions, laws, policies, and media. Societal influences promoted a historic disparaging and limiting identity that confined African-Americans. Intrinsically and extrinsically, the vacant esteem exhibited by African-Americans tended to affect their overall values and attitudes.

Extrinsic perceptions are formed from environmental factors that contribute to access into the work environment. Some external factors that exist according to Leonard and Papalewis (1987) are an organization's lack of support for or opposition to sex-equality policies, sex-role stereotyping, lack of enforcement of Title IX mandates, sex/race discrimination, lack of role models/sponsors, and absence of networks. Leonard and Papalewis see the extrinsic perceptions as being systemic and elusive in nature. According to Leonard and Papalewis, individuals are affected as a collective group by extrinsic factors regardless of an individual's intrinsic factors. African-American principals in predominantly white schools possess intrinsic and extrinsic perceptions that either have provided them with individual opportunities or hindered them.

In addition to the work of Leonard and Papalewis and Stansbury, Warner, and Wiggins (1984) also investigated intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors. Stansbury, Warner, and Wiggins identified forces limiting access to employment opportunities, including individual, organizational, and institutional barriers. They asserted that

personality, values, and attitudes of individuals and institutions could hinder or provide opportunities for advancement within organizational systems like schools.

There are a limited number of studies about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors for leaders of color in suburban schools (Madsen & Mabokela, 2002). In Madsen and Mabokela's (2002) qualitative study, they interviewed assistant principals in suburban school districts, as did Vittengl (1984) and Lortie (2009). Madsen and Mabokela wanted to gain a clearer understanding of leadership styles and interactions in diverse workplaces. They conducted their study in environments where minority administrators were principals in predominantly white districts. The purpose of Madsen and Mabokela's research was to understand how African-American principals' cultural backgrounds shaped their leadership practices and how they managed issues of diversity. Intrinsically, Madsen and Mabokela's findings revealed that due to their upbringing, education, and general life experiences, African-American leaders tended to develop an empathetic orientation in meeting the needs of all their school participants, regardless of their race. This study noted that it was African-American principals' awareness combined with their experiences and understandings that resulted in their developing a sense of tolerance in the area of human relations.

Commissioned by the Iowa legislature, a study conducted in 2010 examined strategies that would reduce internal and/or external barriers and develop opportunities to equip minority candidates with specific expertise required for administrative management positions (House File 2432). A total of 339 school leaders and 76 experienced African-American teachers completed the survey. One of the purposes of the study was to examine the opportunities for recruiting racial and ethnic minorities to continue their careers as school administrators. The survey revealed external barriers that survey participants felt were reasons that African-Americans did not pursue administrative careers. Barriers included a lack of cultural and social support, apprehension about the certification process, and intimidation of the application process.

The study revealed some of the same intrinsic barriers from research by Leonard and Papalewis (1987). Survey respondents believed that African-Americans would consider working in the state if they felt a sense of belonging and community bonds, had the availability of role models, and had proximity to family from their work environments. What sets this study apart from past research is that the state legislature has recognized the barriers of minority principal recruitment and has begun to develop strategies to remove barriers.

Sojourner Effects

Being a newcomer, also called a sojourner, to work environments is not new and has been discussed in the literature as being part of the assimilation process for most employees. The assimilation of newcomer employees has been researched since the late 1950s (Lambert & Bressler, 1956; Beals & Humphrey, 1957, Bennet, Passin & McKnight, 1958; Morris, 1960; Oberg, 1960). One study was by the Committee on Cross-Cultural Education of the Social Sciences Research Council (Gudykunst, 1979). This section will summarize the literature about the sojourner effect that explores cultural issues, particularly for African-American principals.

Gray (2001) defined a sojourner as being a traveler who moves through areas that are considered foreign. Gray's dissertation on the socialization of African-American principals in predominantly white settings provided an example of the sojourner effect. Gray interviewed five African-American principals assigned to be principals of schools that were populated by predominantly white students, faculty, staff, and parents. Crow and Matthews (1998) state that African-American principal's previous experiences as school administrators can affect their socialization and perceptions into a new work environment. Other sojourner research has provided glimpses into the initial contact with the school environment, work behavior, personal characteristics, and stages that sojourners go through during their adjustment period in a culture.

Gray's (2001) research found that as a sojourner African-American principals tended to develop their own role identification, because no experienced person from their district was willing or able to serve as role models. In Gray's study, the adjustments that African-American principals made to situations were examples of how the sojourners established a relationship with others within their work environments. Their adjustments tended to produce varying consequences.

The earlier work of Bochner (1982) revealed that for persons entering an unfamiliar culture, the mundane, everyday interpersonal encounters with members of the host society (e.g. in the streets, shops, factories, and bars) are often a major source of stress, due to the person not knowing the rules and conventions in the receiving culture. Bochner's results are consistent with Gray's (2001) finding that many minorities typically enter the work environment with a different cultural background.

Interpreting the sojourner differently than Bochner (1982) and Gray (2001), Ogbu (2004) identified African-American sojourners as having a collective identity. Ogbu thought sojourners possessed the burden of what he refers to as "acting white" to assimilate in their work environment (Becknell, 1987; Kochman, 1987; Luster, 1992, Ogbu, 1999). Ogbu defined collective identity as a person's sense of who they are, their "we-feeling" or "belonging." Ogbu believed that people express their collective identity with emblems or cultural symbols that reflect their attitudes, beliefs, feelings, behaviors, and language or dialect. Therefore, the persistence of a group's collective identity depended on the continuity of the external historical and structural forces that contributed to its formation. Ogbu believe a person's identity developed because of a group's common experiences or series of shared experiences. As sojourners arrived in the work environment, Ogbu believed that they addressed issues of assimilation and responded to their status in the new environment individually.

Lacy's (2007) ethnography of the African-American middle class in the Washington, D.C. area explored middle class African-Americans working in white

environments. Lacy found that even though many of the middle class African-Americans in the study attended white colleges, lived in white neighborhoods, and worked in predominately white environments, their experiences suggested assimilation has occurred for some subsets of the African-American population. Lacy questioned whether their route to assimilation in the workforce allowed these African-Americans to decide when and where they wanted to identify racially. Despite assimilation, many middle class African-Americans with access to predominantly white colleges, workplaces, and neighborhoods consciously retained the values and culture of the larger African-American community (Lacy, 2007).

Mollica, Gray, & Trevino's (2003) work on sojourners revealed a concept from the 1950s called homophily, which describes the sojourner's relationships in the workplace. This study examined the formation and persistence of homophilous, or same-race, friendship ties among racial minorities and whites in a "newcomer" setting. Lazarsfeld & Merton (1954) defined homophily as the tendency for people to associate with others similar to them in terms of attributes (e.g. race, gender) and values. The term "homophily" — love of the same — is described as our tendency to link up with one another in ways that confirm rather than test our core beliefs. Those who liked the same thing, in other words, liked each other. McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001) stated that similarity bred connection, which resulted in their conclusion that people's personal networks are homogeneous.

These studies of homophily found that love of the same provides valuable sources of mutual support for people who shared the same attributes. At the same time racial minorities' access to resources and information in organizations is limited if there are no other minorities with their attributes in the organization. Hood and Koberg (1994) believed that understanding racial homophily provides insight into marginalized racial minorities in a social and occupational setting. The idea they address through their research is that these relationships could be detrimental to the performance and

advancement of minorities in white environments. In his research, Brass (1995) proposed that minority sojourners develop a career strategy of building relationships with those who have positional power and resources instead of acting in isolation. The Glass Ceiling Commission Report of the U.S. Department of Labor (1995) showed that race overlapped with hierarchical positions and that white males were more likely than racial minorities to hold positions of power. The Glass Ceiling Report, therefore, supports Brass's idea that minorities needed to build networks.

Other researchers identified ways that homophilous relationships provide support. Cox (1993) and Ibarra (1993) researched the intrinsic benefits that homophilous relationships could offer minority sojourners as a source of social support within organizations. Their research found that people tended to be more comfortable interacting with similar others because interpersonal similarities increased ease of communication, improved predictability of behavior, and fostered relationships of trust and reciprocity. Thomas (1993) suggested that same-race relationships provided more psychosocial support. Cox (1993) expanded on this idea by noting that for racial minorities in predominantly white environments, informal sources of support were important in maintaining their racial identity.

Madsen and Mabokela's (2002) work provides a different perspective. They focused on the sojourner in the work environment as a cultural broker, or cultural integrator between the majority in the organization and the minority. The findings from Madsen and Mabokela's research with suburban assistant principals established that there was a tendency for sojourners, or minorities working in predominantly white environments, to be "color conscious" leaders who were consensus builders. Unlike the research on homophily, which showed that individuals tend to work with those with similar beliefs, these minority leaders had acquired an understanding of diversity of groups and were able to establish leader-member trust for their schools. Findings also

revealed that African-American principals often struggled with how to respond to the needs of both minority and majority groups in dealing with intergroup conflict.

Research on sojourners emphasizes the potential for or actual conflict in school system organizations. Alderfer and Smith's (1982) work analyzes power relations and conflict among groups in organizations. Potential for intergroup conflict exists, according to the work of Ayman (1993), when people of different subgroups interact with each other. Ayman stated that the idea of conflict is often viewed as negative because it requires the majority to adjust their patterns of interaction with minority counterparts. Madsen and Mabokela (2002) believed that having a number of identified characteristics like racial differences created opposing interests among groups that tended to lead to power conflicts.

Lortie (2009) conducted a survey of 113 suburban elementary principals that furthered the research on African-American sojourners. His research examined the socioeconomic origins of participants and their choices for employment in the suburbs. Among his respondents, nine African-Americans originated from cities and other locations that were different from their place of employment. Lortie asked respondents about the extent to which they were recruited and socialized into the occupation and setting. He found that success of African-American principals holding positions in predominantly white suburban schools depended heavily on whether they had taught in a local suburban school. According to Lortie's survey, many suburban schools had a preference to hire insiders; 68 percent of suburban principals were likely to have worked in their schools as teachers or low-ranking administrators. Seventy-three percent of the participants revealed that sponsors gave African-American principals who were hired from the inside assistance or support as they moved into their first principalship.

