Leading Ladies: A Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Black Women School Leaders in the Wake of Brown v. Board of Education

ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, LEADING LADIES: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMONOLOGY OF BLACK WOMEN SCHOOL LEADERS IN THE WAKE OF BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION, by JAIRUS E. HALLUMS, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Education, in the College of Education & Human Development, Georgia State University.

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LEADING LADIES: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMONOLOGY OF BLACK WOMEN SCHOOL LEADERS IN THE WAKE OF BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION

by

JAIRUS E. HALLUMS

Under the Direction of Dr. Dionne Cowan

ABSTRACT

This study examined the lived experiences of Black women school leaders in the aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision. Despite the impact of their leadership, Black women school leaders remain undertheorized, especially during the period of desegregation. By understanding their lived experiences, this study aimed to shed light on the implications for contemporary Black women leaders and contribute to future research.

Drawing upon *intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1991) and *sensemaking* (Weick, 1995) theories, this study investigated how Black women negotiated their roles in desegregated schools while grappling with the complexities of their intersecting identities. The research employed a hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Gadamer, 2004) to analyze the data in response to two research questions: (1) *What are the lived experiences of five Black women school leaders who led in the aftermath of the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) decision?* (2) *How did five Black women school leaders make sense of their roles in a desegregated school setting between 1965 and 1985, after the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) decision?* Data were collected using

semi-structured interviews with five Black women school leaders, document analysis, and reflective journaling.

While acknowledging limitations such as sample size constraints and access to specific data, this research provides a rich and comprehensive exploration of a critical aspect of educational leadership history. In examining patterns, commitments, and hindrances identified in previous research, this study offers valuable insights into the unique challenges and triumphs of Black women leaders in education.

INDEX WORDS: *Brown v. Board of Education*, Black Women, School Leaders, Intersectionality, Sensemaking, Phenomenology

LEADING LADIES: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMONOLOGY OF BLACK WOMEN SCHOOL LEADERS IN THE WAKE OF BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION

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JAIRUS HALLUMS

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

in

Educational Policy Studies

in

the College of Education & Human Development

Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA
2025

DEDICATION

For Maggie Pearl Davidson, my grandmother,
who always saw something in me I did not see

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My God, The Almighty— "Thank You" by Benita Washington and "Thandewye" by Nina Simone

For the strength when I had none, the guidance when I needed it most, the comfort when imposter syndrome set in the greatest, the wisdom to let me recognize this as only a season and that greater is coming—Thank you. With this expression of gratitude, I recommit to the charge I've been given.

My Cloud of Witnesses, The Ancestors— "I Remember, I Believe" by Sweet Honey in the Rock

For reminders of the strength of my people—Black people—who stared White supremacy in the face, created and sustained life, and stayed cool in the midst of it all. Thank you.

My Wife, Jackie— "Sweet Love" by Anita Baker

For your patience and love. For allowing me the space to be in my head, quietly wrestling with a million thoughts. I'm grateful for seeing greater *with* me—and sometimes seeing it *for* me when I couldn't. Thank you.

My Children, Aidan, Sariya, Sarafina— "Black Gold" by Esperanza Spalding and "Worthy" by Mavis Staples

For allowing me the opportunity to better myself, and for giving me the space to stare at a computer screen during this season. I pray that you are blessed with educators and school leaders who love you, who hold you to high standards, and who will see greatness in you.

My Parents— "Wind Beneath My Wings" by Gladys Knight

For sacrificing so much. For loving me, and pouring into me, and for protecting me. Thank you.

My Siblings— "Family Reunion" by Jill Scott

For supporting me in the midst of all the marriages, new babies, and new stages of life. Thank you for allowing me to be me.

My Friend, Dr. Jennifer Aycock— "You are My Friend" by Patti Labelle

For your thoughtful reflections and insight for so many years. Thank you for being a true friend and sister. Only God, with such a sense of humor, could have worked it out that one of my best friends in the world would be a White woman from Texas.

My Dynamic Chair, Dr. Dionne Cowan— "Bridge Over Troubled Water" by Aretha Franklin

For your gentle, thoughtful guidance. Thank you. In the midst of the busyness and precariousness of life, I'm grateful for your calm demeanor, your sensitive spirit, and your discerning approach to, not only the dissertation process, but also to my calling. Thank you for praying. This, above all, I'm truly grateful.

My Dream Team, Dr. Joyce King and Dr. Sheryl Croft— "Woke Up This Morning" by Ruthie Foster and "Talkin' Bout a Revolution" by Tracy Chapman

For saying, "yes." I'm grateful for your guidance, your assistance in searching for participants, and your wealth of personal and scholarly knowledge. I do not take for granted that you were a part of my committee; I do not believe anyone else could have. Thank you for believing in me and this study, and for being an example of justice-seeking, justice-loving, justice-living Black women.

My Fellow Dreamers, Sam, Bre, Dominique, Arnitra, Antonio, and Tasha (Cohort XI)— "I Believe" by Fantasia and "Eyes on the Prize" by Dianne Reeves

For walking this journey out together with insight, and support, and laughter. Let's keep dreaming higher and higher. We are called for such a time as this! I'm grateful for each of you; and I'm praying that, in the words of Howard Thurman, the peace of the Eternal be in your every step.

My Inspirations, Mrs. Pearl, Ms. Jessamine, Mrs. Leone, Dr. Peachtree, Dr. Cherry— "Freedom" by Lizz Wright and "Better People" by India.Arie

For being an example of what Black excellence looks like. Thank you for your time, your reflections, and your encouragement. My desire is to continue in the tradition of Black excellence that you exemplified. I only hope that I can make an impression on those in my path as you have made upon me.

My Connectors, **Mrs. Lillian Brock Flemming, Mrs. Mary Jessie, Mrs. Lisa Adams, Dr. Anita Fleming-Rife— "Bless You Real Good" by Twinkie Clark**

For all the organizations and people who accepted my call to search their databases and contact lists to help find participants. Most especially to Mrs. Flemming, Mrs. Jessie, Mrs. Adams, and Dr. Rife, for connecting me with those who would become my participants, thank you. I appreciate the e-mails, texts, and Facetime calls you made so that I could meet these amazing women. Further, thank you for what you've done to pour into others in your own respective vineyards!

My Spot, Black Coffee Atlanta— "Turntables" by Janelle Monáe and "Crown" by CHIKA

For providing the space to write and process, with the energy and spirit that only Black people can provide. I'm grateful for what you offer the community; and I look forward to continuing to be a part of your mission of uplifting our people. Asé.

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1 THE PROBLEM

Background

Black principals make a difference for Black students, and most Black principals are women—"comprising 13% of the total number of women principals and nearly twice the number of Black male principals" (Lomotey, 2022). Given this statement, the purpose of this study explores an additional line of discourse in educational leadership research: it investigates the lived experiences of five Black women school leaders who led in the immediate aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) Supreme Court decision, and how they made sense of their roles in desegregated school settings. While there were many Black educators and leaders who were dismissed, fired, or displaced following the decision, there were others who remained to teach, and lead, in desegregated spaces (Fenwick, 2023). Black female school leaders stood at the cross section of racism and sexism, which shaped how they navigated their leadership roles. This study situated the lived experiences of Black women school leaders within the context of the burgeoning Civil Rights movement, Black Consciousness movement, and Feminist movement. This dissertation focuses on the specific timeframe of 1965 to 1985. Most school desegregation, particularly in the South, did not begin in earnest until the late 1960s into the early 1970s. Further, when desegregation began, students were the primary focus. Focus on teachers and administrators did not take precedent, in many places, until later.

Statement of the Problem

Black women school leaders continue to be oppressed, at least by race and gender (Collins, 2004; hooks, 1981; Shorter-Gooden, 2004). The intersection of these identities is highly influential in the leadership styles of these leaders (Johnson, 2021; Moorosi et al., 2018). This

study explored, in part, why Black women have been undertheorized, particularly during the period of school desegregation. Understanding the lived experiences of Black women leaders may provide insight into the implications for Black female educational leaders who currently lead. Understanding the historical trajectory of these leaders will allow other researchers to extrapolate patterns that may be further theorized in future research.

Theoretical Frameworks for the Study

Black women assistant principals and principals, in the aftermath of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), are the primary focus of this study. *Intersectionality* and *sensemaking* theories, respectively, are used to look at the ways these leaders' lived experiences were shaped by their intersecting identities, as well as how they made sense of their roles in desegregated school settings. Because of the dual nature of the Black woman—representing a racially-marginalized and gender-marginalized individual—*Feminist Theory* and *Critical Race Theory*, respectively, cannot adequately address the unique combination of identities. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1990), as a theory, critiques the limitations of *Feminist Theory*, which tends to focus on White women. Further, it extends beyond *Critical Race Theory*, which focuses entirely on implications of race and racism. Intersectionality, instead, looks at the "interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015). Part of this study sought to look at the lived experiences of Black women through an intersectional lens allows the researcher to understand how these leaders perceived their roles in desegregated school contexts.

In addition to *intersectionality theory*, I used *sensemaking* to address how Black women leaders made sense of their roles, given their intersected identities, after the *Brown v. Board of*

Education decision. Evans (2007) defined sensemaking as "the cognitive act of taking in information, framing it, and using it to determine actions and behaviors in a way that manages meaning for individuals." Black women school leaders' intersected identities inform how they made sense of their roles in the context of desegregated settings. I used some of Weick's (1995) seven properties of sensemaking to explain how the data connected to this framework. The full list of the seven properties are: (1) grounded in identity construction, (2) retrospective, (3) enactive of sensible environments, (4) social, (5) ongoing, (6) focused on and by extracted cues, (7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (p. 17).

Property one, *grounded in identity construction*, connects to how individuals interpret the circumstances they are in, and how those circumstances are shaped by the person's sense of who they are. Property two, *retrospective*, focuses on how people look back at previous events, and extrapolate meaning from it in light of present circumstances. Property three, *enactive of sensible environments*, is where people create the environments they are interpreting. Any actions from these people shape the contexts they are in. Property four, *social*, is where people construct meaning through interaction with others. Property five, *ongoing*, is the continuous interpreting, based upon the new encounters and experiences people have. Property six, *focused on and by extracted cues*, means that people rely on certain information to interpret what is happening around them. Property seven, *driven by plausibility rather than accuracy*, means that people seek to make sense in ways that are most reasonable, not necessarily that are factually precise. While not all these properties are revealed in the data, it was important for me, as the researcher, to fully articulate the properties, so there is an understanding of how this framework is utilized in this study.

Purpose of the Study

This study explored the lived experiences of Black women school leaders, and how they made sense of their roles in desegregated schools after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision. On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court unanimously asserted that racial segregation in public schools violated the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution, and that separate educational facilities for Black and White students were unequal (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954). While hailed as a significant legal victory for African Americans and seen as a sign that America was a beacon of light to the world, there were many adverse consequences (Horsford, 2011; Peters, 2019; Tillman, 2004). These consequences included, but were not limited to, the closing of Black schools, the firing and demotion of Black teachers and principals, the increase of violent protests (especially in the South), and the increase in calls for "school choice" programs (Duignan, 2023; Fenwick, 2023).

The research on Black school leadership has primarily focused on male leaders; therefore, this study explores an underdeveloped area of Black female school leadership. Dunbar (2015) affirmed the significant contribution Black women have played as school leaders before, and after, *Brown*:

> History touts the accomplishments of African American female leaders both before and after the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling. Pioneers such as Sarah Smith, Mary McLeod Bethune, Fannie Jackson Coppin, and several others have been credited for not only fighting against the inequalities that existed for students, but also for paving the way for teachers and educational leaders both past and present to experience a more equitable educational space (p. 21).

While the contributions are known, they are not always represented in the literature; therefore, the purpose of this study sought to contribute an additional element to the conversation on educational leadership, specifically as it focuses on Black women in the immediacy of *Brown I* (1954), *Brown II*, and the subsequent implementation process. With this said, the guiding research questions for this study are:

1. What are the lived experiences of five Black women school leaders who led in the aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision?
2. How did five women female school leaders make sense of their roles in a desegregated school setting between 1965 and 1985, after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision?

Definition of Terms

In this study, "school leader" is defined as a principal or assistant (or vice) principal. Given the vocational precarity after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, many Black school leaders who held one position before the decision may have held a different position after the decision. Thus, this study broadens the scope of leadership to more than just the primary leader (i.e. principal).

Further, the term "desegregation" is used rather than "integration" in this study. The two terms have been used interchangeably in much of the literature regarding the period immediately following *Brown*. Each term, however, carries distinct connotations. Martin Luther King, Jr., in a 1962 speech, articulates the differences by saying desegregation is "eliminative and negative," while integration is "genuine intergroup, interpersonal doing" (King & Washington, 1991). Others assert a difficulty in defining the terms (Irvine & Irvine, 1983), which contributes to the ina-

bility of scholars to adequately study this period. Others still look at the two as a progression: desegregation precedes integration (Fergus, 2017). The varied understandings of the two terms create openings for how narratives about Black school leaders are told. In other words, the framing of a narrative, with either term, may impact perceptions of what Black women who served as school leaders and Black students experienced.

"Desegregation," in this study, also envelopes the implications of the Supreme Court decision. The timeframe for this study was 1965 to 1985, encompassing the beginning of the desegregation process for many states (particularly in the South), all the way through to a period where the presence of Black women in school leadership began to increase. The latter end of this timeframe may not have dealt much with the legal process of desegregation, involving moving students, teachers, and administrators; but it may have dealt with the implications of desegregation, involving the inequities in educational spaces along racial and class lines.

Additionally, since the scope of the study is targeting Black women, it is important to delve into components of oppression that are specific to this group. This study uses the term "gendered racism," (Essed, 1991) where appropriate, which articulates the concurrent experience of oppression based on sexist and racist beliefs. Further, the term "intersectionality" is used, complementarily, to articulate ways in which race and gender oppression play in one's lived experiences that cannot be captured completely by looking at each of those dimensions separately (Crenshaw, 1990).

Lastly, *sensemaking* is "the cognitive act of taking in information, framing it, and using it to determine actions and behaviors in a way that manages meaning for individuals" (Evans, 2007, p. 161). Weick (1995) articulated seven properties of sensemaking: (1) grounded in identity construction, (2) retrospective, (3) enactive of sensible environments, (4) social, (5) ongoing,

(6) focused on and by extracted cues, and (7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. This process, according to Weick (1995) separates from other processes that attempt to understand, interpret and attribute meaning. This framework allowed me the ability to understand how Black women made sense of their roles in different educational spaces than what they had experienced before the *Brown* decision.

Significance of the Study

Black educational leadership has been a burgeoning focus in research in recent decades, as conversations around this specific area of leadership and Black student achievement have been correlated. This study is significant because it addresses a perspective of the *Brown* era that is underdeveloped. Further, this study adds to the field by providing historically marginalized perspectives into the discourse by examining lived experiences during a time in American history that continues to shape cultural, social, and political moments today. There is evidence that Black females led schools prior to *Brown*. Further, women comprised 54% of the principals in U.S. public schools in 2015-2016 (Lomotey, 2022). Knowing that Black women were in leadership positions before *Brown* and continue to lead in larger numbers relative to their Black male counterparts, one wonders 1) what happened in the immediacy of desegregation, and 2) what would have happened if the trajectory of Black women were not stunted.

Limitations of the Study

This study had limitations. The first was the sample size, which could impact the trustworthiness of the study. While this study was focused on five Black women school leaders, the search for living leaders that fit this criterion was broad. Given that the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was in 1954 (with *Brown* II being decided in 1955), Black women school leaders

might have been advanced in age as of this study, depending on the age they assumed a leadership position. The second limitation was, after finding potential participants, was determining whether these participants had reasonable cognitive abilities to recall, and reflect upon, their leadership experiences. The third limitation was access to data specific to the lived experiences of these school leaders, during the selected period immediately following the Supreme Court decision (i.e., 1965 to 1985). Black educational experiences were impacted greatly by demotion, firing, and displacement after the decision. While data about this phenomenon exists, the depth has not been as expansive as it relates to the intersection of race and gender.