Mobility Preferences

Literature concerning the mobility of principals over the last decade has revealed some significant trends. Principals who shared the same race as the largest student racial

group tended to work and remain in that same school or district (Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Ross and Chung, 2006). African-American principals also preferred seeking employment in larger cities, even though approximately 70 percent of the schools were located in the suburbs (Brown, 2005; Heller, 1992; Lortie, 2009; Rossi & Daugherty, 1996). Furthermore, Lortie found that principals regardless of their race tended to resemble the same socioeconomic status, attitudes, and values of their districts. Heller (1992), Rossi and Daugherty (1996), and Brown (2005) found that the tremendous concentration of African-Americans in cities could be due to the established familial ties and community support they received.

African-American principals tended to prefer familiar environments where they were raised over suburban environments of predominantly white communities. Vittengl's (1984) study of 451 Iowa elementary principals found that most principals tended to seek employment within the same districts where they taught or served as low ranking administrators. Heller's (1992) study did not find the reasons this practice has continued; rather, his focus was on where African-Americans tended to live. The findings from Heller's research showed that African-American principals tended to live in the largely racially homogenous urban communities where they were raised. Heller believed the reason for this was due to the social capital that these African-Americans possessed and accrued during their tenure as teachers or lower level administrators in the same race schools. Fiore's (1997) study indicated that along with intrinsic choices African-American principals' training, experience, and perceptions of problems in their schools influenced their decisions to choose where to find employment.

Other researchers investigated the desirability of minority teachers and principals in suburban schools. Heller (1992) argued that the suburbs' dramatic increase in minority enrollment should have been met with a significant increase in minority staffing, which did not happen. Heller found that the suburbs of Chicago, which are characterized by high quality working conditions and strong salaries, have tended to have the lowest

teacher turnovers. Because of these advantages, it could potentially become difficult for minority staff to gain opportunities in the suburbs due to overall competition and great demand for access to teaching positions in the suburbs by all groups. Nevertheless, Heller believed that choice of employment could hardly be used to justify underrepresentation.

McCray, Wright, and Beachum (2007) investigated a common perception that African-American principals had choices in their determination to seek employment anywhere. They conducted a survey of 302 secondary principals in the southeastern states. McCray, Wright, and Beachum investigated the question of whether African-American principals are usually hired in schools with predominantly African-American student populations. Another purpose of their work was to investigate the extent to which a candidate's race had determined their placement in administrative positions. Their findings revealed that African-American principals were being placed in schools where the majority of the student body was African-American. According to their study, white principals had a greater chance of being chosen to lead majority African-American schools due to desegregation and racism. McCray, Wright, and Beachum (2007) concluded that one limitation of their study was that more research was needed to find the causes of the hiring patterns and whether African-Americans preferred to work in predominantly white schools.

Affirmative Action's Impact and Trends

Affirmative action policies have affected employment opportunities for African-American school leaders over the last 50 years. Regardless of African-American principals' intentions to enter the workforce on equal footing with others, the fact remains that the issues of race and discrimination continue to play some role in their endeavors to work in education (Tillman, 2003; Valverde, 2003; McCray, Wright, and Beachum, 2007). With that being said, the literature on African-American principals and their entrance into school leadership in public schools has been divided by two historic and

legal events that occurred in American history. The first event was the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision (Heller, 1992; Jost, 1995; Fiore, 1997; Fenwick, 2001; Mitgang, 2003; Fultz, 2004; Dale, 2005; Tillman, 2005). The second was the 1970s affirmative action programs and policies mandated by government entities, such as school districts and state legislatures (Jost, 1995; Dale, 2005; Schaerer, 1996; Tillman, 2004; Brown, 2005; McCray, Wright, Beachum, 2007).

Affirmative action is defined as an action appropriate to overcome the effects of past or present policies and practices that posed barriers to equal employment opportunity based on race, national origin, gender, or disability (Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action Requirements). The historical background of affirmative action, according to Jost (1995), developed over unresolved issues of racial justice and the question of equal rights for women and African-Americans in American history. The implementation of Affirmative Action programs has led to a backlash and complications for its beneficiaries, minorities and women, and nonbeneficiaries, whites. For both groups, studies have revealed a certain amount of disillusionment, skepticism, and general ambivalence about affirmative action and its implementation (Levi & Fried, 2008; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1997).

The federal government took its first steps toward affirmative action in 1941, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order banning discrimination by defense contractors, creating a Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) to investigate charges of discrimination and ordering blacks to be admitted to defense job training programs. Outside of defense, the term “affirmative action” first appeared in a revised anti-discrimination order issued by President John F. Kennedy on March 6, 1961 (Jost, 1995).

Dale’s (2005) congressional report explained that the origins of affirmative action law might be traced to the early 1960's under the Warren Burger Supreme Court, hereafter called “The Burger Court.” The Burger Court, according to Dale, dealt with the

problem of racial segregation of students in public schools. Congressional Judicial rulings from this period recognized an "affirmative duty," mandated for local school boards by the Equal Protection Clause, to desegregate formerly "dual school" systems and to eliminate state-enforced segregation (Green v. County Board, 1968; Swann v. Board of Education, 1971; Keyes v. Denver, 1973).

Many school districts across the nation operating under affirmative duty mandates were declared in compliance with constitutional requirements in order to gain release from federal intervention. The Supreme Court eventually responded by holding that judicial control of a school system previously found guilty of intentional segregation should be relinquished if, looking to all aspects of school operations, it appeared that the district had complied with desegregation requirements in "good faith" for a reasonable period of time and had eliminated all instances of past discrimination to the extent possible (Dale, 2005).

As the 2000s approached, the literature attempted to examine African-American principals' education, leadership, and reactions to affirmative action. Fenwick (2001) argued that African-American educators (both teachers and principals) were more likely to hold doctorates and/or master's degrees than their white peers, had more years of teaching experience, and had higher participation rates in district sponsored principal or leadership academies. Yet, Fenwick noted that African-American principals were dramatically underrepresented in educational administration. By comparison, according to Fenwick's 2001 data, white males constituted less than 25percent of the teaching force and were the least credentialed educators. Nonetheless, they constituted 50percent of the nation's principals and over 80percent of the nation's superintendents and central office directors.

Levi and Fried (2008) argued that resistance to affirmative action on the part of nonbeneficiary groups, whites, has been a consistent finding in studies conducted over many years using a variety of methods (Bell, Harrison, & McLaughlin, 2000; Brief, Dietz

& Cohen, 2001; Kravitz & Klineberg, 2000). Levi and Fried (2008) examined the reactions of 800 African-Americans and whites to affirmative action programs for hiring, promoting, training, and layoffs. The findings of Levi and Fried supported their hypothesis that there were differences in programs for hiring, promoting, training, and laying off African-Americans and whites. The differences have led to the belief, according to Levi and Fried, that affirmative action is based on self-interest, prejudice, and justice.

Levi and Fried (2008) also thought members of non-beneficiary groups resented affirmative action if an individual perceived the group's outcomes to be unsatisfactory because of low justification procedures. Such resentment may occur even when the individual's own outcomes are satisfactory. Levi and Fried provided the example of individuals who have never suffered discrimination but nevertheless feel resentment on behalf of their group if a member of the group has unjustifiably been denied a promotion.

Literature on the history of affirmative action provides varying perspectives on factors affecting the employment of African-American principals over the past 50 years. The literature provided perspectives on the historic and legal context in which race shaped the work environment of African-Americans. The literature addresses the impact of defacto and dejure practices of employment in the customary and legal actions of school districts. Prior to the affirmative action policies, both the defacto and dejure practices have been debated in the literature on African-American school leadership.

The ideal that government can solve human rights issues like employment discrimination, solely by dejure practices, is articulated in the literature. This concept was examined in a 2006 brief by Thernstrom before the United States Commission on Civil Rights held in Washington, D.C. on the issue of diversity and law. Thernstrom wrote that when we measure or define diversity we must understand that it is an astonishingly elastic and amorphous concept. Furthermore, Thernstrom warned that if our constitutional right to equal protection under the laws can be suspended whenever an

instrument of government makes the claim that it is acting to enhance diversity, we should be worried.

The ideals espoused by Thernstrom's brief in 2006 allude to a controversy seen in the literature. The controversy states that policies intended to enhance diversity in employment are in fact difficult to evaluate because the concepts are rarely given a clear operational definition. For this reason, some have continued to argue that affirmative action programs that assign benefits or burdens based on group characteristics say nothing about individual merit or disadvantage (Bolick, 1996). Sociologist William Julius Wilson felt that such policies tended to concentrate their benefits on the members of the preferred groups who possess the greatest skills or resources (Jost, 1995). Yale law Professor Stephen Carter stated that for the truly disadvantaged, race-based programs are "stunningly irrelevant." By contrast, Carter notes, race-neutral efforts are aimed more precisely at eliminating barriers to opportunity.

According to Ralph Neas, the Executive Director of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights in 1995, affirmative action is an American success story to millions of women and men who have been given equal opportunity in education and employment. Furthermore, Neas (1995) felt that while many private and public studies corroborate the effectiveness of affirmative action for women and minorities, numerous studies and congressional hearings also show, regrettably, that serious discrimination still exists in our country. Thus, there is still a need for affirmative action as long as there is discrimination based on race or gender (Neas, 1995).

Neas' (1995) argument carried the sentiment of the federal government and could be reflected further in his writings for the Congressional Quarterly Reporter about affirmative action and its perceptions by the American public. For example, Neas stated that many Americans equate affirmative action with quotas or preferences. However, the law is very clear that employers cannot hire or promote strictly by the numbers, nor can they prefer someone simply because of race or gender. Some Americans, noted Neas,

still believe that affirmative action allows employers to hire unqualified workers. However, an affirmative action program involving unqualified individuals would be impermissible under law (Neas, 1995).

The decades of the 1970s to 1980s were considered by Dale (2005) and other scholars to have brought massive desegregation first in the South and later the urban North. Federal desegregation orders frequently required extensive reconfiguration of school attendance patterns along racial lines (Heller, 1992; Jost, 1995; Fiore, 1997; Fenwick, 2001; Mitgang, 2003; Dale, 2005; Tillman, 2005).

Defacto practices

The term de facto is defined in a legal context as an action done in practice, but not necessarily ordained by law. In other words, this definition states that some practices for employment occur "by custom," although the government does not sanction them officially. McCray, Wright, & Beachum (2007) attribute much de facto discrimination as being embedded in what they refer to as the historical legacy of Jim Crow laws. In fact, results of McCray, Wright, & Beachum's survey of 126 school principals in the southeastern United States suggested that defacto discrimination still exists with hiring practices of African-American principals.

The work of Brown (2005) argued that de facto discrimination has influenced the number of African-Americans in leadership roles at predominantly white schools due to integration in the southern states. Ogletree (2004), Alston (2005), and Brown (2005) found that African-American principals who were in charge of predominantly African-American schools usually lost their jobs to white administrators. Jost (1995) concurred by noting that the long history of racial discrimination had shut African-Americans and other minorities out of better paying jobs in the private industry and government service.

DeJure practices

De Jure is defined as what the law says. Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka in 1954 was considered the catalyst of future governmental policies like affirmative

action policies for employment of African-Americans in education (Abney, 1980; Valverde & Brown, 1988; Heller, 1992; Jost, 1995; Fiore, 1997; Fenwick, 2001; Tillman, 2004; and Fultz, 2004). The literature on the impact of Brown v. Board of Education was not considered as prominent for African-American educators or principals.

The literature revealed that African-American school leadership was dramatically changed by desegregation, particularly in the South (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1998; Tillman, 2004). Although some African-American principals were retained in their positions after the Brown v. Board of Education decision, desegregation had a negative impact on employment opportunities. As a National Education Association publication noted, "what is happening . . . is not integration; rather it is disintegration – the near total disintegration of African-American authority in every area of the system of public education" (NEA, 1970).

Several longitudinal studies conducted mainly in the south from 1964 through the 1980s attest to the adverse employment impact for African-American principals. Abney's (1980) study focused on the status of African-American principals in the state of Florida from 1964 to 1965 and 1975 to 1976. Abney (1980) found that in the 1964-1965 academic school years there were African-American principals in all of the 67 school districts in Florida. Ten years later, in the 1975-1976 academic school year, 27 of these districts had no African-American principals. Abney concluded that some districts decreased the number of African-American principals, even though African-American student enrollment increased. During the 1975-1976 academic school year, Florida added 165 public schools, but lost 166 African-American principals. Abney speculated that the composition of Florida school boards figured prominently in the underrepresentation of African-American principals. Most Florida schools board members were white as were the superintendents who controlled the boards.

McCarthy and Zent's (1982) study of 46 school districts of varying sizes in six states found a paradox about the employment of African-American principals. The

paradox was that although the 1970s attempted to reduce employment discrimination in administrative positions for African-Americans through federal legislation and regulation, there actually was a decrease in the proportion of minorities prepared for administrative roles and a decline of representation in certain administrative positions. To understand why the paradox existed, McCarthy and Zent focused their study on two purposes: (1) analyzing administrator characteristics within and across building and central office roles and (2) analyzing administrator characteristics by date of employment. The data from all 46 school districts suggested that the proportion of minorities among those recently hired increased and was more than twice that of the national workforce (11.2%) since 1975. Furthermore, McCarthy & Zent found that male minorities were better represented among recently hired administrators in several line positions; employment in line positions generally led to leadership positions within the district.

The National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (NCEEA, 1987) examined educational leadership throughout the United States in its report, Leaders for America's Schools. The NCEEA's report found several shortcomings within the educational leadership community in American public schools. The NCEEA report along with other reports during the 1980s indicated that minorities had not made significant gains in leadership roles within the public schools since the 1970s (NCEEA, 1987). Other national studies provided similar trends on the number of African-American school leaders in public schools (Jones & Montenegro, 1982; Pounder, 1987).

Craven's (1990) longitudinal study of minorities, including female principals in South Carolina public secondary schools from 1978-1988, revealed trends pertaining to African-American principal employment in the South. Craven's (1990) major findings were that the percentage of minority secondary principals increased at a slow rate. Although the percentage of minority secondary principals and assistant principals increased from 1978 to 1984, percentage of minority secondary principals has since

declined. An important implication found in Craven's study is that the decline in minority principals is more acute for African-American males. Craven felt that the African-American male appeared to be vanishing from the education arena in South Carolina, while the enrollment of African-American students has increased.

In summary, these studies indicated that despite the presence of affirmative action programs and an increased awareness by educators that more African-American administrators are needed, little change has occurred since 1954. According to Fiore's (1997) work for the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), utilizing data from 1987-1988, 1990-1991, and 1993-1994 the numbers of African-American principals declined from 9.2 percent in 1987 to 6.3 percent in 1994 nationally. During the most recent NCES study, African-American principals' employment in all public schools was 10.6percent. From 1987 to 2008, there was a 1.4 percent increase in African-American principals (NCES, 2008). While the percentage of African-American principals is increasing, a 1.4 percent increase in 21 years is small.

This literature review has summarized several themes on African-American principals in America's schools. Though research in this area is limited, early scholars investigated the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors for pursuing an administration position. Other researchers identified challenges that African-Americans face in unfamiliar, white work environments, leaving them feeling like sojourners in a strange place. Research on mobility preferences shows that most African-American principals prefer to work in schools that are near their homes and serve students most like them. Finally, a review of affirmative action policy and related research shows that affirmative action has not, historically, increased the number of African-American principals. Recent data shows, however, a slight increase in the percentage of African-American principals nationally.

The next chapter presents the design and methods that were used to investigate the experiences of African-American principals who chose to work in predominantly white schools in one Midwestern state.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH AND METHODS

The study used qualitative methods to investigate the experiences and perceptions of African-American principals employed in predominantly white schools with less than 20 percent African-American students in their schools. The study used in-depth interviews to elicit responses about participants' experiences, careers, leadership styles, and attitudes regarding their employment and race.

Participants

This study was conducted in a Midwestern state. Participants were twelve African-American principals and assistant principals who worked in all school types (elementary, middle, high) with less than 20 percent African-American students. Out of the twelve participants, seven were principals from seven different districts. The other five were assistant principals who worked in five different districts. Three elementary principals and a middle school principal had relocated from schools where the African-American enrollment was over 20 percent. Four principals were from elementary schools, two were from middle schools, and one was from a high school. All five assistant principals were from high schools. Six of the twelve participants were female. One principal had served in his district for two years. The other eleven principals had served their districts as administrators for four to thirty or more years.

Ten principals began their careers as classroom teachers in districts with African-American student enrollment over 20 percent. Three principals held doctorate degrees in education administration, while the other nine held master's degrees in education, mathematics, or counseling. Seven principals began their administrative career as deans of students in other districts. Five principals started their careers as teachers and were

promoted to administrators in their current schools. In addition, seven were born in urban communities in other states.

Participants were identified through a database from a State Department of Education. The database provided principals' names, schools, school districts, and student enrollments. Pseudonyms were assigned for actual names of the participants, schools of employment, or other identifying information about participants to protect their privacy. All participants were employed in schools with less than 20 percent African-American students during the 2009-2010 academic school year.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection methods for this study included one or two interviews with each participant. The first interview lasted about one hour. Follow-up interviews were used to clarify information in the first interview. Interviews were conducted in person, by Skype, or by telephone. Participants agreed to be digitally audio taped and one participant chose the option of video conferencing via Skype. Although participants had the option to not answer interview questions, none choose this option.

Participants were asked demographic questions about their background, education, career, and personal experiences about their employment as principals. They also were asked open-ended questions to probe their perceptions and attitudes about their work experiences and leadership in schools with students who were racially different from them.

Participants appeared to answer questions about race with emotion and a deliberate choice of words. The researcher noticed that during interviews participants seemed at ease to discuss their viewpoints on race and gender openly. For example, the researcher's last question during interviews was: "Do you think white communities tend to be less frightened by African-American female administrators than by black male administrators?" Most participants said that in their experience African-American male principals were considered more intimidating than African-American female principals.

From the participants' viewpoints, whites considered African-American males as aggressive, mean, and disrespectful. The six male principals grimaced when they expressed this opinion. In answering questions about race, the participants cautioned the researcher to make sure that their opinions were reported as their personal experiences and should not be generalized to others.

A defining moment occurred during the interviews that made the researcher feel a strong rapport with a participant. The eldest female principal, named "Dr. Jane," revealed her perspective. Dr. Jane leaned over and placed her hand on the researcher's shoulder, and said sternly, "White communities are probably more tolerant of African-Americans in general, as long as there are not many African-Americans in the same place!" At this moment, the researcher felt a level of trust that opened up a wealth of rich stories about Dr. Jane's career and personal experience.

The participants appeared willing to confide in the researcher because of commonalities of race, position, and cultural connections. Since the researcher was African-American and held an interim assistant principal position similar to them, the dialogue throughout the interviews was candid. Furthermore, similarities existed in the shared culture of African-Americans in a predominantly white environment. Four of the participants were raised in African-American communities and left their families to pursue college in this predominantly white Midwestern state.

The researcher made another connection with the older participants who were willing to confide in him in a "parental" manner. This was especially true of the older female participants who tended to place their hands on the researcher's shoulder in a comforting way during interviews. This gesture made the interview feel more like a conversation with an endearing relative, which helped the researcher feel at ease and less focused on specific interview questions.

The researcher also felt a connection with the male participants who referred to him as "man," a more informal and brotherly term. They also used phrases like "our

people" to refer to African-Americans. In addition, some participants explained that they were at the end of their careers and could finally tell their stories to a sympathetic listener who valued their experiences.

The researcher felt that because of the perceived connection with the participants, one potential challenge was finding a way to be objective and not allow the connection to cloud the researcher's judgment. One strategy that the researcher used was to be constantly reminded that the interview was temporary and arranged. Also, the researcher had to remind himself that the purpose of the study was to interview the participants and not himself regardless of the connection he felt to his participants.

Interview Questions

Fifteen open-ended interview questions were asked of the participants (see Appendix A). The first six questions focused on the demographic background of the principals. The second two questions focused on their career experiences. The last seven questions focused on the role of race and gender in relation to issues of affirmative action, their careers, and leadership.

Lessons Learned from Pilot Interview

A pilot interview was conducted with an African-American assistant principal who was not included in this study, but was a colleague of the researcher. The researcher's co-chairs attended and observed the pilot interview. After the pilot interview was conducted, the participant and the co-chairs provided feedback. The researcher learned several important lessons from the pilot interview. This participant helped frame some of the interview questions so they would be not be leading but would elicit in-depth and genuine answers.

In order to make sure the confidentiality statement was not too mechanical or technical, the pilot interview allowed the researcher to reword the interview script appropriately. The participant also noted how important it was that the researcher be patient and allow participants more time to talk. Both the participant and the co-chairs

suggested that silence was vital during interviews if the researcher wanted participants to reflect and think.