Organization of the Study

This chapter provided an overview of this study, as it relates to exploring the lived experiences of Black women school leaders, and how they made sense of their roles, after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision. In Chapter Two, I review the existing literature on Black women school leaders' experiences in schools after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954.

After a historical, social, and political context overview, in order to situate these Black women leaders' experiences, this literature review will focus on the following categories: Pre- and Post- *Brown* Black principal experiences related to race and gender; the commitments (or educational philosophies) of Black school leaders to Black students and Black teachers, before and after *Brown*, as well as hindrances to maintaining that commitment following the decision; and patterns that exist in the extant literature regarding common theoretical (or conceptual) frameworks used to analyze similar studies about African American women in school leadership.

In Chapter Three, I provide the methodological approach, rationale, and procedures used for this study. I use a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology (Gadamer, 2004) to garner

the lived experiences of these Black women. Semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and reflective journaling were all ways of garnering data about these women's experiences and the historical and social contexts in which they led.

In Chapter Four, I provide a description of each one of my participants' lived experiences as Black women in school leadership. Additionally, this section presents the participants' perspectives on how they made sense of their roles in desegregated school settings. I include a description of the national, state, and local education history contexts for each of the participants, since the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision resulted in various responses and interpretations by state and local political leaders. After a description of the contexts to which each participant led within, I provide readers a detailed description of each participant's personal and professional backgrounds in the states they served in (Georgia, South Carolina, Arkansas, and Alaska). Lastly, in response to the research questions, I interwove participants' words, experiences, and narratives to create a portrait, revealing the essence of their lived experiences.

Lastly, in Chapter Five I summarize the study, and provide a discussion about the key findings associated with the research questions. The data will be interpreted through the lenses of *intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1991) and *sensemaking* (Weick, 1995). Further, I discuss the implications for educational practice and policy. Subsequently, I provide recommendations for future research and my final concluding thoughts.

2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview of the Literature

This study sought to explore the lived experiences of Black women who served as school leaders, and how they made sense of their roles in desegregated schools after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision. On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously asserted that racial segregation in public schools violated the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution, and that separate educational facilities for Black and White students were unequal (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954). In effect, "racially segregated schooling facilities could never be 'equal' in the eyes of the law" (Lopez & Burciaga, 2014, p. 800). The Supreme Court provided more commentary the next year as to the implementation of the recently decided judgement (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1955). The Court decided that desegregation should occur with "all deliberate speed," and the vagueness of that directive resulted in desegregation efforts being delayed in school districts across the United States (Orfield & Eaton, 1996, p. xxi). Some states, particularly in the South, requested exemption from the *Brown* mandates citing logistical concerns and demographic barriers that they thought made it impossible to comply with the court's ruling (Liu, 2004).

Brown had implications for social relations; but especially, it held the opportunity for Blacks to also share in the pursuit of the American Dream—which had been out of reach (Tate, Ladson-Billings, & Grant, 1996). While hailed as a significant legal victory for some African Americans and seen as a sign that America was a beacon of light to the world, there were many adverse consequences. These consequences included, but were not limited to, the closing of Black schools, the firing, demotion, and displacement of Black teachers and principals, the increase of violent protests (especially in the South), and the increase in calls for "school choice"

programs (Alston, 2005; Duignan, 2023; Fenwick, 2022; Horsford, 2011; Peters, 2019; Tillman, 2004).

The dismissal of Black educators, and educational leaders, resulted in a social, intellectual, and economic impact on the Black community, since many who were considered middle-class worked in education (Fairclough, 2004; Fenwick, 2022; Foster, 1997; Walker, 2001; Tillman, 2004). The following table displays a concise profile of the Black educators' and leaders' plight following the *Brown* decision.

Table 1

The Impact of Brown v. Board of Education on the Employment Status of Black Educators

Pre-1954	Approximately 82,000 Black teachers 2 million Black children who attended mostly segregated schools.
1954	On May 17, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the case of Oliver L. Brown v. the Topeka (KS) Board of Education.
1954 - 1965	More than 38,000 Black educators in 17 southern and border states were dismissed from their positions.
1975 - 1985	The number of Black students who chose teacher education as a major declined by 66%.
1984 - 1989	New teacher certification requirements and teacher education program admission requirements resulted in the displacement of 21,515 Black teachers.
2001	African American teachers represented 6% of the public school teaching force, whereas African American students represented 17.1% of the public school student population.

Note. (Ethridge, 1979; Hudson & Homes, 1994; Orfield & Lee, 2004; Tillman, 2004b)

The dramatic decrease of Black teachers and principals, in relation to Black students is one of the largest negative vestiges of the desegregation process on the state of the Black community, specifically as it relates to Black education (Walker, 2003; Tillman, 2004; Dempsey & Noblit, 1993). Fenwick (2023) noted that as early as 1952, Thurgood Marshall feared that if *Brown* was successful, Black principals and teachers would be forced from their jobs as educators, leaving newly desegregating school systems with all white educators. While there are data

that exist on the number of Black teachers and principals who were dismissed, demoted, or displaced, literature on the lived experiences of these school leaders, primarily, is scarce. There are mentions of them in some literature after the *Brown* decision; however, deeper studies will not reveal themselves until well after the desegregation process was in effect. I will discuss the scarcity of literature related to Black teachers and principals later in this literature review.

The lack of a governmental response post-*Brown*, alongside the phenomena of White flight and opposition to integrating Black students into predominantly White schools, illustrated a prevailing climate of racism and White self-interest (Bell, 2006; Tate et al, 1996; Wells, 1993). The strategies used to obstruct school integration ranged from Whites enacting violence, to them choosing to relocate from certain neighborhoods rather than having to mix with those they perceived as biologically, socially, and intellectually inferior. "Massive resistance" involved Southern leaders' attempt to paint the African American community as satisfied with segregation (Bell, 2004, p. 13; McRae, 2018). Additionally, school boards utilized their local authority to enact laws allowing districts to close schools and provide tuition vouchers to White families, allowing them to select schools that had no Black students (Wells, 1993). School choice plans were advocated as an alternative to traditional schooling, providing White parents with the option to decide whether their children would go to school with African American students (Peterkin & Jackson, 1994; Ryan, 2004). However, the implications of this in contemporary education has meant that diversity initiatives amongst some of the "choice" plans rarely exists (Fuller & Elmore, 1996; Wells, 1993).

Goals of Literature Review

The goals of this literature review will be to summarize and synthesize information from the extant literature on Black women's lived experiences in schools after the Brown v. Board of

Education decisions in 1954 and 1955, and situate these leaders within a broader historical, social, and political context that complicates traditional narratives regarding educational leaders. Focusing on Black women's experiences in leadership allows their stories to be pulled to the forefront of the broader educational narratives in the U.S. Further, because of the unique lived experiences of Black women, particularly in the post-*Brown* era—which included Jim (and Jane[1]) Crow legal subjugation of the Black community, wartime politics as the Vietnam War grew and shaped discourse, the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, and the rise of the [White] Feminist Movement—this study provides an opportunity to reframe conversations about the contributions of these women on a broader scale, beyond the more obvious impacts within the Black community.

This study sought to understand the lived experiences of Black women leaders who shaped students' lives in the United States. Because the *Brown* decision was implemented in different ways across the country, the implications for students, teachers, and administrators were also different. This study seeks to understand how Black women—in various states—led their schools, and how they made sense of the social, cultural, and political changes that were taking place.

Proceeding the following historical, social, and political context overview, this review will focus on the following categories: Pre- and Post- *Brown* Black principal experiences related to race and gender; the commitments (or educational philosophies) of Black women school leaders to Black students and Black teachers, before and after *Brown*, as well as hindrances to maintain-

[1] The term, Jane Crow, has been most connected to the work of Pauli Murray. See Murray, P., & Eastwood, M. O. (1965). Jane Crow and the law: Sex discrimination and Title VII. *Geo. Wash. L. Rev.*, *34*, 232.

ing that commitment following the decision; and patterns that exist in the extant literature regarding common theoretical (or conceptual) frameworks used to analyze similar studies about African American women in school leadership. The guiding questions for this study are:

1. What are the lived experiences of five Black women school leaders who led in the aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision?
2. How did five Black women school leaders make sense of their roles in a desegregated school setting between 1965 and 1985, after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision?

On Race *and* Gender

Philomena Essed (1991) coined the term "everyday racisms" to describe the intersecting and widespread oppressions that many African Americans face in American society. The social and political contexts, after the *Brown* decision, in which Black school leaders led were complex and challenging, primarily due to the racialized subjugation they experienced on a constant basis, in several spheres of society. For example, Allen (2006) used the phrase, "anxieties of citizenship," related to this notion of suspicion, or distrust, in racial relations. This type of challenge would hinder progress, if there was any doubt to the motivations behind certain people's actions. More specific to education and society, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "I have come upon something that disturbs me deeply. I've come to believe we're integrating into a burning house" (Belafonte, 2011, pp. 328-329). This "burning house" impacted the lives of all people, especially Black people, who at that point had to navigate a precarious social environment.

Du Bois (2015) articulated a common conundrum among many people of African descent, in *The Souls of Black Folk*,

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder... He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in the flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face. (pp.14-15)

This notion of being an African American consisted of being caught between seemingly dual identities, according to Du Bois. This "two-ness" might have provoked conflict within individuals while also being the object of immense confrontation and violence outside. Some scholars contend with Du Bois' notion of this often-conflicted self amid an environment of external conflict upon Black bodies. For Black educators and leaders in the *Brown* era, Du Bois' thoughts can provide an entry point into the sensemaking— "the cognitive act of taking in information, framing it, and using it to determine actions and behaviors in a way that manages meaning for individuals" (Evans, 2007)—that took place in educational spaces that may have dramatically shifted. As Black school leaders governed schools, they had to navigate how their racialized selves impacted and informed the contexts in which they led, especially if those contexts were more diverse.

For Black women who were school leaders, the complexity and challenge of being Black and women have been viewed by some researchers as more intense, given the racialized *and* gendered oppressions that they often experienced. Thus, some research has begun to include the notion that race, alone, is insufficient to analyzing the lived experiences of certain individuals. Black women, leading from the late 1950s to early 1980s, were intertwined in the historical, social, and political context that shaped their lived experiences. For example, the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision had far-reaching implications, crossing through multiple aspects of society—nationally and globally. Black women leaders—in various contexts—proved instrumental in shaping ways of knowing, and being, even without receiving their fair acknowledgements. One such context is the contribution Black women made during the Civil Rights era. For example, Collier-Thomas and Franklin (2001) centered the contributions of Black women in the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, respectively, and to provide "sociopolitical analyses [that] examine collectivities and their place in the social environment and political context of their times" (p. 4). In their edited volume, they seek to bring names like Gloria Richardson and Joanne (or Joan) Little, Septima Clarke and Rosa Parks, to the forefront, through biographical accounts and personal testimonies, to situate their roles in social protest movements in the United States. In concert, Farmer (2017) deepens the study of Black women within the Black Power movement, as their roles are more firmly grounded in "black-centered models of…womanhood" (p. 4). The focus was to revolutionize how Black women thought of themselves, as well as how the broader society saw them.

What Collier-Thomas and Franklin (2001) and Farmer (2017) addressed are the gendered imaginations regarding the place, and impact, of Black women, which are key to understanding their contributions to furthering the Black cause. Their work is critical to stand in contrast to

male-centered leadership, and its place in history and literature. Preceding conversations about the contributions of Black women in social justice movements in the mid-20th century, Jones (2009) focuses on the economic impact of Black women, from the time of American slavery, in agricultural settings on family and society primarily, in contrast to the oft-focused contributions to the broader industrial economy. In disrupting the traditional ways in which Black women are often analyzed in historical and theoretical literature, Black female researchers are more inclined to fill in the noticeable gaps in the literature. Who these Black women were is studied, and not who they were perceived to be—which moves the depth of knowledge about this group to a different level.

Various Perspectives on Brown

The *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision comes with varying narratives about its successes or failures, which frame the environments Black female leaders led. Those who have studied the various implications of *Brown*, have examined at its impact through different lenses. Some legal and political lenses have argued that *Brown* strengthened the United States' claim as a beacon of human rights and justice, while others focused on the negative impact of desegregation of public schools, saw it as a failure (Cashin, 2004; Tushnet & Lezin, 1991). The impact of Brown's failure exists in inequitable educational practices and segregated schools in contemporary society (Horsford, 2011; Kozol, 2004; Orfield & Lee, 2006). To some, many would stand with Horsford (2006) in articulating that "*Brown* I's (1954) promise of equal educational opportunities and access for Black children and *Brown* II's (1955) 'all deliberate speed' provision coupled with de facto segregation. White flight, and 'freedom-of-choice' plans rendered the promise of *Brown* empty" (p.31).

In contrast to those who viewed Brown as a failure, Kluger (2004) extensively asserted the benefits:

> Over the next dozen years the Warren Court would hand down decision after decision that followed the path *Brown* had opened. Segregation was outlawed in public parks and recreation areas, on or at all transportation facilities (waiting rooms and lunch counters as well as the carriers themselves), in libraries and courtrooms and the facilities of all public buildings, and in hotels, restaurants, and other enterprises accommodating the public. It was declared unlawful to list on a ballot the race of a candidate for public office. Black witnesses could no longer be addressed by their first names in Southern courtrooms…the high court ruled that state laws forbidding the rite most hateful to the cracker mentality—the joining of white and black in holy matrimony—were unconstitutional. (pp. 754-755)

Others have determined *Brown* to be misrepresented and incomplete. Walker (2018) emphasized a tendency to tell an incomplete story, which leaves out those who truly pushed for, and materialized, justice in society. The American reputation was on the line, as it touted itself as being a beacon of democracy abroad. If *Brown* had not declared that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, how would that have been perceived on the international stage? Tate, Ladson-Billings, and Grant (1996) claimed that *Brown*'s "model of educational equality, coupled with white self-interest, has not produced (and cannot produce) the expansive vision of equality that will lead to equal educational outcomes regardless of physical placement of students" (p. 47). Bell (2005), too, provided a counternarrative, suggesting there may have been (un)intended sacrifices called for in the name of integration. He said,

> Brown's demise is apparent even beyond an analysis of legal doctrine. A quick review of the current statistics on the resegregation of public schools shows that the implementation

> of Brown, through the mechanisms of racial balance and busing, was a failure. Despite hundreds of school desegregation suits, many lasting for decades, most black and Latino students still attend public schools that are both racially separate and educationally ineffective. (p. 1055)

He expounded by saying,

> The passage of time has calmed both the ardor of its admirers and the ire of its detractors. Today, of little use as legal precedent, it has gained in reputation as a measure of what law and society might be. That noble image, dulled by resistance to any but minimal steps toward compliance, but transformed *Brown* into a magnificent mirage, the legal equivalent of that city on a hill to which all aspire without any serious thought that it will ever be attained. (Bell, 2004, p. 4)

Ogletree (2004) furthers what Bell articulates, by stating an unintended consequence, "the violent resistance to integration proved to be more than anyone had imagined" (p. 14).