It was hard for the researcher to learn how to ask more probing questions that would encourage richer dialogue, such as “why” or “because.” Although the researcher prepared questions, follow-up questions were needed to provide experiences that are more detailed. Feedback from the pilot allowed future interviews to be candid conversations that were relevant for this study. The researcher also learned how to use humor to make participants feel at ease.

At one critical point during the pilot interview, the participant was asked to describe experiences he had encountered with race. To the surprise of the researcher and co-chairs, the participant hesitated to describe a racial episode. As soon as the researcher verbally assured the participant that he could trust the co-chairs and be candid, he described his racial experience.

The participant described how during a visit to a local bar he and an African-American friend were being harassed and called racial slurs by two white neighbors. Along with being harassed, both the participant’s and his friend’s wife were being harassed because they were interracially dating. After constant appeals from the participant and his friend to the two white males to leave them alone, the white males started to fight them.

Once the police showed up, only the friend and participant were questioned, while the two white males walked away. Two days after the fight, the white males were arrested. The participant asked the police officer why the two white males were not arrested at the time of the incident. The police officer told him that he did not want to question one of the white males because he did not want to deal with his mother. This infuriated the participant and made him embarrassed because he felt justice was not served, even when he felt he did nothing wrong. In addition, the participant expressed that regardless of the outcome he believed that the town and police supported these two

white males and made him feel like an outsider, especially because he was one of a few African-Americans who resided in the small town.

The researcher learned from this story that issues of race would be difficult to discuss and potentially emotional for participants. The pilot participant's uneasiness to discuss racial matters with his white professors affected him deeply because he wanted to either protect them from the horrors of race, or not offend them. To the shock of the researcher, what seemed puzzling about the participant's reluctance to tell his story was the fact that the participant had known one of the co-chairs for years and had taken several classes from her. To the researcher, this event reminded him of the fact that race is always present and continues to be difficult to discuss openly.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data were analyzed using Atlas ti Qualitative Data Analysis Software. The researcher read and reread the interview transcripts over several times. As a guideline, the researcher followed Fetterman's (1998) suggestions to triangulate information within the participant interviews to search for internal consistency. The researcher searched for patterns within the interviews and sought to find common themes, ideas, or concepts. A coding system was developed to group, sort, compare, and synthesize the participants' responses into common themes, ideas, or concepts.

The researcher applied both inductive and deductive reasoning to assign quotes, key terminology, or other data to corresponding codes. The researcher determined the use of quotes through review of common phrases used by participants to describe their experiences. In addition, quotes had to emphasize a particular thought process or explanation that clarified concepts and ideas as related to the interview questions.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter describes themes that emerged from data collected in semi-structured interviews with African-American principals who worked in predominantly white schools with less than 20 percent African-American student enrollment. Participants described their experiences, attitudes, and perceptions about working in schools with students and communities that had racial backgrounds different from their own. Three predominant themes emerged from the interviews and were universal to all participants. First, participants relied on spirituality to gain access and work in predominantly white schools. Second, principals felt that they were under constant scrutiny, which left them feeling as if they were being "sized up" or "set up" by their districts. Third, participants expressed a desire to serve as role models for both African-American and white students. The remainder of the chapter will summarize and describe each of the three themes supported by direct quotations that represent participants' comments.

Significance of Spirituality

In describing their experiences, all participants discussed the importance of spirituality in gaining and maintaining employment in predominantly white schools. They relied on their inner core values of faith from the beginning of their careers as administrators in predominantly white schools. Faith continued to sustain them in their positions as principals.

Participants explained that spirituality maintained and sustained their confidence and motivation to endure any challenges they faced in their careers. These African-American principals believed that they should "let go, and let God" guide them in their roles as school leaders. They did not describe their spirituality as a means of proselytizing, but as a means of support and guidance from their inner core in their work as leaders. They described the inner core as the internal drive that provided reassurance

or affirmation of their decisions. One middle school principal described spirituality through use of an "inner core" that helped her make decisions:

> The number one thing you have to have is an inner core, like all your decisions should be based on your inner core and you have to tell people what your core is. As you make decisions people do not like, you must remind them of your core (Middle School Principal, Interview, March 17, 2011).

A few principals revealed their spirituality through displays or artifacts in their offices, such as a Holy Bible, posters with biblical quotes, or carved wooden pieces with Jesus on them. All African-American principals disclosed their religious beliefs even though they worked in public schools that have distinct boundaries between church and state. While they did not express their religious beliefs in the school setting, these principals attributed their leadership abilities and dispositions to their spirituality. Participants stated that spirituality was a common foundation that helped them work in predominantly white schools. They expressed the belief that their spirituality led them to become employable, buffered them from adversity, and allowed them to make appropriate decisions. According to their interview comments, participants believed that if they gained employment, it was due to a "master plan" with a purpose initiated by God.

Once they were employed, these principals discussed how their spirituality became a source that either buffered or buoyed them in their careers in predominantly white districts. When these principals felt buffered, they were protected and secure, while the feeling of being buoyed provided a sense of support. Strong spirituality offered these principals a sense of security that guided them in their leadership as principals and in their relationships with their superiors, staff, and communities. When the researcher asked one principal if she had experienced conflicts with parents or the community because of race, her response demonstrated support from spirituality:

> I can't say so. If it is, it's been something that maybe is hidden. When I came from the middle school to the elementary school, I might have encountered it, but I wasn't aware of it. I think God shields me from things like that. Honestly, I really believe that he's protected me from a lot of those things (Elementary Principal, Interview, March 22, 2011).

Some African-American principals admitted to being hesitant to apply for positions in a predominantly white school, even if they had prior experiences as teachers or lower level administrators in predominantly white schools. They reported that their apprehensions came from two potential fears: the fear they would not be hired due to their lack of skills and the fear of not being hired because of their race. Their apprehensions led them to believe that only through prayer would they be hired in a predominantly white school. One principal expressed the importance of prayer in overcoming fears about being ready for employment:

> So then I was thinking, okay, are you prepared for this? How are you going to get prepared in a weekend for this? Yes, you have the education, but you don't have all that experience because these guys haven't really taught you anything as an administrator. So I was nervous being black, being not totally prepared. But then I prayed - I didn't sleep all weekend - I prayed about all of that (Elementary Principal, Interview, April 11, 2011).

Principals believed that if they gained favor with God, their spirituality would allow them to gain employment. They thought their spirituality would provide them with an advantage regardless of their race or experience. Principals felt spirituality allowed them to be mentally free of any apprehensions or frustrations that accompanied stressful situations they encountered as the first African-American principal in their building or district.

Regardless of their experience and confidence in their skills, many principals still claimed that they had gained employment or had relocated in a predominantly white school due to a purposeful "master plan" initiated by God. The principals never professed that they attempted to use their faith to preach to their faculty or students;

instead, they articulated their purpose for being transferred or hired in the district as being part of this "master plan":

> I wouldn't be bashful to say this to anybody; they got to pray through this thing. "Hey, look, this is where the Lord is leading me," and not just to a position, but the Lord's leading me to whatever school district X, Y, Z. If it's the Lord's will, then there's definitely going to be something that's going to happen (Elementary Principal, Interview, March 22, 2011).

Participants were going to trust God's plan even though they did not know details about their future lives as principals. One principal expressed his faith in these terms:

> Can I say today what it is? No. The only thing that I can say is for whatever reason God wanted me here. I don't know, maybe it was that this is a population that typically views people of color as being depicted in movies or television, and they are usually pretty negative in their adult films, etc. I don't why, I really don't, and I guess I have learned a couple of things in my life and one of the things I don't really need to know is why God put me here. As long as it is a good [plan], then I feel like I am doing what God wants me to do (Middle School Principal, Interview, March 17, 2011).

An experienced principal stated that he had relied on his faith in God for his 20 years as a principal:

> Well, to me, everything kind of comes down to a God thing, and I'm a firm believer that God has you at a place for a reason if you're serving Him. I felt like it was like God favors me, and so okay, God, you're putting this before me, so I know this is from you because I'm not seeking it. You just get what you get as you go through life, but the fact is that those that are called according to his purpose, [are following] the Director of Paths (Elementary Principal, Interview, March 22, 2011).

Participants believed that they were not in control of their destinies, and that God wanted them to be in their leadership positions in predominantly white schools. Seven out of the twelve principals talked about their predetermined role as the first African-

American principal in a predominantly white school as being purposely driven and made necessary by God.

Throughout these principals' careers in predominantly white schools, spirituality continued to serve as a guide for them in difficult times of great responsibility and demand. One principal articulated that his spirituality provided continuous support during his first year as principal:

> I remember telling myself just get through the first year because I knew once I got through [that year]; the second year would be easier. I got through my first year and I will never forget that last day of school. I just said, "Thank you, God! Thank you. Thank you for letting me get through my first year." There were times when I was struggling, man. I just didn't know which way to go, because I have never done summative evaluations! (High School Assistant Principal, Interview, March 9, 2011)

Spirituality and commitment to God helped principals lead their respective schools. Their faith helped them face the adversity they felt for being the first African-American principal in their building. Spirituality also helped them make decisions and work with their staff or community. One principal commented on how her faith helped her to create relationships with her staff:

> When I began the job, I started meeting people. I met with every staff member so I could know which way he or she was going. Soon things just fell into place, so I know that was just God (Elementary Principal, Interview, March 15, 2011).

As school leaders, these principals felt that their guidance and support from God would enable them to be better decision-makers, and provided them with the confidence to establish relationships with their constituents and staff.

Through their involvement in the African-American church, which tended to be a tool in grooming their leadership style, some of the principals expressed the connection and development of their decision-making leadership style. How these principals

perceived their spirituality as contributing to their decision making comes from the belief that through relying on faith nothing is impossible to overcome. As active members of their church, many of the principals took leadership roles early on that they attributed to helping them to be more assertive and confident in their careers as teachers and administrators. One intermediate school principal explained her upbringing as the daughter of a pastor as being pivotal in her leadership development:

> Yeah, you know about the leadership that happens in the African-American church? Well, a lot of people don't realize how much of the church background has an effect on dealing with people. You have to learn how to be a take the bull by the horn type of person, and don't sit by and let things just happen. To a certain extent, I try to be mindful of people's feelings and very seldom, my assertiveness sneaks up on people. I will lay back and quietly let people sort of walk on top of me. Then all of a sudden, they don't know where it is coming from, all of a sudden you know I will say okay wait a minute and make my decision (High School Assistant Principal, Interview, June 6, 2011).

Another principal described her role as being a moral and ethical role model, but with the idea that God guides her in her interactions with students and adults:

> I believe God has provided me with a moral and ethical obligation that supersedes the professional one to ensure every student here has an opportunity to learn to grow and to achieve. I say it frequently to kids as well as to faculty members here that when it comes to kids, I try to treat other people's kids the way I and God want someone to treat my kids. When it comes to adults, whether it is a faculty member or whoever, I try to treat people the way I want to be treated. So this is what drives me that even if you are rude or disrespectful to me, I am going to treat you respectfully because that is the way God wants it (Middle School Principal, Interview, March 6, 2011).

These principals held this commonly held idea of treating people with respect and dignity, as they would like to be treated. Furthermore, the fact remained that as moral and ethical role models they felt that God would use them to convey these tenets of their faith in all their interactions positively.

Regardless of the amount of experience these African-American principals had, each had relied on their inner core, or spirituality, to support and help them endure career challenges. In the end, they believed that it was their inner core that led them to seek employment and remain in predominantly white schools as planned by God.

The feeling of being "sized up"

A second prevalent theme that emerged from interviews with the African-American principals in this study was that their race was a factor in their hiring. In their words, eight of the twelve principals claimed that they were always being "sized up" or put "under the microscope" because of their race. They thought that they were being more closely watched and scrutinized by their white superiors and subordinates than were other principals in the district. Others said that they felt inadequate as leaders. They assumed that they had been hired because of their race, and therefore, had to perform.

In addition, some African-American principals reported that their districts set them up to fail by moving them to predominantly white schools that had never had an African-American principal. Only four of the twelve principals believed that their qualifications, not their race, played a role in their appointment to predominantly white schools. Those four principals acknowledged that their race was a bonus to districts that hired or relocated them. The fact remains that eight of the twelve participants felt as if the supervisors in the districts that had employed them were sizing them up.

One participant, who had been an assistant principal for six years, described what it meant to be sized up. He felt discomfort as the only African-American administrator in the district. His feelings of discomfort left him ill at ease with his colleagues:

> There is pressure that you cannot fail. I mean, when you are sitting at meetings, and you are one of two, or maybe the only person of color, sitting amongst your colleagues, and you know it is always this way, even a fool is thought to be intelligent when he keeps his mouth shut. Many times, I just sat at these meetings, and just listened because I don't want to say something that is going to put me in a negative light. A few times, I did. It was only in retrospect, I thought,

> "son of a gun, why did I say that!" Because the first thing you know is that, there are perceptions out there of an African-American man. I knew a lot of them, and I am sure it is self-imposed perceptions (High School Assistant Principal, Interview, March 9, 2010).

The participant continued to feel that he was scrutinized even though he had been in the district for six years. However, he acknowledged that his feelings were internal and not the result of how he was treated by people in the community:

> I think you know this is my sixth year here. I think that I know enough parents in the community that I have earned my keep. I just felt like people were always walking behind me, and so much of that is self-imposed. I realized that it is so self-imposed because, you know, I am thinking that they are sizing me up. They might be dealing with are their own issues. Now I am sitting here thinking … do they like of me? You know, it's self-imposed (High School Assistant Principal, Interview, March 9, 2011).

Even though this participant admitted his feelings of being scrutinized were self-imposed, his feeling sized-up persisted. Other principals shared the experience of self-imposed feelings of being sized up.

The principals stated that their self-imposed perceptions began to shape why they thought they were hired or placed in a predominantly white school. These principals expressed doubt despite their previous career experiences. One principal shared her feelings of disbelief at being transferred to a different school after the beginning of the year. She thought this transfer was because she was African-American:

> Again, it was October, so the school year had started. I hadn't told anyone I wanted to be an administrator. I was in that position as a lead teacher, again, and then had the opportunity at Louis Hamilton Elementary School. And when they called and said I was being relocated, I just thought, okay, I'm black. They're going put me somewhere on the east side whenever they decide to give me a principalship. Then they called on a Friday, and said that I needed to come down to the Central Offices at 3:30. When I got there, they said, "On Monday, we need you to go to Kane Elementary. Congratulations." I'm, like, what? You want me to go where? It's October. There's a principal there. I'm black, and I think most of those people are white. So initially, it was just a shock, I was like you're not

> setting me up, right? I know you're not setting me up because why would you do that? (Elementary School Principal, Interview, April 4, 2010)

The participant not only felt sized-up, but set-up for failure as she reported:

> Sometimes I think people are put in situations so that they can fail, so they can say, "we put one there." But that didn't work (Elementary School Principal, Interview, April, 4, 2010).

When asked if the district made a conscious effort to put an African-American principal in a predominantly white school, she replied:

> You know how you think -- so many different things go through your mind. I know these people. I'm thinking, No, that's not true, that couldn't be a possibility. But you know, sometimes that devil will play things in your head to make you think you're not good enough or something like that. I was thinking, I know that's not why they would put me there, so what have they seen in me that makes them realize that I can do this job? I'm thinking I know I can do this job (Elementary School Principal, Interview, April 4, 2011).

Similarly, some principals perceived that they were being set up for failure, or being sized up frequently, for which they paid a psychological price. As Ogbu's (2004) work described, African-American principals felt that they paid a price by assimilating because whites and some African-Americans believed they "acted white." As described by the participants (over 80 percent), there was no factor that affected them more negatively psychologically than the label given by other African-Americans than the labeling of them as acting white. By far the African-American principals described this fact as causing them to feel more isolated and rejected as a sojourner because they attempted to deliberately assist African-American students more than whites.

Because of these expressed feelings of inadequacy, most African-American principals in the study described questioning both their districts' motives and their own leadership abilities.

Even though these principals had many professional accomplishments, they continued to question their abilities. Their own questions about their competence led to psychological struggles. In some cases, parents' attitudes and comments contributed to principals' feelings of inadequacy. One principal described his personal struggles working with parents. As his remarks illustrate, it could be challenging to work with both white and African-American parents:

> I consider myself a member of the Great Woods community and in the past, I felt the pulse of Great Woods, but not anymore. I know it's still there and I know there are young men and women there, as well as boys and girls that need attention, motivation, and inspiration, but it's not the same community that I came up in. There are just so many people that I don't know. So, when I get phone calls from some young man or woman who's in trouble, and I tell them I'm calling their folks, I get a response like, "Well, who are you?" I respond, "Well, I'm the associate principal." I might get anything from some parents saying, "Oh, yeah, I heard some good things about you," to, "Oh, yeah, you ain't nothing but an Uncle Tom," by some African-American parents. These types of situations hurts, you know, how you approach or deal with your job (High School Assistant Principal, Interview, June 7, 2011).

Whether or not these African-American principals felt that their superiors were justified in challenging their competence, their stories provide a glimpse into their self-doubts when they chose to lead predominantly white schools as principals. The sources of principals' self-doubts were many; their supervisors, colleagues, parents, and their own confidence levels left them feeling constantly scrutinized.

Along with doubts about the real reasons for their promotions, some principals thought that districts' actions had made them question their performance. A female principal told a story about how a fellow African-American administrator responded to an opportunity for promotion within the district:

> The assistant superintendent, the one who was a director in our Central Office, recommended I go across the river. [He] is now retired, but prior to that, he worked in Riverdale. Okay, when he left this district to become a superintendent,

> we were in the process of getting a new assistant superintendent. He threw his hat in the ring. He heard a lot of rumbling. He did not have a PhD, so our district did not want to hire him. He heard all negative stuff from our district. So, he applied for jobs and got the superintendent position in Riverdale. As soon as that was announced, our district was like, "Why did you do that? We were going to hire you as a superintendent here" (High School Assistant Principal, Interview, April 6, 2010).

The participant thought that her colleague felt the district was trying to give him an inferiority complex, so he would accept a lower salary. Her belief was that the district was "playing games." She compared the positions in both districts:

> What the district was trying to do is make him feel that if they had given him the superintendent job, then he would only have to deal with five schools, as opposed to dealing with 30 schools in another district. However, all of a sudden, he said if he had heard all this good stuff before accepting the job in Riverdale, then he probably would have stayed here; but that's not how it happened (High School Assistant Principal, Interview, June, 9, 2011).

This story is an example of the self-doubt expressed by participants in this study. Some of the principals believed that their districts would alter their career aspirations for advancement through what participants described as psychological manipulation. Whether or not districts were practicing psychological manipulation, participants interacted with their districts as if they were being manipulated. Their perceptions, whether true or not, led to these principals' to distrust their superiors' motives.

Many African-American principals felt that their self-doubts made them cautious in their relationships with other administrators and faculty in predominantly white schools. Although superintendents, other principals, or faculty had supported many of these principals, their experiences altered their perceptions of all their previous interactions and made them doubt any positive experiences they had encountered. One principal soon learned how relationships with superiors could worsen which led to even more questioning about personal competence. In his situation, he found being mentored by the principal he replaced a situation that was challenging:

> One of the challenges I had at the beginning, was when I came into my job in November. The former principal became not only my evaluator but also my mentor and that was a difficult relationship (Elementary School Principal, Interview, April 17, 2010).

The participant explained why this mentoring situation made him feel as if he was being scrutinized in all of his work:

> She had a vested interest in the school. She was the principal here for years, I can't remember how many. She had done some programs here, so when staff didn't like what I was doing, they would of course minimize my evaluation or my mentor time. That principal, she would tell me "what you are doing here?" It was almost like I was under a microscope. It was very difficult to operate freely (Middle School Principal, Interview, April 17, 2011).

Another source of feeling as if they were under constant scrutiny came from professional relationships with white educators. Some principals told stories of interactions with whites they worked with that led to mistrust. Feelings of mistrust negatively affected their interactions with colleagues in their schools or districts. Interactions were not comfortable, and participants felt that they had to be careful about their words and actions. One participant described how she behaved with the staff:

> I'd say be careful what you say to people. Be private about things. Be equitable with your staff. Know that people are always watching you, so always be careful what you say. Be professional in everything you do. Don't get too comfortable with them.

When asked whom she meant by "them," the participant responded:

> With white people. Don't get too comfortable with them because they will take something that you say, and they will use it to benefit themselves.