Beyond Black and White

While Brown's implementation asserted and maintained a Black-White binary regarding race relations (Garcia, 1976; Perea, 1995), where "an individual is a member of the 'majority' or the 'minority,' either White or Non-White" (Bowman, 2001), some extant literature delves into the Latinx experience, to distinguish this group from others—primarily African Americans. The enveloping of minoritized groups in literature is a trend that does not allow for analysis of specific groups' experiences throughout the integration process during this timeframe. For example, the Latinx population was grafted into the White category, but many still experienced segregation (Contreras & Valverde, 1994; Donato & Hanson, 2019; Montoya, 2002).

Other legal cases, such as *Westminster v. Mendez* (1946) and *Cisneros v. Corpus Christi Independent School District* (1970), among many (e.g. *Independent School District v. Salvatierra* (1930); *Delago v. Bastrop Independent School District* (1948); *Keyes v. School District No. 1* (1973)), serve as significant shapers of educational experiences of Latinx children. *Westminster* served as a precursor to the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, although the details of both cases have components that are not similar. Interestingly, the *Brown* decision makes no mention of the *Westminster* case, or the Latinx community, at all (Bowman, 2001). The Black-White narrative in *Brown* could provide insight into the limited conversation about race in America, in that it only focused on Black and White, neglecting other communities of color. The latter case's significance also determined Mexican Americans as an ethnic minority group in the United States, that could not legally be discriminated against with regards to public school desegregation.

Scholars have acknowledged the scant literature dealing with Latinx desegregation experiences in relation to the African American experience (Contreras & Valverde, 1994; Donato & Hanson, 2019; Garcia, 1976; Orfield, Frankenberg, Ee, Kucsera, 2014; Trevino, 2010). These experiences primarily focused on the experiences of students, and not as much on the impact to teachers and school leaders, except where language needs were apparent (Garcia, 1976). Having additional theorization about the plight of Latinx educators and educational leaders may provide an opportunity to compare those experiences with other minoritized groups, and further trace its impact on contemporary circumstances in public schools, today.

With regards to the experiences of Asian students and educators (and educational leaders) in the *Brown* era, the literature, much like that related to the Latinx community, is scant. Hu-

DeHart (2016) noted that, not as widespread, Asian American students—of Chinese and Japanese heritages—were forced to attend segregated schools in the state of California. She argued that because students of Asian descent are seen as highly intelligent, and successful, by certain metrics, that they should still be grafted within the segregation-desegregation narrative. The stories of these students should not be overlooked because their trajectories may have ended up differently than other minoritized students. While it is important to note the implications for students, the literature does not deal with educators or educational leaders; therefore, it is an area that should be researched to understand the experiences of those who worked with this student population, as well as understanding the beliefs, motivations, and thoughts of educating in such a complex period in American history.

Since the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision has been framed in a Black-White binary, other minoritized groups have not had the same attention to their experiences as others. Much like the Asian experiences, Indigenous students and educators have been under researched (Martinez-Cola, 2020). This is because minoritized experiences often get grafted within a broader "minority" category, without proper attention to them respectively. The Indigenous experience is unique in that some scholars, rather than framing it as a "segregation-desegregation" issue, have framed the issue as a "cultural assimilation vs. cultural preservation" (Black, 2002; Pertusati, 1988; Sanchez & Stuckey, 1999). What is insightful to understand is that "as the U.S. Supreme Court prepared to rehear…the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1953, the 83rd Congress passed House Concurrent Resolution 108 and Public Law 280—policies that would terminate federal treaty and trust responsibilities to Native Americans" (McCarty, 2018). Even though this resolution essentially absolved the Court of responsibilities towards Indigenous peoples, with the attention generally focused on the outcome of *Brown*, not much was focused on the

lived educational experiences of Indigenous groups. Child and Klopotek (2014) noted that there are, in broadening the scope of research, "significant opportunities to better understand how race functioned [and functions] in conjunction with educational policy" (p. 6).

Since typically the desegregation conversation is framed within a Black-White binary, some literature does not address the cultural implications of legal proceedings such as *Brown*. It would seem as though "community control, curriculum content, minority student identity, and the role of minority culture with the educational process are the central focus of concern" (Pertusati, 1988, p. 11). The focus of whether one's culture is honored and preserved is the typical trend when negotiating the experiences of this group. Others have proposed a "third way," which included more focus on cultural identity and cultural pluralism (Pertusati, 1988).

As seems to be a trend in the research: broader educational policy research is more prevalent when discussing minority groups (outside of the African American community), than specific focus on student experiences. Even less prevalent is a general focus on educators and educational leaders who had to navigate the policy changes that occurred. As this study seeks to situate the Black woman school leader's experience within a broader socio-cultural context, it is important to note the scantness of literature for most minoritized school leaders. *Brown v. Board of Education* is often framed as a student-focused legal case; but its implications for educators and administrators were significant, too. In the next section of this literature review, I will flesh out the pre-*Brown* educational leader experiences, the post-*Brown* educational leader experiences, as well as lay out how research has discussed the educational commitments of Black school leaders. Lastly, I will survey the theoretical (and conceptual) frameworks that have been utilized in extant literature to study similar areas of research.

Narratives about Black Educational Experiences

Multiple narratives exist about the educational experiences of Black people prior to the Brown v. Board of Education decisions 1954 and 1955. Walker (1996) mentioned that some early scholarship focuses on the unequal access to school resources, disproportionate building facilities, financial limitations, and legal restrictions for the broader community. Others focused not on the state of the resources that were used, but to the deeper impact of segregation on children. Irons (2002), in *Jim Crow's Children*, stated

> What made the enforced separation of black children from white most damaging . . .was not tattered books or untrained teachers, but the stigma of inferiority that segregation inflicted on black children. School officials could buy newer books and hire better teachers for black children, but they could not erase feelings of inferiority from their minds. (p. 63)

Initially, this line of thought was first made in *Roberts v. City of Boston* (1849). Roberts, an African American man, argued that his 5-year-old daughter was receiving unjust treatment by having to "walk through the streets of the city of Boston past five elementary schools for White children to reach the Smith Grammar School, which had been established in 1920 for Blacks," to a school that lacked satisfactory resources, and was in overall poor condition (Alexander & Alexander, 2001, p. 499). Charles Sumner, Roberts' attorney, argued that forcing Black children to attend racially separate schools was to "brand a whole race with the stigma of inferiority and degradation" (Roberts v. City of Boston, 1848, 59 Mass. 198). Later, Thurgood Marshall would use a similar argument in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case.

To be clear: it is important to draw a distinction between the feelings students might have felt in the North versus those in the South. To conflate the two views would diminish the unique environmental circumstances students navigated in both regions. Some Black students in the

North asserted that they would "rather go to school in the South" (Theoharis, 2003, p. 125). This is an example of the implications of de facto segregation in the North, in relation to the de jure form of segregation in the South.

Counternarratives to Black Inferiority

There were other narratives, however, that pushed against perceived notions that Blacks did not have the experience or structures in place to educate Black students (Anderson, 1988; Walker, 1996; Williams, 2005). These narratives hold on to the oral histories and personal testimonies of Black people during segregation, that highlighted a shared sense of community and prepared students for an every-changing world (Fairclough, 2004). Many Black Americans held on to the belief that access to an education would help in the desire for equal citizenship and equated that education with liberation (Fairclough, 2001). Following Emancipation, Blacks built schools as they built communities, developed curricula as they asserted self-determination, and laid the foundation for a strong educator pipeline as they fought for equal standing in America (Anderson, 1988; Fenwick 2022; Tillman, 2004a). This "tradition of excellence," as Tillman (2007) asserted aided in the expanding of the Black community.

Black educators had a "willingness to be involved in the community, their dedication and commitment to the academic achievement of Black children, and their willingness to support one another through various forms of mentoring" (Tillman, 2004). Many scholars agree that while there were challenges to fully integrating into civic society, particularly in the South, the ability for Black people to access some form of education within the community, was ultimately beneficial. Within these post-Civil War contexts, Black school leaders were seen as more than just educational leaders; they were community leaders (Anderson, 1988; Walker, 2018; Tillman, 2008).

While the *position* of principal was designated as the leader within a school, the *role* of the principal seemed to extend from the school into the community. School leaders, like Horace Tate, are examples of leaders who contributed to the advocacy of the Black community regarding equality in education, and access to rights guaranteed by the Constitution (Walker, 2018).

The role of a Black school leader was to provide the space for developing the Black student as an intellectual, an active member of a democracy, and an investor into the Black community. Before the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, Black school leaders—male and female—strived to establish firm, flourishing, and equal footing with Whites. Black women served dual roles as teachers and principals (Tillman, 2004a). While serving in similar types of professional and social activities as Black males in the 19th century, Black female school leaders were often subjected to gender discrimination (Franklin, 1990; Tillman, 2004a). With this understanding of bias, based on race and gender, Black women school leaders' contributions to Black schools should be researched from the perspective of their understanding of their roles in social contexts that were not always favorable to them. In understanding the perception of roles before the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954 and 1955) decisions, this study can frame the evolution of the role of Black women school leaders in the United States.

Overall, when it comes to Black women and men, who served as school leaders, there are more mentions of their accomplishments, credentials, and impact on Black students within Black archival materials than in the broader research space. "Colored Teachers Associations (CTA)," as they were referred, honor the works of their people. The Black Teacher Archive provides this description for these organizations:

> "While the first documented CTA formed in Ohio, state-wide associations began to proliferate in Southern states during the late nineteenth century, and in some Northern and

> Midwestern states during Jim Crow. A national body of these organizations formed in 1903, as the National Association of Negro Teachers, later known as the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools (1907) and then the American Teachers Association (1937).

Within these state-wide organizations, there were publications that articulated updates from educational leaders and educators related to professional development, political and legal analysis, financial statements, professional advancements, and even personal updates, such as retirements, births, weddings, and deaths. This is significant to note because the research after *Brown* does not delve very deeply into the lived experiences of Black school leaders, as much as it does policy implications, student achievement implications, or broader societal implications.

There are few mentions of Black women school leaders in historical, or education (specifically educational leadership), literature prior to the *Brown* decision; and with this, there is little known of the lived experiences of those school leaders. Depending on the region of the U.S., would determine the greatest number of Black women in leadership during this time frame. A few exceptions include Cornelia Bowen, Dr. Deborah Cannon Partridge Wolfe, and Bessie Estell—all who served as a principal in the state of Alabama. Outside of the South, Fanny Jackson Coppin (Philadelphia), Anna Julia Cooper (Washington, D.C.), Sarah Jane Woodson Early (multiple cities), and Hallie Quinn Brown—to name a few—led Black schools and institutes, primarily right after the Civil War.

Black Male Leaders

As it relates to Black male school leaders, the records are few, but do show a greater number of documented school leaders. When looking at historical documents, archival materials from state educator associations for African Americans in the South, as well as news stories,

there are noted exceptions. A few include Booker T. Washington, who was one of the earliest-known Black school leaders in Virginia and Alabama, respectively, in addition to Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, who was a principal-teacher in San Francisco, California from 1859 to 1874 (Tillman, 2004a). John R. Harris was an educator at Washington High School in Blakely, Georgia, before serving as principal of multiple schools: in Jakin, Georgia (1951-1956) before *Brown*, and Damascus, Georgia (1956-1960) and Blakely, Georgia (1960-1970), respectively, after *Brown* (Fleming, 2018; Walker, 2018).

Black males in school leadership, after *Brown*, have been studied more prevalently. Horace Tate and Ulysses Byas, both chronicled by Vanessa Siddle Walker (2009, 2018), are two primary examples. Lesser-known Black male school leaders are mentioned in local, or regional, publications, such as that provided to members in materials for the GTEA. Additionally, *The History Makers*, a digital repository for Black historical figures, has interviews from several Black male *and* female school leaders, who served across the United States—primarily after the *Brown* decision. These organizational materials, and archival videos and documents, serve to note the seriousness of the Black community in preserving its history. While still limited, it provides material for researchers to delve deeper into the philosophies, practices, and motivations of Black educational leaders.

More Black male examples exist in the higher education arena, primarily in Historically Black Colleges and Universities. A notable exception is Howard Thurman, who served on the faculty of Boston University's School of Theology and became the nation's first Black dean of a chapel in a predominantly white institution of higher education, from 1953 to 1965 (Eisenstadt, 2021; Thurman, 1979). While the higher education space had its own set of unique challenges

with integration, the nuances require a separate study. However, the implications of Black male leadership in primarily White, or integrated, spaces warrant additional study.

Black Teachers

Much of the Black educational history research focuses heavily on Black teachers and students (Anderson, 1988; Foster, 1997; Williams, 2005). Throughout the literature, since before the *Brown* decision, has shown an expansion of focus, from the development of Black education, to foundational leaders who were determined to establish a system of education to give students a sense of pride and intellectual rigor. Murtadha and Watts (2005), in their historical analysis of Black educational leadership, articulated three themes that arise out of the experiences of those who led in the past: first, the practice of educational leadership by people of African descent throughout U.S. history; second, connecting education with liberation and fighting to overcome the obstacles of poverty and racism; third, the primacy of community engagement to Black educational leadership. While this historical analysis is substantive, it remains one of few analyses regarding the leadership of Black educational leaders. Further research should be done to develop the knowledge around the leaders, and what guided their leadership in their respective contexts.

Black Students and Brown

The *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) Supreme Court decision was hailed by many as a good step towards the equality for all in the United States. However, there were some who opposed desegregation and its perceived and eventual results, such as Black educators Anna Julia Cooper, Ruby Forsythe, Bernadine Morris, and others (Foster, 1997). Cooper, at the age of 100, responded to the decision by stating that she opposed it because during segregation Black children were taught to be proud of their race and history (Hine, Brown & Terborg-Penn, 1993).

Ruby Forsythe, in agreement, stated, “When the children were integrated into white schools, they lost something. Integration has helped in some ways, but it has hurt our black children in some ways” (Foster, 1997). In referencing the plight of Black teachers, Zora Neale Hurston, author and anthropologist, asserted “it is a contradiction in terms to scream…equality while at the same time spurning Negro teachers” (1955, para. 13). In concert, Senator George McGovern, before the Senate Select Committee, said “The plight of Black school officials…symbolizes the incomplete implementation of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision” (Hearings, 1540). The intermingled arguments from government officials, writers, and educators regarding the complications of the *Brown* decision, reveal the cross-sectional impact of the decision.

While documents, interviews, and other personal communication from those who lived and worked after the 1954 and 1955 decisions exist, confirming certain historical factors, there is disagreement among some scholars regarding the consequences of desegregation on Black principals, and especially on Black students. The previous section in this literature review touches on some of the implications for school leaders, as identified from various sources. However, there seems to be a limitation in the literature regarding how the engagement between Black school leaders and Black students evolved in a desegregated school context. Some scholars asserted that the extended implications of desegregation were to deepen the division between Black educators and leaders from their students and families (Foster, 1997; Walker, 2000). With this division, the implications for the Black community, in general, are of concern.

Further, as it relates to Black students in desegregated schools, race became a factor that had not been before this point (Irvine & Irvine, 1983). Because of this race factor the teacher-student dynamics shifted, which in some cases, adversely impacted how Black students were viewed. This factor, among others, often shaped later conversations on student achievement.

While there has been research connecting Black principals to an increase in student achievement (Bartanen & Grissom, 2023; Lomotey, 1987, 2019; Jang & Alexander, 2022), it is minimal, at best, which leaves questions about implications in today's public education conversations, while leaving wonderings about the root causes. Beyond student achievement, however, there still begs the question of what did loyalty, commitment, and encouragement look like for the Black student in desegregated schools? How did Black school leaders, male or female, continue a pre-*Brown* mission in a post-*Brown* society? This study further seeks to explore how Black female school leaders fostered self-identity, pride, and academic achievement among Black students in desegregated settings.