The participant explained in detail that she had an experience in which white people had misconstrued what she had said:

> It has not been extreme, but I've just shared something with - you know, if you share something with someone you don't expect to hear it again. I've shared things with people, and I thought they were private, but I've heard those things again. Moreover, it's nothing that would jeopardize my job or anyone's job. It's just the idea if you come into my office, and the door is closed, and we're having a conversation, I would think that it would be between us, and they think of it differently, I think. Some of us are kind of private people, and when we share things with people, we don't want to hear it again. So I learned that you can't really share things with them because they will . . . you know? Just like how the telephone game is. You start that message, and you say hello, and by the time you get it, somebody went to Utah or something! You have to be careful what you say to people, or they might misconstrue it. As the message is passed on, it might be eventually used against you (Elementary School Principal, Interview, April 11, 2011).

In contrast to the caution expressed in the previous quotation, other participants thought that being African-American did not put them in a position of greater scrutiny. Those African-American principals reported that they thought their districts hired them based solely on their experience. Being African-American was a bonus to increase the districts' diversity. Principals who felt this way tended to have more experience in their current districts as teachers and then as administrators, which may explain their reason for feeling less scrutinized. The feeling of "being set up" did not affect principals who were empowered and felt confident in their leadership abilities. One participant described an experience in which her race was a bonus:

> I think initially what probably elevated me to the status of going from teacher of the year in eight weeks to being an assistant principal was the fact that, yeah, I was African-American. I don't know if anybody was sitting there thinking, "Hey, we're going to really balance the scales. We're going to have an African-American," but I think what happened is that's what the attraction was to begin with. I'm certainly not embarrassed or ashamed to end up saying that yeah, maybe it was simply because I was black, but I also think that after getting a position, I think people would sit back and realize, "Okay, this fellow kind of knows what's happening and knows how to get it done." I think that was probably the initial attraction. At the time, I probably came at the right time because we were coming off the heels of many gang issues, not so much as far as

> in our school building, but citywide (Elementary School Principal, Interview, March 22, 2011).

Whether or not participants viewed being scrutinized because of their race as a stressful situation or a positive one for their districts and themselves, principals acknowledged that their race had been a factor in their being hired for their positions.

A singular unifying factor in how participants thought about the idea of being "sized up" or scrutinized related to affirmative action. Specifically, participants talked about their opinions on whether or not they were affirmative action hires. The idea that race had played a significant or minor role in their being hiring or transferred to another school in their districts could not be avoided. Participants had a variety of responses to possibly being affirmative action hires. Some principals felt the burden of having to succeed for their race. While some principals thought that they had been hired to succeed in their careers, others claimed they were under unjustified scrutiny. Several principals described this feeling as they felt the burden of serving as a representative for an entire race. A participant who had been an assistant principal for over 25 years felt if he were to fail, his failure might make it difficult for other African-American principals to be hired in the district:

> When you hear as an administrator, what do you think about this person? Then you're hearing that person say, "Well, we might not hire this person." Then you're saying to yourself as an African-American principal, "Well, let's give him a shot." However, you hope that they also don't fail because you have that concept of if they fail, you feel a little bit like maybe they're closing the door for the next African-American person coming down the line (High School Assistant Principal, Interview, May, 18, 2011).

Participants found that the potential of being affirmative action hires left them persistently feeling as if they were being held to a different standard. One assistant high school principal described the complicated feelings he had about his career advancement

as related to race. He thought that he and other African-American principals in his situation had what he described as a "victim mentality":

> I think to a degree, there is a victim mentality we have. Even though I hate to admit it, you know there is a victim mentality, there is a stereotype, there is a special name for it, it is a stereotype born ability and you know African-American's have it. To a degree we suffer from that just because of our history, you know just because of our history is so negative. Actually, it was my father-in-law who said you know you can stay where you are as the dean of students, gain no experience and hope that they will give you the opportunity to advance or you can go somewhere else to gain experience and then if you want to go back, you have that experience to bring with you. So with that argument, I thought that makes damn good sense and that is absolutely correct. So initially, I started putting together my interview material and probably for two or three days, I told myself I am just going to go through the interview. I said to myself I know I am not going to get it, but I am just going to go through the process. Then I started to get my things together, and I said - screw that, I want this job (High School Assistant Principal, Interview, March 10, 2011).

The victim mentality this participant expressed is an example of the self-doubt principals experienced. These perceptions led the principals to believe that they were being sized up. Some participants felt pressure that came from what they described as a burden of succeeding for their race. Some felt that they were hired to succeed, while others felt they were the victims of undue scrutiny. They recognized that their self-imposed perceptions needed to be examined as they worked alongside white colleagues in predominantly white schools or districts.

Problem with being a Role Model

The principals expressed a strong commitment to working closely with all their students. In the interviews, it became clear that the participants thought about role modeling in three contexts: for African-Americans in African-American dominated schools, for whites in white dominated schools, and for African-Americans in white dominated schools. The principals described the burdens that they had to overcome to mentor students in these three situations. Interview participants thought that being

constantly recognized as African-American principals was a reminder for them of how influential their actions were in creating both positive and negative impressions in their schools.

These principals expressed their internal struggles concerning the representation of their race to white students, faculty, and communities that had very little interracial contact. Some of the principals described how important it was that they be achieving, hard-working, middle class role models for African-American students in African-American dominated schools. Other principals expressed the significance of their roles as emotional compensation for making the choice to stay in predominantly white schools. All of the principals endured different types of stress in their positions as role models in their schools.

The principals wanted to convey a positive image not only to their African-American students, but also to their staff and the community. An elementary principal of over 20 years expressed his reasons for being a role model for the few African-American students enrolled at a predominantly white school:

> I have planned to come back because I recognized that there weren't very many black professionals you know in our community for our people, for our kids. I had determined that when I grew up, I would come back and be a role model for the kids (Elementary School Principal, Interview, March 14, 2011).

Another interviewee described another example of the power of being a positive role model for the few African-Americans in predominantly white schools:

> I truly believe that being a role model is going to be a very powerful authority, and probably even more so with students that have few African-Americans in the building because I think it's probably even greater because at that point, they can say, "Wait a minute, you're black and you're responsible for all these white people?" I think there's something positive when you take 10 or 11 black young kids and they can see that a person who is running that organization and that school is black. I think that's just absolutely powerful (Elementary School Principal, Interview, March 23, 2011).

Being a positive role model also cut across gender lines, as the female principals proudly described their roles as leaders and women. One assistant principal from a larger high school cited the benefits of portraying an image of a strong African-American woman: "I think for both the kids of color and the kids of non-color I think they're seeing the role of a strong African-American woman is powerful, and it speaks volumes to the students (High School Assistant Principal, female, May 18, 2011)." Another principal described himself as a role model to white students because of a moving conversation he had with a young student:

> My first day at the elementary school I was giving kids high fives as they were leaving the school and getting on the bus. Then one little second grader comes by and says, "What is your name again?" I said, "Oh, it's Dr. Mike." She says, "Oh, I thought it was Dr. Huxtable." Her only relationship with an African-American was Dr. Huxtable from TV (Elementary School Principal, Interview, March 22, 2011).

The commitment of participants to serve as role models for all students is evident from these example quotations. Regardless of the principals' gender, building, or years of experience as principals, they all shared the desire to serve as positive role models for their students and communities. However, this commitment did not come without personal sacrifice.

As African-American principals in schools that served few African-American students, participants reported that they experienced a number of professional dilemmas. Some principals were ambivalent about their decisions to work in white dominated schools; these decisions proved stressful. One principal felt stressed because he felt a personal desire to return to an African-American school. He described his goal of eventually working in an African-American school:

> I have worked in whites schools, but I would love to go back to a black school. To be honest, that is where I will eventually end up because that is why I got into

> this position, that's why after college the first place I wanted to work was with the population of African-American kids who don't know about the power of education (High School Assistant Principal, Interview, March 10, 2011).

All participants talked about their desires to serve as role models for all students. Similarly, all principals expressed a shared commitment in their professional lives to serve their own race. This commitment to serve as role models created emotional stress in their professional lives.

One source of stress for African-American principals in predominantly white schools concerned students' academic achievement. Even though they wanted to serve as role models, participants believed that they lacked influence on African-American students' academic progress. Some principals wanted to do more to help the few African-American students in their schools perform better academically in order to close the achievement gap. Despite their desire to help students, participants did not have the resources they needed to do so. One middle school principal identified a necessary resource—statistical information about academic achievement of the few African-American students in his school:

> I wonder sometimes if I have lost something, if I am being successful in my work. Whether I am not focused enough on the achievement gap of minorities? There hasn't been that many blacks in the town for me to really look at my school, there isn't any and if there were, it was maybe two or three students. How could I really compare statistically the achievement of these two ordinary students to white students? I don't have those stats and if I am looking at the state, then I am asking myself what can I do to close the gap of blacks with whites? What can I do from where I am to help them? (Middle School Principal, Interview, March 15, 2011)

While serving as role models who supported and encouraged academic achievement for African-American students was stressful, principals thought that there were additional stresses depending on the type of school in which they chose to work.

Participants admitted that they purposefully made choices about the type of stress they wanted in their professional lives. They thought that the stress of working in an African-American dominated school would be different than it was working in a predominantly white school. Based on their prior experience working in African-American dominated schools or their perceptions of what it would be like to work in these schools, participants believed stress from working in African-American dominated schools would be greater than their current levels of stress. Therefore, they accepted their career decisions to work in white dominated schools. The level of stress they experienced was acceptable because they believed that being principals in predominantly white schools offered them less stressful careers, access to a better quality of life, and academic success inherent in working in white dominated schools. Several principals described the stress of working in African-American dominated schools. One participant who had worked in an African-American dominated school had personal experience to compare and contrast the stress of working with white and African-American students. His comments express the stress and frustration of not being able to serve as a role model in support of students' academic achievement:

> Well, I had the opportunity to build a new building. There were lots of opportunities. First of all, not a whole lot of behavior problems when I first started here, so that gave me an opportunity to become a better instructional leader. To apply some things that- okay, a lot of the schools on the black side of town, there are lots of behavior problems. I'm just going to be frank with you. I attended those schools. You would spend a lot of time with behaviors, and not be able to focus so much on the part that kids really come to school for-- that's achievement (Elementary School Principal, Interview, April 11, 2011).

Other principals described discipline as a main factor in determining whether they should work in an African-American dominated school. Besides creating stress for them, these principals recognized that most of their time would be spent with behavioral issues, limiting time they could spend serving as positive role models for students. One principal

who had worked in an African-American school described his experiences with behavior issues that detracted from role modeling:

> I think there are easier places to work in besides mostly black schools. I'm sure some of us don't want to work there. I've been at schools where the majority of the kids are minority. Those are not good schools. I can tell you, the discipline concerns are enormous (Intermediate Assistant Principal, Interview, July 12, 2011).

Part of the stress of being a role model in an African-American school had to do with culture. Some principals had worked to change the culture of academic failure in African-American schools. Some principals stated that these schools tended to be schools in need of assistance (SINA):

> I would say the schools that are dominated African-American or have the highest number of African-Americans - those schools that are on the school in need of assistance watch list are in the urban areas (High School Principal, Interview, May 23, 2011).

Participants in this study had chosen not to work in African-American dominated schools which they perceived as stressful situations with limited opportunities to serve as role models for students. Nevertheless, these African-American principals felt that they had left footprints as role models in their current schools. In their estimation, their footprints, or impact as positive role models, were significant enough for them to remain in their leadership positions in white dominated schools. Overall, these principals had made a conscious effort to work in white dominated schools so that they could leave a positive legacy.

Participants believed that their presence in white dominated schools was necessary to create a better school climate. They described better school climates as culturally sensitive and respectful of all races. One participant gave an example of an

activity in his school that was insensitive to African-American students. He took advantage of the opportunity to educate the students and teachers about the inappropriate nature of this activity. His participation as a role model resulted in elimination of the activity. In his words, he thought that getting rid of this practice was a positive educational experience:

> Well, I think in Ford High School, we had many students who probably had not had a lot of encounters with adult African-Americans, especially males. And the picture that TV portrays of us is not the best one. I felt I was able to get kids to see a different view of some things, get kids to understand some things. If nothing else, get them to at least open their minds up to accepting other people's thoughts and views, just little things. When I first went to Ford High School, its National Honor Society major fundraiser was a Slave Day. A Slave Day was where basically one student could buy another student for a day. Then that student would have to carry their books or whatever the case may be. And when I first went in there - because there were no African-Americans at the time, you know, that's just not a good thing to have. Or it's not a good name for it. And in talking with the students about it and the teachers, they understood why I felt the way I felt about it. And there were no issues on changing it. No, no, no, after my first year, that was a practice that they got rid of (High School Principal, Interview, May 23, 2011).

This principals' story of doing away with Slave Day is an example of the ways African-American principals may make positive changes to a predominantly white school climate. Some of the principals felt that their presence in predominantly white schools led to greater racial understanding and sensitivity. Most of these African-Americans mentioned cases of cultural insensitivity when they arrived, yet they felt their leadership and presence, as a role model could be a guide. As stated earlier, some African-American principals in white schools believed that being role models, despite the stress, meant more to them than working in an African-American dominated school.

Regardless of whether these principals felt the need to utilize their faith to combat perceived manipulations by their districts, these principals described their desires for being role models as being positively influential in determining if they should remain in

predominately white schools. As time elapsed from their first years as administrators in the white dominated schools, it appeared that their perceptions of being sized up or set up dissipated. Then, these principals felt compelled to stay in the white dominated school to be leaders and establish a positive school climate by their presence.

Conclusions

In this study, participants shared their personal experiences working as African-American principals in predominantly white schools. The semi-structured format of interviews allowed participants to share their attitudes and perceptions about their experiences. As reported in findings in this chapter, their stories and perceptions centered around three themes that emerged in analysis of the data: relying on spirituality to gain access and work as principals in predominantly white schools, feeling constantly "sized up" or scrutinized because of their race, and desiring to serve as role models for all students with a particular desire to support academic achievement of African-American students.

Chapter five concludes this study of African-American principals who work in predominantly white schools. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section will summarize the three major themes. The second section will present conclusions and analysis of the findings. The third section will present contributions this study makes to the literature on African-American principals. The fourth section will make suggestions for further research and discuss limitations of this study.

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes the experiences of African-American principals working in schools with less than 20percent African-American student enrollment. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section summarizes the findings as they relate to the major themes. The second provides conclusions and analysis of major issues drawn from the research. The third section provides contributions of this study to the literature. The fourth section will suggest areas for further research.

Summary of Findings

This study describes the stories and personal experiences that the African-American principals shared. Through interviews, participants described their daily work as principals, their reasons for continuing to work in predominantly white schools, and any opportunities or impediments they may have encountered in their careers. The three dominant themes that emerged through interviews were the significance that spirituality played in their professional careers, the perception of feeling sized up, and their desire to be role models. Following is a summary of these three themes.

Significance of Spirituality

For these principals spirituality has played a significant role in their careers as administrators. They had relied on their faith from the beginning of their careers. Spirituality continued to sustain them through the challenges they faced. These principals believed that they should allow God to guide them in their roles as school leaders. For them, spirituality was an internal drive that reassured and affirmed their educational decisions. Most believed their employment was a “master plan” predetermined by God.

These principals felt protected, secure, and supported by their faith. Their strong spirituality guided them in their leadership and in building relationships with their superiors, staff, and communities. As school leaders these principals felt that their

guidance and support from God enabled them to make good decisions, minimized lack of self-confidence, and helped them deal with potentially difficult administrative decisions, personnel issues, or disgruntled parents. For these principals, spirituality served as a liberating force by freeing them from stress and helping them cope with isolation. Spirituality served as an important steadfast psychological ally throughout their careers.

The Feeling of Being "Sized Up"

Participants thought that race had been a factor in their hiring. Feeling "sized up" or "under the microscope" because of their race, they thought that their white superiors and subordinates more closely scrutinized them than were other principals in the district. Some principals refused to ask for support for fear of being exposed as being less competent.

Only a few principals believed that their qualifications, not their race, played a role in their appointment to predominantly white schools. The feeling of being sized up led principals to become suspicious of the motives of the district leadership and reluctant to seek support. Some principals never felt they belonged, because they had come from outside the school or district. To some degree, they internalized doubts that may have affected their performance, relationships with superiors or faculty, and made them feel like a racial sojourner.

Problems with Being a Role Model

Principals thought about role modeling in three contexts: for African-Americans in African-American dominated schools, for whites in white-dominated schools, and for African-Americans in white- dominated schools. Their status as African-American principals reminded them how important their actions were in creating both positive and negative environments in their schools. The principals wanted to convey a positive image to their African-American students, staff, and members of the community. They wanted to foster a positive image of African-Americans through their interactions.

Most principals' efforts were to help African-American students close the achievement gap. They wanted students to see them as resources to advance academically. These principals also thought their presence in white-dominated schools was necessary to create a better school climate with differing perspectives on academic and diversity issues. Many principals felt successful overcoming cultural insensitivity through their leadership and presence as role models.

Conclusions

Issues principals raised in this study led to conclusions about the research findings. Conclusions are based on principals' suggestions and experiences about working in predominantly white schools. Principals described their perceptions and styles of leadership in these schools. Conclusions reflect principals' perceptions about the complexities they faced in regards to tensions, race, and professional isolation.

Uniquely Complicated Tensions

Unlike other administrators, participants believed that they had experienced unique tensions because of their race. Tensions centered on the belief that they were role models to everybody and that they paid a price psychologically while dealing with stressors. Many African-American principals felt a deep obligation to perform consistently to a higher degree for their superintendents, other administrators, teachers, or parents in their white dominated schools. These principals wanted to make sure that their administrative decisions demonstrated their abilities.

These principals respected and wanted to assist other administrators they worked with daily. As African-American principals, many participants found that their white colleagues depended on them to handle diversity issues with the students, parents, and teachers in their schools. Principals felt they had a burden in being a racial mediator between white administrators and African-American students or parents. Being a mediator was complicated. Principals felt they were put in difficult situations that they neither initiated, nor anticipated when they had to support white administrators instead of

African-American students or parents. In turn, these situations placed stress on relationships between white and African-American principals who believed they had to choose administrative solidarity over support for the African-Americans they served.

Most African-American principals were expected to help other administrators in white dominated schools, yet doing so came at the expense of additional workload. Their workload increased through their involvement in school initiatives for additional diversity programming and the hiring of minority teachers or administrators. Many times superintendents asked these principals to develop, assist, or initiate hiring processes because they were African-Americans. Ironically, most African-American principals would have participated in seeking minority candidates anyway because they felt like they could be role models or mentors to these potential candidates.

Participants believed that they paid a price psychologically because of their race and differences from others. If they did not make it a high priority to assist their school or district in diversifying faculty, then principals felt that they had to constantly perform at a high level. In addition, their perception that they felt like an outsider or sojourner in a white school took its toll psychologically. By being new and racially different, many principals believed that if they wanted to survive in the white dominated schools they led then they must make attempts to assimilate to some degree.

The type of assimilation that the principals experienced occurred through educational or personal values and through race. These principals felt what they possessed in common with their white colleagues was providing a better quality of life for their families. Through the shared experiences of educational background and middle class values, these principals felt connected with their white counterparts. On the other hand, the principals continued to recognize that they are still isolated outsiders because they were the only African-Americans in the school or district. Hence, attempts at assimilation came at the expense of the principals not truly feeling totally accepted.

Principals said they were committed to relationship building, but felt hesitation because of their outsider view. For this reason, many principals dedicated their administrative focus on developing professional development on cooperative learning communities. Through their efforts as educational leaders in their buildings, they prided themselves publically on leaving a positive fingerprint on the school culture, yet privately they felt disconnected to this culture.

Adding to the feeling of being disconnected, the principals stressed the burden of failing and how devastating psychologically it would be for them and others. These principals described how their administrative positions had such a small window of error because they were the first African-Americans in their school or district, that if they failed they believed it would limit access for other African-American administrators. Using experiences and anecdotes from others principals, participants described how they envisioned the impact of their failure on the perceptions whites would hold about African-Americans. Although minimizing this perception, the principals still described this as being a legitimate concern.

Race is Embedded

At times principals expressed that their own inactions led to self-defeating thinking, which led them to sometimes feel not fully connected to their predominantly white schools. All the principals recognized how much race was embedded in their interactions, decisions, and inability to determine why they were hired. From the onset, principals disclosed how important it was that they did not want to be recognized by their race, but their competence and abilities. At the same time principals recognized that some people generalize race based on behaviors and that made them feel always on display.

As the principals told their stories, they were very deliberate in expressing how much they felt their race affected how they communicated with their staff, parents, other administrators, and superiors. Believing that one bad decision or comment could be

taken out of context and lead to a negative impression weighed heavily on these principals. In addition, the fact that they were the only African-American in the school made them feel like representatives for their race to whites.