Firing of Black School Leaders

Irvine and Irvine (1983) articulated the benefits of having Black schools, where Black students could learn. They described,

> In effect, then, black schools were for all intent and purposes black-controlled, controlled in the sense that they were administered by black principals, staffed by black teachers, and served a black student population. More significant to the issue of independence is the fact that these schools represented and took on uniquely stylized characteristics reflective of their members-patterns of communication, cultural preferences, and normatively diffused modes of behavior. (p. 416)

Irvine and Irvine (1983) explained the benefits of Black schools and Black leaders prior to the displacement, demotion, and firing of those Black educators and Black principals, which resulted in major economic, educational, and social consequences for the Black community (Brown, 2005; Fenwick 2022; Hooker, 1970; Orr, 1972; Tillman, 2004).

Tillman (2004b) posed a question that provides an inkling of skepticism as to the implications of the decision: "Was the loss of employment for Black principals one of the (un)intended and (un)anticipated consequences?" Others highlight the legal preparations from the NAACP, for example, prior to the decision in anticipation of the loss of Black educator positions (Karpinski, 2006). The preparation for an adverse impact on Black employment, and then the eventual results, provided a sense of uncertainty for the lives (and livelihoods) of many Black teachers and principals in the South (Horsford, 2009; Karpinski, 2006; Oakley, et al.). Recent scholarship has attempted to deepen understanding of the human impact of these losses.

Changed Perceptions and Roles

Once seen as community leaders, as principals of Black schools, before *Brown v. the Board of Education* (1954), those Black principals who remained in educational positions after *Brown* experienced changing roles and perceptions. Black principals were frequently demoted and made into assistant principals, and even "co-principals," with their White counterparts still in charge (Fenwick, 2022; Hooker, 1970); they were required to teach classes, do clerical and janitorial work, and be the disciplinarians for Black students (Karpinski, 2006). Those who were "kicked upstairs," into central office positions, where they were titled as "assistant superintendents" or "federal coordinators," had no real authority to execute policy (Hooker, 1970). Further, the status of the Black principal in the community was challenged. Some writers note the removal of these leaders as leading to a distorted image of the Negro, particularly to children of all races (Hearings, 5268; Hearings, 4965). John Oliver Killens expounded by saying,

> In "integrated" schools, too many of the symbols of authority are White…If integration is to have any meaning for Black children, integration must be achieved at the level of authority as well as at the student body. I mean Black and White kids must experience some

> Black authority. How can there be incentive without example?...This distorted image of the negro has its negative effect on children too. It gives them a distorted image of this earth and of human potential and ill equips them to live in a world three-quarters of which is colored and fast becoming independent and free. (1965, pp. 85-86; Hearings, 5268)

Samuel Ethridge, executive secretary to the National Education Association (NEA), wrote to Senator Walter Mondale in 1971 saying to "downgrade [the principal] was to downgrade the Black community" (Hearings, 4965).

The fallout from the *Brown* decisions for Black principals prompted the Senate Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity to convene in 1971 to consider the damage that had been done in Black schools and Black communities, particularly, but not limited to, the American South. These consequences are frequently articulated in the literature, but what is not delineated as clearly is a distinction between Black women principals and Black men principals, or an extensive examination of their experiences at the intersection of race and gender. Part of this is because there was not much research done on Black women, which limited understandings of "leadership styles, accomplishments, and lives" of these individuals (Tillman, 2004a). Literature on Black *teachers* often distinguishes Black women and Black men. Benham (1997) identified possible reasons for the lack of research on Black women in educational leadership: the small number of Black women in P-12 leadership positions in relation to their White male, White women, and Black male counterparts; and there being a limited number of Black women and men as researchers to take interest on this specific area. Pollard (1997) added that often research on female administrators does not often articulate whether women of color are included, or whether references to "minorities" includes men *and* women.

Furthermore, as Tillman (2004a) articulated, Black educational leadership contributions focused on women do not receive the same level of credence as White women. “The result is a privileging of knowledge that often devalues the leadership theory and practice of African American female principals in the educational leadership discourse” (pp. 125-126). The implications of not engaging the stories of Black women in educational leadership can skew the narratives about school experiences after 1954. The research does not fully articulate the experiences of these women—however few there may have been—who had to navigate the segregation-desegregation-integration journey in the South. Mrs. Sara T. Blackmon, who served as principal of Beacon Elementary in Decatur, Georgia, beginning in 1956, written in an article in the Georgia Teachers and Education Association (GTEA) “Herald,” but does not receive much more attention elsewhere (Blackmon, 1958, p. 13; City of Decatur, n.d.; Holmes, 2022). The member publication of the GTEA also includes Mrs. Janette Hayes, who became principal of Moses Jackson School in Savannah, Georgia in 1956, and Mrs. Ethel Moore in LaGrange, Georgia (LaGrange Teacher Honored, 1961; McCree, 1961). Further, it was only until the documentary, *The Harvest: Integrating Mississippi’s Schools*, that there was mention of Mrs. Edna Scott, who served as principal in Leland, Mississippi during the integration process in that state (Blackmon, 2023). Outside of the South includes Kathleen Crosby (in Charlotte, North Carolina), Janet Powell (in Akron, Ohio), Edmae Swain (in Omaha, Nebraska), Adelaide Sanford and Alice Young, both from New York (TheHistoryMakers, n.d.).

Theoretical Frameworks in the Extant Literature

Studies that focus on African American women in school leadership use a variety of theoretical, and conceptual, frameworks. In his examination of the extant literature of African American principals from 1993 to 2017, Lomotey (2019) articulated that many researchers employ

Black Feminist Thought, Critical Race Theory, and Standpoint Theory as the primary frameworks. Additional frameworks, according to him, are Feminist, Transformational Leadership, Life Course, and Womanist (p.338). These lenses are used in isolation, as well as in tandem with others, to analyze aspects of Black female leadership.

This study will look at the intersectional aspects of Black women school leaders' identities. Intersectionality, as coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, "is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects" (Ellison, 2017). It is the "location of women of color both within overlapping systems of subordination and at the margins of feminism and antiracism" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1265). In contemporary educational leadership research, the use of intersectionality theory has become more prevalent, as it can engage, and exam, interlocking injustices (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Scanlan & Theoharis, 2016). In using intersectionality as a theory, some scholars seem to be focusing on the leader herself rather than the leadership behavior (Bass, 2009; Horsford & Tillman, 2012; Peters, 2012; Witherspoon & Arnold, 2010). Others, in contrast, focus on organizational goals or management, transactions or efficiency (Larson & Murtadha, 2003; Quantz, Cambron-McCabe, Dantley, & Hachem, 2017).

Black women in leadership are rarely studied through the lens of sensemaking. Sensemaking is a term that originates in organizational theory, coined by Karl Weick, which means "the making of sense" (Weick, 1995, p. 4). It "involves coming up with a plausible understanding—a map—of a shifting world…" (Ancona, 2012). Weick (1995) would affirm this by saying, "People can cope with change in one of two ways. They can adapt to the change by weakening their commitments and changing their actions, or they manipulate the change by reaffirming their commitments and strengthening their actions" (p. 161). How Black women leaders were able to

make sense of the changing social, political, and educational environment around them, shaped how they progressed, as well as how they fulfilled their commitments to their students and communities. McNeal (2011), in her dissertation, conceptualized the sensemaking paradigm of Black women in leadership and investigates their attitudes and behaviors in relation to their personal sensemaking in their roles in relation to their organization's sensemaking. Cobb (2021) assessed the "sensegiving" messages regarding discourse about mental health in Black communities, particularly in the Black Church. Her focus is on how Black female religious leaders make sense of mental health, and how that understanding shapes the messages they convey. The utilization of this lens in the research, as it relates to Black female leaders, seems to primarily be found outside educational leadership literature.

Studies focusing on Black male school leaders have utilized different theoretical, or conceptual, lenses. Frameworks, such as Black Masculine Caring, focus on the behaviors of Black male leaders, as an additional narrative to Black women being seen as nurturers and those who care (Bass, 2016; Bass & Alston, 2018; Smith, 2021). "Black feminist caring," (Collins, 1990, 2002) and "othermothering," (Foster, 1993; Collins, 2000) tend to get attributed to Black women in educational research, with the notion of Black males in education, not receiving the same attention in later. Black males in education, as educators or educational leaders, being analyzed through a lens of care buttresses against how their White male counterparts are viewed, while also destigmatizing the perceptions of Black males.

Much like their Black female counterparts, Black male school leaders are studied through the lens of Critical Race Theory, as a primary lens or conjoined one, which seems appropriate as it centers an aspect of a leader's identity (Haggins, 2017; Miller & Callender, 2018; Smith, 2021.) This shifts the focus from leadership behavior to personal identity, and how that might

impact behavior in the role of the leader. Moving beyond the identity of the leader allows other frameworks, such as Culturally Responsive Leadership to capture the behaviors of Black male leaders (Lomotey, 2022; Smith, 2021). What should be noted is that there is more literature regarding Black male teachers' pedagogy through culturally responsive teaching than there is regarding Black male leaders' behavior through culturally responsive leadership.

The frameworks used to analyze Black educational leaders is important for understanding the motivations, behaviors, and experiences of these leaders. Much of the leadership regarding Black [female] educational leadership is outside of the realm of organizational management, and efficiency literature, which is typical of contemporary educational leadership literature. Rather, it focuses more on the identities of the leader and how those impact/shape behaviors in the role of leadership.

Conclusion

As it relates to this study, the matter of history is well established through personal accounts and historical documents. What continues to provoke conversations is the nature of those lived experiences of Black female leaders in desegregated spaces. More so, what continues to challenge educators and scholars is the extent to which the *Brown* decision has impacted Black students particularly, and the Black community, overall. Much scholarship exists pertaining to adverse impacts of Black students in desegregated school spaces; but that of Black female school leaders' relationships, and engagement, with Black students is scant. Engagement here means a dedicated focus on motivating students towards academic excellence, instilling Black cultural uplift and centrality, and aiding in the cultivation of a positive "self" knowledge and love.

Questions persist on whether a desegregated school context allowed for Black female school leadership to harness this for Black students. Further research is needed to address the

unique experiences and contributions of Black female school leaders in creating equitable and empowering educational spaces for Black students in desegregated school spaces. The implications of this study could provide insight into current educational concerns related to Black students and the perceived "achievement gap."

The lived experiences and perspectives shared through the eyes of the Black female school leaders in this study will allow these often missed or marginalized viewpoints to be voiced, acknowledged, documented, and analyzed through the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality theory and sensemaking (Weick, 1995). In Chapter Three, I provide the methodological approach, rationale, and procedures used for this study. I use a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology (Gadamer, 2004) to garner the lived experiences of these Black female school leaders.

3 METHODOLOGY

Overview of Study

This study explored the lived experiences of Black women school leaders, and how they understood their roles in desegregated schools after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision. This study is significant because it addresses a perspective of the *Brown* era that is underdeveloped. Black educational leadership has been a burgeoning focus in research in recent decades, as conversations around this specific area of leadership and Black student achievement have been correlated. This study adds to the field by providing individuals in a historically marginalized group, perspective and voice into the discourse. There is evidence that Black women led schools prior to *Brown*. Further, women comprised 54% of the principals in U.S. public schools in 2015-2016, with Black female principals outnumbering their Black male counterparts (Lomotey, 2022). Knowing that Black women were in leadership positions before *Brown* and continue to lead in larger numbers relative to their Black male counterparts, one wonders 1) what happened in the immediacy of desegregation? and 2) what would have happened if the trajectory of Black female leaders were not stunted? This phenomenological study asked:

1. What are the lived experiences of five Black women school leaders who led in the aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision?
2. How did five Black women school leaders make sense of their roles in a desegregated school setting between 1965 and 1985, after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision?

In this chapter, I will summarize the process I took to carry out this study, then go in-depth in the following areas:

1. My role as the researcher

2. The methods I utilized
3. The criteria for participants, how they were recruited, and personal/professional profiles
4. How data were collected
5. How data were analyzed

This study explored the lived experiences of Black women school leaders during the desegregation process in public schools in the United States. Because of the uniqueness of the criteria needed to fulfill this study's focus, the research design is spelled out in the following manner. In conducting a hermeneutic phenomenological study (Gadamer, 2004) on the lived experiences of five Black women school leaders following the *Brown v. Board of Education (*1954) decision, my role as the researcher was deeply involved and multifaceted. I was the facilitator of the entire research process, from the initial conceptualization to the final dissemination of findings.

Engaging with the principles of hermeneutic phenomenology was central to my approach. I reflected on my own preconceptions and biases, allowing for a more nuanced interpretation of the data. Analysis involved dialectically moving between the parts and wholes of participants' narratives, uncovering themes, patterns, and meanings while remaining attentive to their voices and perspectives. I contextualized participants' experiences within broader historical, social, and cultural contexts, recognizing the intersecting influences of race, gender, and educational policies.

Finally, in reporting and disseminating findings, I communicated transparently, acknowledging limitations and complexities in the data. Sharing insights with stakeholders and contributing to scholarly discourse were essential aspects of my role, as was advocating for social

change based on the research findings. Throughout the entire process, my goal was to honor participants' voices and experiences while contributing to a deeper understanding of the complexities of leadership in education.

Role of the Researcher

Black women have shaped me in my personal and professional lives. This section of this dissertation manuscript is not large enough to name each one, and how they shaped me into the man I am continuously becoming. This study allowed me the opportunity to shine a light upon the other Black women who shaped other educators and administrators, activists and politicians, ministers and writers, and so many other people like me. In reflecting upon the impact of Black women—in every part of my life— I was afforded the opportunity to pay homage to the Black women school leaders who may not have had their names called, but who had an impact on students and communities.

My role as the researcher was to identify participants, dialogue with them, listen to them, internalize what they said and remembered, reflect upon their stories and my wonderings, and write, and interpret, the findings faithfully. Knowing this topic intertwines with my personal and professional lives, I sought to be attentive to the intersection of my lived experiences with those of this study's participants. My decision to choose phenomenological research was intentional, as it allowed not just the stories of these Black women leaders to be told, but also allowed me, as the researcher, the chance to savor a glimpse of the lived experiences of these women in an ever-changing social, political, and cultural context in America.

As a Black, male educator, teaching in a public-school setting, in an ever-changing society, I have wondered how to engage, honor, and love *all* of my students—while also wrestling with the often disproportionate, unfair, and harmful school experiences of my Black students. In

these multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-national public-school spaces, I wonder if Black students get what they truly need to thrive. As I continue to wrestle with this—with full transparency—I reflect upon the aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, and some of the implications for students who entered desegregated spaces. How did they understand, and engage, this democratic social experiment? How did they understand "being Black" in racially-mixed school settings? How did they continue to learn about who they were, while being encouraged (in some cases, but not all) to embrace the newness of others? With these questions, I am curious about those Black school leaders—female and male—who led in desegregated spaces, who had to make sense of the changes, and ask questions, like their students. I wonder if they wrestled then with what I wrestle with now.

While engaging these questions and wonderings, as the researcher I was mindful of my own preconceived ideas about the time. More personally, I was mindful to monitor my bias and ego, so that the experiences of the interviewees were the focus of my investigation and not my own (Seidman, 2019). As a Black male scholar studying the sensemaking and lived experiences of elder Black women school leaders, I acknowledge the complexity of interpreting narratives that are not my own, but that are rooted in shared cultural and historical struggle. While I share in the broader Black experience and understand some of the systemic challenges these women faced, I am also conscious of the gendered dynamics at play in both the production and analysis of knowledge. My positionality shaped how I approached the research—with humility, cultural reverence, and a deep commitment to honoring these women's voices. I remained aware of how my identity might influence the questions I asked, the silences I noticed, and the interpretations I made. Throughout the study, I engaged in reflexive journaling to ensure that my interpretations

remained aligned with the participants' intended meanings. This awareness enriched the integrity of the analysis and upheld the spirit of collaborative, culturally situated knowledge production.

Methods

This study was qualitative in nature, aiming to explore the lived experience and perceptions of Black women who were school leaders. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth understanding of the subject matter and provides ample data for analysis. Hermeneutic phenomenology (Gadamer, 2004) was employed to capture the lived experience and perceptions from Black women, who led between the years of 1965 and 1985. This methodology was most appropriate—in contrast to Narratology—in that it focused on the *essence* of the lived experience, not just the *account* of the experience. Moustakas (1994) asserted that "in phenomenological studies the investigator abstains from making suppositions, focuses on a specific topic freshly and naively, constructs a question or problem to guide the study, and derives findings that will provide the basis for further research and reflection" (p. 47). Further, hermeneutic phenomenological researchers seek to "reveal aspects of phenomena that are rarely noticed, described or accounted for… illuminate essential, yet often forgotten, dimensions of human experience in ways that compel attention and provoke further thinking" (Crowther et al., 2017, p. 827). This form of phenomenology includes descriptions of what a particular phenomenon is, as well as the interpretation of the phenomena "to search for the fullness of living" (van Manen, 2016, p.16).

Participants

With this said, these Black women, and their leadership experiences, were focused upon in the immediate aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, between 1965 and 1985, as integration implementation took place across the United States. Given the limited number of Black women who served as principals and assistant principals during that time, and

the extensive lapse of time since the 1954 decision, the scope of this research study included the entire United States.

Selection. The criteria for the participants in this study were:

1) Women who identify as Black or African American
2) Black women who served as a principal or assistant (or vice) principal
3) Black women who served as school leaders in the United States
4) Black women school leaders who served between 1965 and 1985 (leadership in a de-segregated school preferred)
5) Black women school leaders who served in an elementary or secondary school setting

Criteria were articulated, posted, and/or presented on the following platforms, or within Black organizational venues, to garner participants' interest: Historically Black Colleges and Universities; Black sororities (Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., and Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.); Black religious institutions (e.g. the Black Church); and Online Social Networks; and Delta Kappa Gamma (an international society of women educators). Additionally, a Recruitment Letter (Appendix C) was sent to out to locate potential participants. Once potential participants were identified, the researcher talked with each interested individual and asked whether each of the requirements were met, according to the Participant Eligibility Form (Appendix D). The participants personal and professional profiles are recorded in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2

Participants' Personal Profiles

Participant Name	Year of Birth	Place of Birth	College Graduated From
Mrs. Pearl	1927	Arkansas	HBCU in Missouri
Mrs. Leone	1934	Virginia	HBCU in Virginia
Ms. Jessamine	1936	Alabama	HBCU in Alabama
Dr. Peachtree	1945	Georgia	HBCU in Georgia
Dr. Cherry	1952	Georgia	HBCU in Georgia

Table 3

Participants' Professional Profiles

Participant Name	Year of Entry into Education	Location of Leadership	Type of School Led and Position Held	Years of School Leadership
Mrs. Pearl	1949	Arkansas	High School Assistant Principal High School Summer School Principal	1968 - 1992
Mrs. Leone	1956	Alaska	Elementary School Principal	1981 - 1987
Ms. Jessamine	1960	South Carolina	High School Assistant Principal Administrative Assistant Middle School Principal	1972 – 1977 1977 – 1980 1980 – 1996
Dr. Peachtree	1967	Georgia	Elementary School Principal Middle School Principal	1985 – 1987

Dr. Cherry	1970	Georgia	Elementary School Assistant Principal Elementary School Principal	1983 – 1986 1986 – 2007

Setting. Given the age of the participants, in-person meetings were encouraged, first. However, if participants resided in a location where I was unable to meet them in person, virtual options were offered utilizing Zoom. To ensure privacy, safety, and comfort, the following places were suggested for interview sessions: participants' residences, private rooms in local community centers, or private rooms in local churches. Creating a safe and trusting environment for participants was paramount to me, as I sought to recognize the sensitivity of the topic and the importance of respecting participants' experiences and identities.

Sampling. This study included five participants, which is consistent with other qualitative research studies (Grillo et al., 2022; Johnson & Fournillier, 2023). The number of participants for phenomenological studies to satisfy saturation can be a minimum of two, to as many as 25 (Boyd, 2001; Creswell, 2013). For this study, purposive sampling, a method in which the researcher develops specific criteria that the participants in the study must meet to be involved (Hays & Singh, 2012), was utilized to select participants who are Black women school leaders in the United States, with experience in desegregated schools after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision. Purposive sampling ensured that the participant had the necessary experience related to the focus of this study. In phenomenological studies, purposeful sampling is utilized because it allows the researcher to identify participants who can provide the amount of detail needed to understand the phenomenon. This study aimed for collecting data from former Black women school leaders who served anywhere between 1965 to 1985.

Ethical principles. I sought institutional review board approval from Georgia State University before research began. This was to ensure complete compliance with ethical guidelines and principles established by the university.

Subsequently, prior to participation, the participants received detailed information about the research purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits. Informed consent was obtained from the participants, ensuring their voluntary participation and confidentiality (see Appendix A). Participants had the choice to choose their own pseudonyms, but declined to do so; therefore, I chose them.

A code sheet was utilized to capture personal information that was not included within the data. The code sheet was saved with password-protected files on my personal computer. If any identifiable information about the participant or others was inadvertently collected during interviews, that information was not transcribed or used for data analysis. No transcription services were used. All interviews were hand transcribed from the recordings. All hand-transcribed transcripts are stored in a password-protected document on the researcher's computer. The researcher's computer is password protected. Ethical considerations, such as protecting confidentiality and ensuring accurate representation, guided my decisions throughout the study.

Data Collection

Interviews. This study utilized three semi-structured interviews as spelled out by Seidman (2019) with each selected participant. The interview is a traditional form of data collection; and for this study, it allowed the participants' experience to be highlighted and acknowledged for their value and work (Creswell, 2013; Seidman, 2019). Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility, while ensuring that the research questions and themes were addressed. The process entailed using an interview guide with open-ended questions to explore their roles, experiences,

challenges, and commitments as Black women school leaders in desegregated schools (see Appendix B). The participants were interviewed a total of three times in person or virtually. These 15 interviews yielded 15 hours and nine minutes of audio recording coupled with 174 typed, single-spaced pages of transcribed interviews. My Data Collection Chart (see Appendix E) provides an overview of the 15 interviews, the date of each interview, and 174 typed, single-spaced pages of transcription data.

All audio and/or video recordings were recorded using my personal iPhone (using Voice Memos) and/or MacBook Pro (using Photo Booth). After each interview was recorded, it was sent to my personal Apple iCloud account, as well as my personal e-mail, which are password protected. Only I have knowledge of these passwords. After five years, all recordings will be deleted and cleared from all my personal devices.

Designing an interview protocol that allowed for authentic sharing while aligning with the research questions was a significant aspect of my role as researcher. During interviews, I sought to actively listen, probe for deeper insights, and navigate sensitive topics with empathy and respect. I sought to make sure that meticulous transcription of interviews and careful management of data ensured confidentiality and anonymity for all participants.

Document Analysis. Additionally, document analysis provided the personal, legal, and social context for the study. "Document analysis is often [combined] with other qualitative research methods as a means of triangulation…[as the] researcher is expected to draw upon multiple…sources of evidence [for] convergence and corroboration through the use of different data sources and methods" (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). This includes personal writings, newspaper articles, Black educational organizational documents, state and local educational records, and minutes

from respective boards of education. The intertwining of interview and document analysis provided a clearer picture of the context these Black women school leaders experienced. I utilized Gadamer's (2004) hermeneutic circle (detailed later in this chapter) to analyze the information that was revealed from the documentation to better understand the phenomenon. This meant skimming or reading information and making meaning from it to determine patterns and implications.

These documents provided some of the parts (in addition to interview narratives) to understanding the whole of the phenomenon related to the lived experiences of these women after the *Brown* decisions. Each of the interview narratives existed within a historical, social, and cultural context; therefore, it was important to get an understanding of context to better understand the circumstances in which these school leaders led. Document analysis focused on archival materials about Black educational leaders from the Atlanta Public Schools archives, Auburn Avenue Research Library, Harvard Black Teacher Archive, Georgia State University Archives, in addition to those such as the *Hearing before the Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity of the United States Senate, Part 10—Displacement and Present Status of Black School Principals in Desegregated School Districts* (1971).

Initial examination of the newspapers, newsletters, memos, Black educator organization documents, and other archival material was to determine how many Black women occupied positions of leadership in schools prior to, and after, *Brown*. For example, in Atlanta Public Schools archival materials, from the early 1970s, I was able to see hiring data, retirement information, and school locations of women who served as vice principals and principals around the time of the Atlanta Compromise. Atlanta-focused materials were further sought within the Auburn Avenue Research Library, and Georgia State University, to contextualize the unique and complex

history of desegregation in the city. Further, in state Black educator publications in the South, provided through the Black Teacher Archive, I could see the lists of school leaders who were apart of these networks, how they were involved in their local contexts, and examples of their dedication to the service of Black children. Lastly, interviews from the *Hearing before the Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity of the United States Senate* provided a glimpse into the federal conversations taking place in the early 1970s that included Black principals and leaders who provided first-hand accounts of their experiences with the transition in their respective locations.

Reflective Journaling. Lastly, I maintained a reflective journal to mark my perceptions and thoughts; I made assumptions that I needed to track while this study ensued. As a hermeneutic phenomenology approach (Gadamer, 2004) was employed for this study, I was aware of the beliefs and values I hold true. Reflectively journaling throughout the stages of this research process served to bracket out what was revealed from participants and what I believed as the researcher (Koch, 1996; Smith, 1999).

Data Analysis

Following each interview session with the participant, I transcribed each one. Prior to data analysis, transcriptions were provided to the five women to confirm the accuracy. When all interviews were transcribed and confirmed, the process of data analysis began.

Phenomenological approaches to data analysis vary. For this study, I aligned with Gadamer's (2004) hermeneutic circle for interpretive analysis. Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy was framed in 1960, then translated from German to English in 1975 and revised in 2004 and 2013. Gadamer (1996) explored the idea of the hermeneutic circle, highlighting the intimate connection between understanding and interpretation. Continuous dialogue and inquiry encourage

the emergence of new insights, prompting further exploration and allowing for the well-rounded unfolding of experiences. Understanding, according to Gadamer, is deeply rooted in a historical engagement with personal encounters in one's lifetime (Laverty, 2003). Gadamer highlighted the importance of the researcher staying focused on the phenomenon when interpreting the "texts," stating that interpretation is, "the first, last, and constant task" (Gadamer, 2004, p.269). It is described as follows by:

(1) Engaging the whole, by immersing myself in the broader context of this study
    a. Immersing myself allowed me to engage in the historical and social contexts these women served within. While Brown v. Board of Education was decided in 1954 and 1955, respectively, the scope of this study was between 1965 and 1985.
    b. Furthermore, immersion required me to mix in the theoretical frameworks, of intersectionality and sensemaking, which undergirded the analysis. The goal was to make sure that my analysis was comprehensive.
(2) Intentionally focusing on the parts, by examining specific pieces of data through the narratives, unique quotations, and themes
    a. Focusing on the parts pushed me to analyze the data closely and meticulously. In identifying specific themes, from specific narratives articulated by the participants, I was able to garner a better understanding of their lived experiences—individually and as a collective group.
(3) Moving between parts and the whole, by testing my assumptions in relation to the information the participants provided and contextualizing the participants' narratives to the larger historical and societal contexts

   a. Moving between parts and the whole provided me the chance to refine my understanding of the data.
   b. Furthermore, moving between the two prompted me to make sure that my data was not isolated from the historical and sociocultural environment.

(4) Refining my understanding through the "fusion of horizons," which meant acknowledging my perspective as the researcher, while "fusing" that understanding with that of the participants
   a. This step meant being honest with myself about my thoughts, assumptions, and fore-knowledge (Gadamer, 2004), and acknowledging it in the reflective journaling process.
   b. I acknowledged my positionality as the researcher, while also being clear about the voices of each woman in this study. It was important that their voices retained the spotlight. The "fusing" of both positions—researcher and participant—is necessary to reveal how engaging with the narratives of the participants developed my perspectives of the phenomenon.

(5) Synthesizing the findings, which meant integrating insights from the parts into a tight, cohesive account that responded to my research questions
   a. This prompted me to utilize the data, and craft a clear, descriptive narrative of participants' experiences as school leaders.
   b. The merging together of experiences helped to highlight ideas that responded to my research questions, offering a different perspective and deeper under-

standing of the phenomenon. In other words, the synthesis clarified the phenomenon of Black women in school leadership and provided a clearer picture of their lived experiences.

(6) Iterative revision, which prompted me to revisit the data in a broader context to refine my analysis of the phenomenon

   a. This type of revision helped me to adhere to the ethical standards established within this study, as well as to the data that was revealed, to maintain trustworthiness in this study.

   b. The process further helped to confirm my interpretations of the data, challenge my assumptions, and confirm that my claims and conclusions were supported by evidence.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that trustworthiness in a study is important for determining its merit. Trustworthiness, according to these researchers, involves credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility confirms the truthfulness of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, I utilized semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and a reflective journal to retain accountability of the true essence of the participants' lived experiences, monitor my own biases, and reflect upon the "dialoguing" (Gadamer, 1996) between myself and each participant. Gadamer (1996) stated,

> When one enters into a dialogue with another person and is then carried further by the dialogue, it is not only the will of the individual person . . . that is determinative. Rather, the law of the subject matter is at issue in the dialogue and elicits statements and counterstatements, and in the end plays them into each other. (p. 347)

Each interview allowed the researcher to garner the truest aspects of the phenomenon studied. Thus, as the researcher, I sought to understand the phenomenon in an effort to bring forth meaning and significance, as a means of liberating the minds of researcher and participants (Gadamer, 1979).

Transferability acknowledges the ability for the findings to apply to different contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, the researcher was not certain whether the findings would apply in different contexts. While the due diligence was done in the research process for this study, this aspect of trustworthiness may not be as relevant.

Dependability asserts that the findings are consistent and possibly repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The steps in the procedure section are clear and follow standard hermeneutic phenomenological (Gadamer, 2004) processes; thus, further research can be done in the same manner. Additional documents in the appendices are included, such as signed consent forms and the interview protocol questions, to provide more insight into the procedures taken in this study.

Lastly, confirmability emphasizes that the findings are not impacted by a researcher's bias or personal motivation (Lincon & Guba, 1985). It refers to the researcher's ability to "listen to the data" and report them as directly as possible (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 201). For this study, this meant after interviews were completed, transcriptions were done by hand and confirmed with participants prior to data collection taking place. Further, this meant monitoring my own biases in a reflective journal, while making sure the true lived experiences of the participants were centered.

This research process of triangulation utilized multiple methods for achieving the most trustworthy data. According to Wilson (2014), triangulation "refers to using more than one particular approach when doing research in order to get richer, fuller data and/or to help confirm the

results of the research" (p. 74). Triangulating or leveraging multiple methods of data collection helps to provide a richer deeper understanding (Wilson, 2014).

Limitations

This study had several limitations. The first was the participant sample size. The search for living leaders that fit this criterion was challenging. Given that the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was in 1954 (with *Brown II* being decided in 1955), these Black women would be at an advanced age. The second limitation was locating Black women school leaders, who served in the aftermath of the *Brown* decision, who still had reasonable cognitive abilities to remember, and reflect upon, their leadership. The third limitation was having access to data specific to the lived experiences of Black female school leaders, during the selected period immediately following the Supreme Court decision (i.e., 1965 to 1985). Black educational experiences were impacted greatly by demotion, firing, and displacement after the decision (Alston, 2005; Duignan, 2023; Fenwick, 2022; Horsford, 2011; Peters, 2019; Tillman, 2004). While data about this phenomenon exists, the depth has not been as expansive as it relates to the intersection of race and gender.