The burden of feeling like the sole representative for their race created a dual paradox. On one hand, they recognized that they were African-Americans with somewhat different cultural perspectives than their white colleagues. On the other hand, they recognized that they were not experts on race, but vested in advocating for racial and diversity issues. Sometimes the principals expressed a sense of being overly sensitive to racial issues that portrayed African-Americans in a negative light. Principals explained that sometimes during disciplinary interactions of African-American students, they attempted to focus the attention on the behavior instead of the student as best they could. Principals expressed how difficult it was to hear negative news about the few African-American students that made them feel internally embarrassed, especially when they felt they tried to model and teach proper behavior.

Some of the principals thought that their decisions carried the burden or reward of race. The burden of race is believed to be that they felt it was impossible to know how significant a role their race played in their being hired. The reward of race is that the principals believed that their race served as an added bonus for the school. Regardless of the consideration of race in the hiring process, these principals seemed to understand that they were the bridge between whites and African-Americans in the school and community. These principals felt compelled to mediate between the few African-American families and whites with whom they interacted.

Professional Isolation

Many of the African-American principals felt isolated professionally and always on guard against criticism. The feeling of isolation led the principals to avoid seeking support for administrative matters from superiors or other administrators. Throughout the interviews, principals relayed how self-defeating their inability to ask for support was and

how it created a wedge between them and their white colleagues. Principals recognized that they determined whether or not to initiate or respond to efforts to engage in the white school culture. At no time during the interviews did any of the principals indicate not having support from their superiors or other administrators, but rather they choose to not seek it. By extending the feeling of being scrutinized or set up for failure, they exacerbated their feelings of isolation. With experience and confidence that they were having an impact, these feelings began to fade.

Another factor that led to professional isolation was that these principals felt they were always on guard about their interactions, decisions, and actions as sojourners. Some principals described how they felt they could never totally trust others due to previous experiences in their careers. Although these principals described that they dealt with limited amounts of personnel issues from their faculty, they felt they were always under scrutiny by some parents in the community regarding their credentials. Principals expressed that what made the interactions with the parents professionally isolating was that as principals they had to handle all parent issues with limited support. Coupled with being a racial minority, the principals felt they were isolated and had few people they could seek psychological refuge with in the school or district.

Contributions to Literature

The field of research on African-American principals who work in predominantly white schools or school districts is minimal (McCray, Wright, Beachum, 2005; Tillman, 2005). Literature on African-American principals is about topics on general practice, leadership style, and entrance into the profession. This study's contribution on African-American principals working in predominantly white schools may allow conversations to begin and provide a glimpse of perspectives of those with experiences like these principals. These principals began the conversation with intimate, honest, and painful reflections on their experiences.

Along those lines, this study will continue the dialogue in the literature to tell the story of these African-Americans as being sojourners in areas not like their own racial or community background. The idea of looking at African-American principals as sojourners can be applied to other contexts in the world of employment in the public sector specifically. The more information provided to potential African-Americans and other minorities seeking employment in the country, the greater the understanding of their stories and perspectives. As the states continue to grow in diversity, so will the schools and principals.

As information is made available to policymakers, school districts, and educational administration training programs, the better they can gain insight into factors of recruitment and retention, the teacher pipeline for employing minorities, and the supports that state organizations can provide to assist these principals. It is hoped that this study would allow policy makers to think and see patterns in how environments affect their employees.

Finally, the importance of understanding the experiences of these African-American principals in their work environments that are predominantly white has potential significance for: (1) extending the research on African-Americans in predominantly white cultures as "sojourners", (2) African-American or other minority principal candidates, (3) policy makers (school districts and educational agencies) employing African-Americans or other minorities. Without studies like this, these African-Americans' stories as educators and administrators in the Midwest may be lost. Furthermore, these stories will provide information of their professional experiences and their thoughts about the key issue and role that race plays in their careers.

Agreement with Literature

African-American principals felt like sojourners with specific mobility preferences and various motivations. Findings in this study show similar attitudes and perceptions that were consistent with the research findings of Brass (1995), Gray (2001),

Madsen and Mabokela (2002), and Ogbu (2004). The findings reveal that African-American principals in predominantly white schools exhibit sojourner tendencies, follow similar mobility patterns, and possess the same intrinsic and extrinsic motivations as other principals.

This study upheld Brass' (1995) research that African-American principals need to develop relationships and not act in isolation in predominantly white schools. Whether or not the principals acknowledged their self-imposed isolation, the fact remained that they recognized the need to build on relationships with other whites. Because of the interviews of this study, several principals described that efforts have been made to reach out to others professionally and personally.

According to the work of Gray (2001) on the socialization of African-American principals in white settings, the concept of the sojourner was supported in this study. Gray operationalized the definition of sojourner as meaning to be a type of traveler who moved through areas that were considered foreign, which these twelve African-American principals had experienced. The attribute in common with Gray was that the twelve principals felt they were outsiders in their careers. This study also revealed that these sojourner principals found ways to address their adjustment to assimilate through their faith and interactions.

Furthermore, as the findings from Madsen and Mabokela's (2002) work revealed, some African-American principals often struggled with how to respond to the needs of both minority and majority groups. These principals did express through the interviews that they struggled with inter and intra group conflict constantly in predominantly white schools. For this reason, they felt that, unlike other white principals, they experienced unintended unique tensions that they had to address.

The mobility preferences referenced in the literature regarding African-Americans were supported by this study. The work of Heller (1992), Brown (2005), and Lortie (2009) showing that African-American principals tended to prefer seeking employment in

larger cities is supported. Seventy percent of the principals in this study revealed in their interviews that they preferred and actively sought administrative positions initially in schools with a majority of African-American student enrollment.

This study upheld Vittengl's (1984) and Lortie's (2009) conclusion that principals preferred to seek employment within the same districts that they taught in or served as lower level administrators. Of the twelve principals, seven attempted to seek a higher position within their own districts and were rejected. Over fifty percent of the secondary principals in this study began as deans of students in the districts where they began their teaching careers. Regardless of their preferences to work in their home districts or cities, most principals had to seek employment in other districts unlike their own previous districts.

The research findings from this study were also consistent with the literature in that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations tended to emerge through the participant's stories and experiences. As far as intrinsic motivations, this study found that aspects of the participant's personality, values, and attitudes reflected the negative perceptions described by Leonard and Papalewis' (1987) work. The principal's belief that they were being sized up or set up confirmed the idea that they may have had lack of confidence. In spite of the commonly shared educational or class values these African-American principals felt they possessed with whites, they continued to show self-imposed hesitation in dealing with whites.

Just as Leonard and Papalewis (1987) articulated that external factors led to a perception that schools tended to have a lack of supports for minorities, so too did these principals believe that was the case in their predominantly white districts. At no fault of the predominantly white districts that hired these principals, the lack of support systemically was because for many districts this was the district's first time hiring minorities. Hence, as sojourners these African-Americans principals did expect and

recognize that they would face some systemic issues through their work in the predominantly white schools.

Disagreement with Literature

The principals in this study did not confirm the assumptions of hiring practices made by the work of McCray, Wright, and Beachum's (2007) survey of 302 principals in the southeastern states. McCray, Wright, and Beachum's assumption that race plays a significant role in the hiring of African-American principals was not confirmed by this study. Interestingly, the opposite conclusion to this assertion could be made, because the twelve participants were hired by predominantly white districts with student populations of less than 20 percent African-American student enrollment.

While McCray, Wright, and Beachum (2007) concluded that African-American principals were being placed in schools where majority of students were African-American, this was not the case because this study found that only five of the twelve principals (40%) were hired for their first jobs by districts with greater than twenty-five percent African-American students. Regardless of the fact that they had previously served as lower level administrators, these districts did not hire them but white districts with fewer than 20 percent African-American student populations did hire them. In addition, all twelve principals in the study have remained in their predominantly white schools from five to over thirty years by their choice.

Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the conclusions, further research should investigate several issues about African-American principals and current educational practices that affect them. The importance of the research will have policy and educational training benefits for those choosing to work in predominant cultures. As research provides more information, administrators will be able to understand what expectations and challenges they may face in their employment. As the expectations for African-American administrators to work in

any environment becomes more commonplace, it is important to investigate African-American principal allegiances and conflicts with their school, race, or personal goals.

Since spirituality was found to be of vital importance in how African-American principals made professional decisions, further research as to how African-American principals use their faith for recruiting teachers or mentoring could be useful to see how leadership practices affect hiring practices. As more research is provided, there will be a better understanding of the spirituality of the administrator influences school climate or culture.

Along the issue of hiring practices, more information is needed to investigate how African-American principals feel that they are viable as superintendents in the predominantly white districts where they work. Determining if African-American principals feel that a glass ceiling exists at the highest level in the white school districts that hired them as principals would help school districts to make hiring opportunities more equitable. Lastly, investigation into the perceptions and motivations of white school board members on hiring of African-American principals would be useful for creating better cultural understanding.

Summary of Study

There were twelve African-American principals in this study who worked in predominantly white schools and have continued to remain on their own terms by utilizing their faith and by recognizing their contributions as school leaders. Whether or not they sought employment on their own or were relocated by their superiors to a predominantly white school, these African-American principals accepted their role in a predominantly white school. For some a reliance on their spirituality buoyed and buffered them in their daily work and provided them the reward of staying. For others, the chance to be a role model was their reward and they embraced the challenge willfully. In the end, all twelve African-American principals continued to stay and become positively motivated leaders in their predominantly white schools without regrets.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The interview questions were divided into three sections. The following questions were asked.

I. DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

1. Tell me about yourself
2. Tell me your story about becoming an educator and principal?
3. How did you get to this state?
4. Why did you choose to stay here in this state?
5. Before you received this job, what were some of the feelings or perceptions you had about the school, district, or community?
6. What lasting contribution do you feel you have made in this school, district, or community?

II. CAREER RELATED

1. Can you tell me about your career that led you to be a principal here at this school in this district?
2. Have you had prior experience working in predominantly white populations? Could you provide examples?

III. RACE RELATED

1. What were your thoughts, if any, about the prospect for employment opportunities in this state as an African American principal?
2. Do you feel your minority status affects your leadership style? If so, how?
3. In the past or present as an African American principal, what experiences stand out the most in your career?
4. Did you feel encouraged to remain in a predominantly white school?
5. What advice would you give to another African American principal seeking to work in a predominantly white school?

6. Did some people look at you as an “affirmative action” hire? Has that changed over time?
7. Do you think white communities tend to be less frightened by African-American female administrators than by black male administrators?

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