Conclusion

This study aimed to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of five Black women who served as school leaders between 1965 and 1985. Further, it was to understand how they made sense of the roles considering the evolving educational landscape. Individual participants were selected utilizing purposeful sampling, with clearly defined criteria. The sample included Black women participants who served as an assistant principal and/or principal between the established timeframe.

Gadamer's (2004) hermeneutic phenomenology served as the methodology, to better understand the phenomena with the historical and cultural context. Semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and reflective journaling were utilized to capture data from participants and myself as the researcher. Data analysis began after precise transcriptions were completed. A thorough analysis of the data is presented in Chapter four.

4 FINDINGS

Chapter four provides glimpses into the experiences of five Black women school leaders who lead P-12 public schools between 1965 and 1985, and descriptions of how they made sense of their roles in desegregated school settings by means Gadamer's (2004) hermeneutic phenomenological approach, which involved a recursive process of interpretation where I moved back and forth between the parts and the whole. The "parts" in this study are the participant narratives that produced the crystallized themes related to research questions. The "whole" is the phenomenon I am studying, within the historical context of the *Brown* decisions, that entail responses to the overarching research questions. The entire process allowed me to deepen my understanding of the lived experiences of these Black women leaders and how they made sense of their roles in their specific contexts.

In the previous chapter, I provided an overview of how this study was conducted, including the methodology chosen, as well as the means of data collection and analysis. In this chapter, I provide a description of each one of my participants' lived experiences as Black women in school leadership. In presenting these narratives, I sought to bring out the essence of their lived experiences. This said, precise transcriptions were intertwined with the pertinent descriptive information to solidify the findings. Additionally, this section presents the participants' perspectives on how they made sense of their roles in desegregated school settings.

I begin with the description of the national, state, and local education history contexts for each of the participants. The *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision resulted in various responses and interpretations by state and local political leaders. The participants for this study

served as school leaders in the states of South Carolina, Georgia, Arkansas, and Alaska; therefore, the interpretation of the Supreme Court's decision dictated when, and how, desegregation was implemented.

After a description of the contexts within which each participant led, I provide readers a detailed description of each participant's personal and professional backgrounds. After a full portrait for each participant has been illustrated, this chapter will answer the following research questions, from the extrapolated themes from a careful data analysis:

1. What are the lived experiences of five Black women school leaders who led in the aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision?
2. How did five Black women school leaders make sense of their roles in a desegregated school setting between 1965 and 1985, after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision?

To respond to the research questions, the participants' words, experiences, and narratives are interwoven to create an illustration that reveals the essence of the lived experience of five Black women school leaders who served in the immediate decades following the Supreme Court's decisions of 1954 and 1955. Additionally, after I determined themes based on each research question, I made connections to the documents I found and analyzed related to the study of these Black women's lived experiences in public schools between 1965 and 1985. While I connected the findings from the participants' data to the literature review, I bracketed my personal thoughts and placed them in my personal journal. I am mindful of the primacy of the data from the participant interviews; I honor my perspectives, respective to this study, in that journal.

National Context

The *Brown v. Board of Education* decisions of 1954 and 1955 resulted in the universal declaration that racial segregation in public schools violated the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution, and that separate educational facilities for Black and White students were unequal. While the Supreme Court's decisions were final, the implications of those decisions resulted in various interpretations of implementation. Chief Justice Earl Warren stated in the Court's decision

> Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law, for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the negro group…We conclude that, in the field of public education, the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954)

Later in the decision, he acknowledged, "Because these are class actions, because of the wide applicability of this decision, and because of the great variety of local conditions, the formulation of decrees in these cases presents problems of considerable complexity (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954, p. 11)." The concluding thoughts of the decision could be interpreted as allowing for further conversation related to implementation in all states, and not just those involving the five cases that comprised *Brown (*Kluger, 2004; Patterson, 2001*)*. With that said, Kluger (2004) stated that Warren,

> managed to (1) proclaim 'the wide applicability' of the decision and make it plain that the Court had no intention of limiting its benefits to a handful of plaintiffs in a few outlying districts; (2) reassure the South that the Court understood the emotional wrench desegregation would cause and was therefore granting the region some time to get accustomed to

> the idea; and (3) invite the South to participate in the entombing of Jim Crow by joining the Court's efforts to fashion a temperate implementation decree—or to forfeit that chance by petulantly abstaining from the Court's further deliberations and thereby run the risk of having a harsh decree imposed upon it. (p. 710)

The *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision firmly made a declaration as to how public education should look in the United States, while leaving the process of implementation to further consideration.

The Supreme Court's decision in *Brown II* (1955) followed invitations to discuss the May 17, 1954, decision with "the Attorney General of the United States and the Attorneys General of all states requiring or permitting racial discrimination in public education to present their views on that question. The parties, the United States, and the States of Florida, North Carolina, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Maryland, and Texas filed briefs and participated in the oral argument" (Brown v. Board of Education, 1955). In the end, Chief Justice Warren stated,

> While giving weight to these public and private considerations, the courts will require that the defendants make a prompt and reasonable start toward full compliance with our May 17, 1954, ruling. Once such a start has been made, the courts may find that additional time is necessary to carry out the ruling in an effective manner. The burden rests upon the defendants to establish that such time is necessary in the public interest and is consistent with good faith compliance at the earliest practicable date. (Brown v. Board of Education, 1955, p. 349)

The vagueness of the pronouncement left progress towards integration in a precarious state—particularly in the South. Those Southern states were viewed by many, including Warren, to be the ones that needed the most patience and careful maneuvering (Bell, 2004; Kluger, 2004; Ogletree,

2004; Patterson, 2001). And because of this approach, some perceived the decisions to be more symbolic, carrying no practical outcomes for Black children, and playing "into the hands of the integration opponents" (Ogletree, 2004). Therefore, the variety of implementation processes became apparent when many states outside of the South moved to transform their public-school practices, leaving Southern states to retain segregated classrooms (Kluger, 2004; Patterson, 2001). Considering the various approaches to implementation across the United States, I will now provide a brief overview of each state and local contexts of the Black women interviewed in this study. In doing so, it will provide background for the environments they led within.

State Context

Alaska

On January 3, 1959, Alaska became the 49th state. Its admittance as a state, after the *Brown* decisions, uniquely positions itself within this study. The influence of the Russian Orthodox Church missionaries in establishing schools in the early 1800s, shaped the educational experiences of Alaska Native children prior to an official establishment of a state educational system by the American government (Getches, 1977). It was not until 1867 that the territory of Alaska was purchased by the United States government, for $7.2 million, from Russia. In 1884, the United States Congress enacted the Organic Act, which established a civil government and creating the District of Alaska, which designated that children of that territory— "without reference to race"—were to be educated (Barnhardt, 2001; United States Congress, 1884, p. 28). At that time, schools were under the auspices of the U.S. Secretary of the Interior. It was not until 1888 that the Bureau of Education was established within the Interior Department.

In 1905, Congress passed the Nelson Act, which established a separate system of education for Alaskan Natives (Jaeger, 2009). For the next several decades, Native education consisted

of a combination of religious-based learning from missionaries or government-led schooling, where the cultures of Native groups were not included or honored for students (Reyhner & Eder, 2017). While the state of Alaska was one the newest states to join the United States[2], it was not immune to legal challenges from students and their families, alleging discrimination because of their race or ethnicity. Further, challenges arose due to students feeling that their cultures were being diminished or erased through Bureau of Indian Affairs' (BIA) methods.

In 1929, Irene Jones, a mixed 12-year-old girl, was denied entrance to her local school in Ketchikan, Alaska, due to her Indigenous heritage. Despite meeting qualifications of the Nelson Act, which established certain schools for "white children and children of mixed blood leading a civilized life," she was expelled by the superintendent. Her parents sued the school district, in *Jones v. Ellis (1929)*, citing the 14th Amendment, which requires states to provide equal protection of the laws to all people. A federal judge ruled in favor of Jones, which allowed her admission to the public school she had attended. Later in 1975, Molly Hootch, a 16-year-old from Emmonak, and Anna Tobeluk, 18, from Nunapitchuk, sued Alaska for not providing local high schools in predominately Alaska Native Villages. *Hootch v. Alaska State-Operated School System (1975)* forced the state to create high school opportunities for those students residing in primarily rural areas. While just two examples, the state of Alaska had to deal with circumstances related to the intersection of race and education, even though it did not have the length of history as the rest of the United States.

Georgia

The history of education in the state of Georgia is long; therefore, for the purposes of this section, I will focus on what took place after the *Brown* decision. It is important to note that

[2] Hawaii became the 50th state on August 21, 1959.

Georgia operated similarly with most Southern states with regards to the implementation process for public schools. The Georgia legislature opposed the federal mandate from the Supreme Court. Herman Talmadge, the governor at the time, a staunch opponent to the 1954 decision said,

> The United States Supreme Court by its decision today has reduced our Constitution to a mere scrap of paper... The people of Georgia believe in, adhere to, and will fight for their right under the United States and Georgia Constitutions to manage their own affairs. They cannot and will not accept a bald political decree without basis in law or practicality which overturns their accepted pattern of life. (Talmadge, 1955, p.58)

A series of laws disallowed or restricted official enactment of the Court's decree. These laws went as far as "the termination of state and local funding for any school that did desegregate, and authorizing the governor to close such schools" (Mewborn, 2004). A further step consisted of the state of Georgia threatening Black educators who contemplated integrating. One threat was to either leave the NAACP or lose their teaching licenses (Carson, 2003).

Georgia refrained from broad implementation of the *Brown* directive until well into the 1960s. While the state and local officials were adjusting to the court-mandated integration, Black educators continued to build their networks amongst themselves. The Georgia Teachers and Education Association (GTEA), formed out of the Georgia Teachers Association and the Georgia Association for the Advancement of Education Among Negroes, served to provide equal opportunities for all children regardless of their race or color (Walker, 2018). It merged with the all-White Georgia Education Association (GEA) in 1970.

South Carolina

Enshrined within its state constitution in 1895, South Carolina mandated that public schools be segregated by race. The next year the Supreme Court said in *Plessy v. Ferguson*

(1896) that separate facilities were constitutional, so long as the facilities were equal, which further entrenched South Carolina's laws, much like other Southern states. The state of South Carolina, much like that of Georgia, delayed the desegregation process for as long as legally possible. While there are consistencies with other Southern states, as far as legal maneuvers to prevent integration from taking place in public schools, there were acts of legal cases taking place to push for Black students to have access to equal educational opportunities with White students, such as adequate facilities and access to bussing.

One such example of a case that attempted to change the educational environment in South Carolina was *Briggs v. Elliott* (1952), originating from Clarendon County, South Carolina. "For if you had set out to find the place in America in the year 1947 where life among black folk had changed least since the end of slavery, Clarendon County is where you might have come" (Kluger, 2004, p. 4). In another example, Brinson (2020) asserted that,

> In nearby Summerton black customers could enter stores, but they couldn't try on clothes or shoes and couldn't return what didn't fit. In drug stores they could buy ice cream but had to eat it outside. The local diner was off limits. As evening fell a siren blew, and all black residents had to leave the main streets of downtown. A black person existed—or ceased to exist—on white people's terms. (p. 33)

The case involved Black parents suing because of the inferior school resources for their students. This lawsuit involved everything from inadequate facilities to bus transportation. Initially beginning with a request for equal bus transportation, the case evolved to address full equal access to educational opportunity, using the 14th Amendment as the foundation of its argument. Even though *Briggs* was lost in the district court, it was appealed to the United States Supreme Court

and was conjoined with four other cases to become what is known as *Brown v. Board of Education*.[3]

Similarly to Georgia, Black educators built education networks amongst themselves. The South Carolina State Teachers Association, later named The Palmetto Education Association (PEA) was founded in 1900, to allow Black educators to network together across the state. The purpose was to organize an organization of their own, for the sake of their children. It merged with the all-White South Carolina Education Association in 1967.

Arkansas

The history of public education in the state of Arkansas is mixed. Years before the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, the Supreme Court of Arkansas in *Maddox v. Neal (1885)* asserted:

> It is the duty of the directors of a school district to provide equal school facilities for the blacks and whites…it is the clear intention of the constitution (Arkansas) and statues alike, to place the means of education within the reach of every youth. Education at the public expense has thus become a legal right extended by law to all people alike. (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1963, p.1)

While progressive for the time, Smith and Joshua (2003) asserted that the 1885 ruling was not taken seriously[4]. Like other Southern states, Arkansas did not immediately comply with the Court's decision.

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[3] The Supreme Court case of Brown v. Board of Education (1954) was a combination of five court cases: *Briggs v. Elliott* (filed in South Carolina), *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* (filed in Virginia), Gebhart v. Belton (filed in Delaware), and *Bolling v. Sharpe* (filed in Washington, D.C.).

[4] *Missouri ex. rel. Gaines v. Canada (1938)* and *Alston v. School Board of the City of Norfolk, Virginia (1941)* were two cases that, like *Maddox v. Neal (1885)* declared that the quality of education should be consistent for all children and staff, regardless of race. These cases, while significant, did not significantly change the educational circumstances for Black students and teachers.

The ruling from the Supreme Court initiated a period of inconsistent implementation. Many school districts refused to desegregate, and rather attempted "to circumvent the Brown decision by equalizing Black and White teacher salaries, by improving the physical facilities of Black schools, and by adopting the 'freedom of choice' programs" (Smith & Joshua, 2003, p. 84). This strategy was consistent with other states to avoid having to fully integrate public schools.

One of the most significant dates in Arkansas history was September 4, 1957, in Little Rock, when nine African American students attempted to enter Central High School under a court-ordered mandate to desegregate, to threats of violence. It was not until September 23rd that the "Little Rock Nine" attempted to enter the school again, but were removed after threats were made against them. The next day, President Eisenhower ordered troops to serve as escorts and protection for the students. This situation was the most visible, because it was politicized at the national level; but it is one of many examples of how the implementation process was difficult.

While Black teachers and administrators were dismissed and demoted after the United States Supreme Court's decision (Fenwick, 2022; Horsford, 2011; Peters, 2019; Tillman, 2004), some fought in the local courts and were granted relief. One example was *Smith v. Board of Education, Morrilton School District No. 32 (1966)*, where the court declared, "It is our firm conclusion that the reach of the *Brown* decisions, although they specified only pupil discrimination, clearly extends to the proscription of the employment and assignment of public-school teachers on a racial basis" (Patterson, 1981, p. 34). Further legal challenges were organized within networks of Black educators, like the Arkansas Teachers Association (ATA). The ATA, formerly the State Teachers Association of Arkansas was created in 1898. Like many other Black state ed-

ucator associations, this body of educators served to connect, uplift, and develop those who engaged and educated Black children in Arkansas (Patterson, 1981). In 1969, the ATA merged with the Arkansas Education Association (AEA), a predominately White educator association.

Participant Profiles

A profile of each of the five participants is included to provide the reader a glimpse into each participant's personal and professional backgrounds that reveal their lived experiences and how they made sense of their roles in leadership in desegregated schools. Each profile will highlight the personality and uniqueness of each participant. These profiles will include the participants' words, reflections, and stories gathered during the semi-structured interviews. The participants in this study are noted here in the order of age at the time of their interviews, beginning with the most senior:

- Mrs. Pearl, 97, Vice Principal and Summer School Principal in Arkansas
- Mrs. Leone, 90, Principal in Alaska
- Ms. Jessamine, 87, Assistant Principal and Principal in South Carolina
- Dr. Peachtree, 79, Principal in Georgia
- Dr. Cherry, 72, Assistant Principal and Principal in Georgia

Below is the detailed profile developed for each participant. Each profile will begin with a quotation from the participant, to represent the essence of each participant during our conversations in our interview sessions. Lastly, after articulating findings about each participant, I will delve into the findings specific to each research question.

Mrs. Pearl—Arkansas—"Be respectful and demand respect."

Born in Arkansas in 1927, Mrs. Pearl's family stressed the importance of education. While her grandparents were more educated than her parents, she ascribed most of her development as an individual to her parents: her father, a World War I veteran, and her mother, a beautician-turned-school secretary. Her father, whom she esteemed to the highest level, taught her five ideals that she lived by: (1) always look people in the eye, (2) remember that your body is your castle, (3) get your education, so you can take care of yourself, (4) keep a Christian life, and (5) don't get your honey where you get your money. Her father, who always carried a pistol, and was never afraid of White people, was her source of inspiration and motivation—that drove how she carried herself in her educational and political lives. That confidence that she lives is rooted in what she saw in him.

Attending an HBCU in Missouri, Mrs. Pearl majored in History and Music, being trained by Black educators who were educated all over the country. Graduating early, she began her career in education in 1949 in small towns in Arkansas, before permanently moving to Little Rock in 1960. In that time, she married and divorced, during a time when it was nontraditional for divorce to take place. While good friends with her husband at the time, and having admiration for him, she felt that he was not ready to be married; therefore, the marriage did not last long. She remarried in 1959 but remained friends with her former husband. She had only one child: a daughter from her second marriage. "I never really wanted, nor planned, to have a lot of children. I wanted to have a career." Having only one child and having a husband in the military—being stationed away most of the time—allowed Mrs. Pearl to be able to be as busy with her career and civic work.

In the 1960s, Mrs. Pearl taught music in the junior high school setting to Black and White students, particularly after she was part of a group of teachers who were the first to begin integrating classrooms in Little Rock. She said she "found that most students liked school…You only had a problem if the White students who were told at home to be against the Black students." She acknowledged that integration helped in some ways; but in some ways it did not. Her perceptions of White students, and their families, were challenged, as she began to see some of the deficiencies in learning that were not often discussed. "I didn't make a difference in children." This thought she carried throughout the integration process, as it expressed the intention not to see differences amongst the students.

After being a teacher, the rest of her career in education consisted of being an assistant principal, beginning in 1968 (until she retired in 1992), and summer school principal for a total of 10 years. According to her, there were no Black women as high school administrators prior to 1968. According to *The Bulletin of the Arkansas Teacher Association*, there were many Black women as elementary school principals throughout the state of Arkansas in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Further, women could only be vice principals in high school and serve as principals during the summer school sessions. She worked primarily with White men as principals; but she never recalled any hostile encounters while in her role. She even said, "The thing that I enjoyed best was the respect I got."

She learned to "know your people," and that "you have to treat everybody, whether you like it or not, with no difference." She conveyed that some of her interactions with teachers and staff were not always favorable. She repeated the point that she had trouble with two teachers and two counselors in her career as an administrator—more so dealing with them not aligning with what was expected. She told the following anecdotes,

> When I was an administrator, I would have problems with Whites, regarding segregation (sic). I will never forget, I had a librarian from Mississippi, originally. She would have issues with some of the White staff. I would have them come to my office. They would come in saying things like 'yassuh boss…what can we do for ya boss?' Another time, I had a Black teacher, who just couldn't take a White parent coming in and saying something to make her feel like she didn't know what she was doing. She would kind of take it out on the children.

Mrs. Pearl recalled the story dealing with White teachers who dismissed her authority by mocking her as "boss." These interactions reflect the deep-seated resistance to integration in Arkansas during the time. The subsequent anecdote showed the pressures of engaging White parents as a Black teacher. These instances show the issues, from both Black and White faculty and staff, as integration was taking place, and how Mrs. Pearl had to handle it.

Mrs. Leone—Alaska—"It's the confidence that I have in me."

Born in Virginia in 1934, Mrs. Leone exuded the confidence that was instilled into her by her parents, but most especially by her grandmother, who always told her, "You can do anything you want to do. You can be anything you want to be. Just trust God." Leone explained: "Where I grew up, anybody in my neighborhood was not supposed to go to college… So nobody had gone to college in my family." While being the youngest of three, she did change the narrative that had been ascribed to her within her local environment. Graduating from high school in 1952, she went on to an HBCU in Virginia to study history and eventually decided to become a Social Studies teacher. In reflecting upon her time, which ended in 1956 when she graduated, she said "we were surrounded by education," expressing the Black culture, history, and excellence that further cultivated her into who she became as an educator and leader. Part of her coursework was

a focus in music. Even though her father was a travelling musician, Leone did not declare herself to be one too; however, in college she was prepared to step into any role if a need arose. She explained:

> At school they told us we were going to do certain things. They told us that we had to be prepared because we didn't know where we would end up…. We had to copy 100 songs. They said, we had to know every kind of area of music…just songs in everything. The other students and I asked, 'why are we doing this?' because we didn't know. But those Black teachers knew.

This broad, yet deep, preparedness made her more flexible and adaptable. So, after marrying a man in the military, Mrs. Leone had two children and eventually relocated to the state of Alaska in 1961—a place that would require such flexibility and adaptability.

The confidence that imbued her, as well as her preparedness through her schooling, bolstered the bold, and independent, way she carried herself. She said that she has always been an individual and always did her own thing. She conveyed a story of a Christmas party in 1974, while she was still a teacher, where she wore a pantsuit. Up until that time, most women did not wear pantsuits; but she decided to do it. Someone at the party challenged her to see if she would wear that suit to work the next week. "I probably wasn't going to wear it at first, but since she said it…you know I wore it, don't you?" She further explained a subsequent conversation with a colleague who said that she danced to the beat of her own drum. Her response, "Yeah; and you like that beat, don't you?"

In purple shoes and a purple dress, Mrs. Leone made her way to the local elementary school, close to where her family had recently moved. Not knowing much, she went to "the yellow school," and asked for a teaching job. After the application, and checking of references, she

was offered a job at the little "yellow school." After a short time, the principal appointed her the teacher in charge. "I didn't know anything; but he appointed me the teacher in charge…He saw something in me." At that point, she taught third and fourth grades, respectively "with a few little Black kids, Native kids, a few White ones…This was supposed to be low community, a lot of poor folks." As she continued teaching in elementary settings, she noticed opportunities to lead coming to her: teacher-in-charge, Social Studies committee chairperson, reading coordinator, and principal intern.

She would emphasize more than once in our interviews, "It was not us. It was not us. It was those other folks that saw something in me; and they could not give me enough to do." She was referring to the affirmation from White people who saw something in her, in the absence of Black people who did not populate the area as much. By the late 1970s, Leone decided to walk the route towards administration, after being recommended to do so. The process entailed being a principal intern, which meant training for the role of an administrator prior to officially becoming one. However, she did not receive the internship after the first attempt. In the meantime, she was put over a special reading program in the district.

In 1981, she had been appointed principal at the first of three schools she served. The last school she served as principal was at that "yellow school" where she first began in Alaska.

Ms. Jessamine—South Carolina—"I love people."

Born in Alabama in 1936, Ms. Jessamine was born as the youngest of three children. Her father died when she was six years old, leaving her mother to raise her and her brothers alone. Ms. Jessamine's mother, who had been a student at an HBCU in Alabama briefly, encouraged her to attend, after she graduated her county's training school. Her mother had been adamant about it. After being educated at the local training school, Ms. Jessamine matriculated to that

HBCU on a five-year plan, which would mandate that she had to complete her Bachelor of Science degree within five years. Against her mother's better judgement, Ms. Jessamine got married at the conclusion of her senior year at the college and relocated to South Carolina and had her first child one year later in 1960.

Ms. Jessamine acknowledged how naïve she was, at first, because she had not been exposed to the world as much, coming from where she was brought up. Upon entering her first teaching job, she did not realize that she was young until her first principal focused on it. She said, "He treated us like children, like his children…Dr. A had a reputation for hiring the youngest teachers, and the teachers with the most advanced degrees. So if you worked at his school, you had to work on your masters." Not only did she go for her masters, but this was the time when she began to see the differences in who got certain positions and who did not. She said he did not encourage women to become administrators, because to him that was out of place. As a teacher, however, she was acknowledged by him, and subsequent principals, for having a strong personality and being good with discipline. As she put it, "I could handle children." In reflecting upon when her school district began integrating, in 1968, she said,

> If you know anything about this county, it was kind of a racist community. At that time, [White] people that grew up there probably had less education than we had, but they thought they were better than me. So when we integrated in 1968, people were lining the halls to get in our classrooms. When they came in my classroom, I said, 'Listen. If you leave your child in my classroom, I can assure you that your child will learn. But I cannot teach children who are disruptive. If you think that you don't want me to discipline your child when they're wrong…you need to tell the principal to take your child out of my

> classroom. But if your child stays in my classroom, I want you to know that I'm going to be in charge. I'm going to be the disciplinarian.

This reputation, of being a no-nonsense, disciplinarian, focused on helping develop children academically and behaviorally, carried with Ms. Jessamine as she progressed in her teaching career.

The transition into school leadership came when the superintendent at the time approached her to lead one of the elementary schools. Her reputation as a strong teacher, and lead teacher, had spread. However, when that opportunity came, she said she did not even think about being an administrator. She recalled,

> I told him that I didn't want to go on as a principal. I didn't know anything. I didn't want to run a school and fail. So I said, let me learn how to be an administrator. I don't know how to be an administrator. I can discipline children; I can lead children. But I'm not sure I can lead adults; and I needed to know how to do that.

The superintendent said, "Okay," and said that he had another position: assistant principal at a local high school. This was 1972.

At that high school, Ms. Jessamine said she was over "books, butts, and busses…the 3 B's." She kept the bookroom in order, addressed discipline issues (to include delivering punishment, such as paddling), and had to be responsible for 33 busses. As an assistant principal, and later as a principal, Ms. Jessamine recounted:

> I never thought that some of the teachers didn't agree with me because I was Black…I never encountered a lot of issues. Now, I'm not saying that there wasn't a lot going on with race, but I never recognized it. The guys treated me like I was one of the guys, because I was one of the few female administrators…and they knew I was tough…I never

didn't get asked to do stuff because of my race. I was always included. I'm not sure they didn't do other stuff behind my back; but I never encountered ugliness. Never.

This was her experience throughout the years that she was an assistant principal, and into her next role: administrative assistant to the area superintendent. An administrative assistant was not a clerical position. Ms. Jessamine's responsibilities included going into a school every day and observing and advising principals on how to lead teachers. In 1976 or 1977, she could not exactly recollect the year she began being exposed to a broader vantage point of leadership beyond the high school where she had served as an assistant principal.

In 1980, she transitioned out of her role as administrative assistant into being the principal of one of the middle schools—where she would remain until 1996.

Dr. Peachtree—Georgia—"What we do for one, we do for all."

Born in 1945, Dr. Peachtree had a strong "pyramid" that cultivated and grounded her: her church, her school, and her family. That structure endured over the course of her career and her personal life. She described her early years in this way: "I'm so glad I was born when I was born. We could walk home. Everybody knew our names, and mama's names." She was a part of the first group of students to desegregate a high school in Atlanta in the early 1960s. While there, she discovered her very first role models of professionalism—"remarkable teachers who really stood tall." From there, she became the first college graduate in her family, graduating from an HBCU in Georgia in 1967, and recruited to teach without an interview. Since she graduated from one of the premier HBCUs around, there was an assumption, and expectation, of excellence.

As an elementary educator, Dr. Peachtree was dedicated to the development of the whole child, and she was recognized for it. In her career, she was named Teacher of the Year by her

school district and highlighted for excellence in the classroom. Her time in the classroom coincided with what is known as the "Atlanta Compromise," in the early 1970s, where Atlanta schools responded to desegregation mandates with a compromise related to school and district leadership, how students would be integrated, as well as how teachers and administrators would be integrated throughout certain schools. Dr. Peachtree remembered,

> I had limited engagement with it. The schools were forced to be a part of the conversation, in that they wanted the schools they wanted. They didn't use the word we use today: equity. They used the word, equal; and that is where our roles came in. They brought us in and talked with us about it. The superintendent of schools at the time was not White; he was Black. He came from California; but he played the low key. We really didn't engage as much as we did in the Civil Rights Movement. In the Civil Rights Movement, we were very active…It was a political piece. I had little knowledge of politics. I thought we all believed the same thing about why we are here, especially in schools.
>
> Let me tell you what we received. That's why the Compromise was so limited for me, because I didn't have a mentor to help me understand. Nobody talked about it because they knew White males were going to be in control, and they knew Black men would sell their souls to be a part of that elite group.

This, and other times, Dr. Peachtree relayed the point that she felt unequipped, at times, because she had not been taught how to navigate the politics of education. Whether dealing with how to properly write, or navigate racial and sexist discrimination, or broader political issues, she acknowledged a perceived deficiency that had to be overcome.

Her transition into school leadership was unique. After about 12 years in the classroom, an opportunity to be a staff developer for curriculum and reading opened for her. She remained

in that role for one year until she transitioned into a central office position. She admitted that she really did not want to be in a leadership role. She stated, "I was sort of forced to go into it…I love children and felt that I could do more good in the classroom with the children than being a principal." An area superintendent, at the time, encouraged her by saying, "we need you; you can do this." That transition into the principalship began in 1985.

As a leader, Dr. Peachtree thought that being honest, caring, and knowing the business, were the characteristics of her leadership. She stood on the importance of instructional leadership, which, she mentioned, "comprised knowing the content, knowing how to frame information, knowing the talent pool, monitoring everything, and knowing your people." It was important to her to be an "invisible leader," which meant paying attention to areas where people did not recognize she was paying attention to. Her "senses of leadership," as she called it, helped her to lead in and out of the classroom. She said,

> My senses of leadership is about all of your senses that you have and how you use them to not only lead, but you use them to make certain that you get this feel for what it's like, and you know what you're looking for…I used my senses as a person, as a mother, as a teacher, as a principal to feel what's happening in the school. When I was principal, I would sweep the front of the building every morning. I wanted it to be clean. I did not want them to *see* paper on the floor. I would walk the building with the custodial staff; I didn't want to *smell* urine in the boy's bathroom. I *looked* at the walls, and if someone wrote something on the wall, I'd tell the custodian to get it off, because if we leave it up, the students will add more. (emphasis added)

Leadership was personal for Dr. Peachtree. While remaining the shortest time in school leadership, compared to the other participants in this study, her lived experience as a leader encompassed a desire to make sure that all her students felt like they belonged.

Dr. Cherry—Georgia—"It's just who I was…"

Born in 1952, Dr. Cherry grew up in Macon, Georgia, being the oldest of her brother and two sisters. Her parents had divorced; so she primarily resided with her mother. She stated that she had "awesome" teachers growing up. She recalled,

> They would come and visit you. My teachers even came and picked us up to take us to Sunday School, because mama had to work on Sundays... I had awesome elementary and junior high teachers who just kind of showed me…compassion. They looked forward to building us, building our capacity, and making sure we were successful.

Later, she was part of a group of students who began integrating schools in Macon in 1967. In contrast to her elementary and junior high experiences, Dr. Cherry said there were "pockets of teachers who were nurturing, and then you had pockets who were really racist." In the broader community, she was aware that racism existed, but it was not always in her face. She conveyed one example of when racism was more blatant: "The night that Martin King was killed, I was on the phone with one of my friends; and because we had the party lines, I heard a Caucasian woman say, 'I knew they were gonna get that nigger.'"

When she entered an HBCU in Atlanta in 1970, she remained, subsequently earning her master's and doctorate from other local Atlanta institutions. She always wanted to do something with children for a career. Initially thinking she wanted to be a pediatrician; she eventually chose

education. She acknowledged, however, that she almost left teaching. She recounted a conversation she had with Benjamin Mays[5], as she drove him home one day after he spoke to one of her classes,

> As we were riding, we were talking. He asked me about my plans for the future, for the next five years. I said that I'm leaving education; I'm going to go to law school. He said, 'I can't tell you what to do. We always need good teachers, and I heard you are a good teacher.' He said, 'In Atlanta, lawyers come a dime a dozen. I can't tell you how to do it, but if I were you, I'd stay right where I am.' So I prayed about it. I thought about it. And here I am.

That conversation with Mays also prompted her to eventually pursue her doctorate, saying "if I'm going to stay, I'm going to get the highest degree. So that's what I did."

Dr. Cherry remained in the classroom for nine years, teaching science, before becoming an assistant principal in the early 1980s. Most of the school and district leadership consisted of males— "the majority of them on the South side were Black and the ones on the North side were White." She found she did not have too many negative interactions with the male principals, Black or White. She said, "I didn't have that. They were very helpful. If I needed something, I could go to them, and they would assist. Even the Caucasian male principals were helpful."

The beginnings of leadership also provided an opportunity to see the differences among schools from a different vantage point. She relayed an encounter with a White principal from the North side, "We were all in a group setting and were filling out some paperwork. And this principal said, 'Why don't you fill out your paperwork, darling? I don't have any Title I students at

[5] Benjamin Mays (1894-1984) was an African American minister, educator, and civil rights leader. He served as Dean of the School of Religion at Howard University (1934-1941), President of Morehouse College (1940-1967), and later as the President of the Atlanta Public Schools Board of Education, where he led Atlanta's desegregation process through what is known as the "Atlanta Compromise."

my school. If I were on your side of town, I wouldn't make it.'" This encounter was one that prompted her to focus on addressing inequities when her principalship began in the mid-1980s. She said, "The inequities of the Southside and the Northside stayed on my mind. However, I would always tell my staff, students, and parents that we were Buckhead on Bankhead[6]." She acknowledged the differences, but did not embrace deficiency.

Findings by Research Question

Research Question One: Lived Experiences

The participants revealed many experiences from their years in education, particularly those in school leadership, related to temperament, gendered racism, engagement with students, staff and families, as well as their progression towards leadership. These experiences were extrapolated from the transcripts from recorded interviews, in alignment to the first research question. Experiences that seemed similar were color coded. Five dominant themes were determined regarding the participants' lived experiences as Black females in school leadership.

Table 4

Associated Themes to Research Question One

Research Question	Themes
What are the lived experiences of five Black women school leaders who led in the aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision?	Participants' lived experiences consisted of: • Faith and service being at the core • Working hard until the job is done • Loving *all* children • Confidence cultivated over time and exercised throughout leadership • Experiencing no straightforward path to leadership

[6] Bankhead is located west of downtown Atlanta, and is primarily populated by minorities, while Buckhead is located north of Atlanta, and is primarily populated by Whites. The median incomes of each area differ significantly, with Buckhead being the more affluent area. Median household income in the Bankhead neighborhood was $19,831 in 2000 and rose to $26,663 from 2015 to 2019. In Buckhead, within the same time frame, the median household income surpasses $100,000.

Faith and service being at the core

The first theme from the participants' lived experiences deals with personal faith, and a life of service, being at the core of who they were and what they did. This enabled them to handle the various circumstances dealing with the process, and aftermath, of integration, as well as engaging with diverse people, and dealing with the day-to-day responsibilities of school leadership. Each interview showed the life these participants lived while they were leaders, but also revealed how each participant is still actively involved in their respective communities. Each participant shared they felt that education was a calling for them, rather than just an option women were often relegated to. They shared their faith shaped how they approached situations and decisions they had to make.

Mrs. Leone repeated several times, "I want to be sure that I give people something good to say about the goodness of God. It's not about me; I can't do anything. With God, everything can happen." When navigating how to work with her staff, and other leaders, she said, "I can't trust God and trust you, too. You might show me the wrong way; so I will trust God. God is directing my path, not you." Similarly, Mrs. Pearl declared, "I'm a believer of God, so I know He's there to help all of us." In reflecting upon her career, she said, "I think God had a reason for saving me, because I've never applied for a job. Somebody was always reaching for me; and I just never thought that I was important. I just enjoyed what I was doing."

When talking about some of the challenges of her teaching-to-leadership transition, Dr. Peachtree stated that "those moments confirmed the fact that God put me here to teach school… Guess what it did? It confirmed all of that for me. It was confirmation that that was what my purpose was supposed to be." One way she expressed her faith in God and its impact on her work was by holding a daily devotion in her school, which was permitted at the time. It was engaging

to her students but also established the holistic foundation in the school. The idea of being led to make certain decisions, or guided towards certain places and spaces, oftentimes has its origins in the prompting of the Holy Spirit[7]—as ascribed by Ms. Jessamine. Identifying as a devout Catholic, Ms. Jessamine referred to the Holy Spirit several times in the interview sessions in aiding in her remembrance of her time in leadership, as well as a guiding force while serving the schools that she did.

Dr. Cherry stated that two Bible verses were the foundation of her leadership: "…Whatever you did for one of the least of these…you did for me,"[8] and "To whom much is given, much is required."[9] These scriptures encompass how her faith intersected with her work, and how her leadership was grounded in service to her students and their community. They also focused her on the weight of the position she held, and not to take it lightly. One thing she would do, for a period, she would play Gospel music at the beginning of the day throughout the school, to set the tone for the rest of the day. She said, "I knew I had to put God first. In any decision, I had to put Him first."

Working hard until the job is done.

None of the participants felt as if they had to work hard because they were Black and/or female, in relation to the White female, and White/Black male counterparts. They worked hard because it was an expression of who they were, how they were raised, and the result of Black education they received. Three of the five participants—Mrs. Pearl, Ms. Jessamine, and Mrs. Leone—all stated that after their first job, they never had to apply again, demonstrating their work

[7] The Holy Spirit, in Christian theology, represents God's presence, guidance, and power at work in the world and within believers.

[8] Matthew 25:40

[9] Luke 12:48

spoke for itself. That ethic was instilled in them from a young age, through their parents and grandparents, and further cultivated through their educational experiences with Black educators.

Mrs. Leone declared "these people couldn't give me enough work to do." At every stage of her career—as a teacher, chairman of the social studies committee (after a short period of time at her initial elementary school in Alaska), as a principal intern, and eventually as a principal—she kept highlighting the fact that her supervisors, mainly White men, would keep giving her responsibilities, because she could handle them well, and wouldn't hesitate to take care of business quickly. She said, "Black folks, they were not in place at that time; so all my stuff came from these other [White] folks. And they saw something in me." One example of her dedicated routine was as principal, she would get to work at 6 a.m., and stay after school, to get her work done, because throughout the day she was intentional about being visible throughout the school.

Similarly, Mrs. Pearl repeatedly mentioned that she grew up with the notion of "see things through to the end," instilled in her. She said, "My grandfather and my father and my mother and my grandmother, all of them, they liked seeing things finished." Therefore, "I like to see a job well done…I'm a worker. I do things, not for the publicity of it, but to see it well, finished and ready to go." In relation to how men—of either race—operated, Mrs. Pearl observed that "Black women probably had a little better chance than Black men. Women get things done a little faster; men kind of procrastinate on work. We, women, want to get it done and will work on it harder." This work ethic distinguished her from her counterparts. She acknowledged, "if there was a problem with a girl, they would always want us (the female educators/leaders) to handle that; or if there was a mother with children, they wanted us to handle that too." Her responsibilities of handling issues related to female students aligned with her identity as a woman.

Mrs. Jessamine, in a different context, said she got used to being around men because there were so few women in school leadership. In a sense, there was even a preference of being around men. “My friends who were teachers, they remained teachers. Some might have become counselors. But I was with the guys. I wanted to talk to them. I didn’t want to talk to no women. I was talking with the guys.” The guys saw how “tough” she was, and how hard she worked, according to Jessamine, which is why she was moved up to high positions—even after her principalship—and why she was included more often than not.

While men were helpful to Dr. Cherry, she primarily ascribed her leadership ethic to her impulse to work hard. Whether being advocated for by a former parent and Atlanta Public Schools Board of Education member for a principal position, or acknowledged by staff in one of her schools, Dr. Cherry continued in a tradition she established in college, that resulted in her graduating valedictorian. This work ethic was instilled in her. She would say that “it was just who I was.” No one had to tell her to work.

When the job of a leader becomes a job, that’s when that leader will not like what she does. Dr. Peachtree asserted, “I have always loved the job I’ve done; and when I love the work I do, I do it well. It’s when you don’t like it and you see it as a job.” She stepped in, within her capacity as an administrator, to make sure that she created “the right place for the children.” That meant walking the school with the custodian every day to make sure the facilities were up to par. It meant home visits to check on students’ families. It meant staying late to make sure things were prepared for the next day.

Loving* all *children

“I was accused of being more pro-child than pro-teacher—and I was.” These words from Dr. Peachtree coincided with the broad theme: the race of the students did not matter in respect

to the quality of education they received. Mrs. Leone, in a very distinct context in Alaska, where Indigenous children heavily populated the schools she led, said "I didn't see no race." This was not to deny the uniqueness of the student, but more so emphasized that race was not going to determine how students were treated and instructed. She would hold learning sessions for her, and her staff, to be sure that the schools were more inclusive. She relayed a teaching moment when she was still in the classroom that shaped how she would operate as a leader: "I had this little guy in my class, Frank. I said, 'Hey everyone, Frank is an Eskimo.' Frank stopped me and said that he wasn't Eskimo." She said she learned that that term, Eskimo, should not be used by Frank, and by mandatory culture classes she had to take. Later, as a leader, she said that she wanted to make her schools "welcoming" and "inclusive" for all.

When asked about whether they felt that they had a special responsibility to Black students, there was a nuanced response. While all students were engaged in a positive way, Ms. Jessamine, in South Carolina, did say that she was harder on the Black kids, because she wanted them to succeed. Similarly, Mrs. Pearl in Arkansas, said "I wanted to protect them." She said,

> There was a lot of problems with integration; and I found that they [White teachers] really didn't have the patience that our teachers had. Black teachers took time with us… We would go and maybe put our arm around the chair by the side of the child, and just really work with them. White teachers didn't do that much. Many taught from their desk; we teach by walking around and making sure each child was understanding.

These perspectives affirmed the notion that, while all students were important and deserved quality, Black students did hold a unique place in their leadership focus.

Mrs. Pearl dug more deeply into why she felt she did not have any problems with children:

> I was interested in what they [the students] were doing in school…watching how they were involved…see their whole life where they are coming from. To me, a good teacher or administrator…has to help to find their importance of things they do well, the things that they enjoy doing.

The love of, and desire to protect, her Black students, did not deny the other students from receiving keen interest and support from Pearl.

Drs. Cherry and Peachtree—leaders of multiple schools, with diverse student populations in their careers—did lead more homogenous, primarily Black schools in the Atlanta, Georgia area, at some point in their tenures. In those homogenous settings, when Black students were the primary population, there was more freedom to contextualize the way students were guided and taught. When in more diverse settings, they both acknowledged that they had to be clear with parents that all children would be cared for.

Confidence cultivated over time and exercised throughout leadership

Each of the participants displayed the confidence that they described in their careers. While different individuals, in different environments, each female leader shared how they faced their day-to-day responsibilities and interactions with students, staff, and parents with boldness and fearlessness, but not always at first. Ms. Jessamine, while speaking confidently during our interviews, acknowledged that she was offered a principalship prior to being an assistant principal at a high school in the early 70s, but declined it. She stated, "I didn't know how to be an administrator. I didn't want to run a school and fail." That period ignited her desire to be a leader. She had thought she would just be a teacher throughout her career, like many Black women. She was not initially groomed for leadership, according to her. It was her quality of work, and her desire to learn that, propelled her.

As an assistant principal and principal, it was important to "lead with confidence and fairness," for Ms. Jessamine. Most of her administrative colleagues were White men. She described her relationship with them as having no issues; she was one of the group. According to her, if there was any bias, it was not overt. She emphasized her mindset when engaging with staff and parents—particularly of White children—that she "wouldn't back down. You don't back down." She told a story of an interaction with a child that she was driving home, because the child was being disruptive at school[10]. En route to the child's home, she pulled off to the side of the road to have a direct, one-on-one conversation, because the child was disrespectful to her, and Ms. Jessamine had had enough. She relayed the rest of the account as such:

> I stopped the car, and I told her to hush, and that I had taken enough of her abuse. I made her get out of the car. She said, 'I don't live here.'
>
> I said, 'I know; I don't either. But either you're going to hush, or I am going to whip your you-know-what, or you're going to whip mine. But when I whip yours, I'm taking you to the detention center right now.' She said, 'Ms. Jessamine, you're crazy.'
>
> I said, 'that's a fact.' That girl got back in the car and didn't say a word the rest of way home. Now, if she had started hitting me, I don't know what I would have done. *I took a chance. But I wanted her to think that I would fight her.*

Ms. Jessamine was not advocating for abusing a child. She was confidently asserting herself in relation to a student who was disruptive and disrespectful. Further, it illustrated her value in discipline, for the sake of effective learning environment for students and a productive teaching environment for teachers she supervised.

[10] In the 1970s, the South Carolina law would support school leaders taking students home in their personal vehicles if they were disruptive at schools.

Likewise, Mrs. Pearl took a no-nonsense approach with students, staff, and parents. This behavior was rooted in the confidence of who she was and her ideal of how she needed to lead in her school. She valued respect in all interactions and expected the same in return, regardless of gender or race. She highlighted, again, the influence of her father—who carried his pistol, and was not afraid of White people—as she navigated leadership. She replayed in her mind part of what her father taught her: look people in the eye. In that, confidence is conveyed, while also being attentive to the other person.

Mrs. Leone rooted her confidence in her grandmother's affirmation, who said that Leone could be anything and do anything. "I was equipped, and I carried myself like that," is what Mrs. Leone stated as she entered the workforce after attending college. That attitude carried with her, as she engaged a diverse community of people in Alaska—those in the military, those from Indigenous communities, those who were White. For her, representing herself with excellence went beyond the aesthetic, however important; it included being equipped for any situation, and being confident in what she knew, and more importantly in who she was. In our last interview session, she highlighted the idea, "*if* is a doubtful word; use *when*." In recounting a story about a class she had to take during her master's program, she described her mindset about being confident. She declared,

> I told the professor I would be missing his class, because of another obligation. He said that was okay, since I had been teaching a long time by that point. He told me to just organize my teaching materials. So, that's what I had to do for the class, since I was going to be out. He just told me to organize materials I already had…I overheard a White girl in the class say to another that I just assumed I was gonna get an A in this class. When I

> heard her say that, I interjected, 'No, I had the A when I enrolled in the class; I'm just doing something for the A. I already had the A…' That's the kind of person I am. I still am very, very confident. It's confidence, that's what it is. And people like to see people who got some confidence. That's when you move [up]; when people see that you have something going here.

Mrs. Leone was clear that she had to be who she was, even in the face of people who did not believe she warranted the position or the access. Further, being in leadership required her to see herself as the one in charge. She said emphatically, "you gotta let people know who you are."

Dr. Peachtree had to confront a particular way she was raised to fully walk in her leadership capacity. She recalled,

> I think the greatest challenge for me was that I was afraid to make decisions, because nobody encouraged me to make a decision…Many Black women were taught, during my time, that one of the things that we should do is to make the men of the house comfortable. Nothing about our needs; it was about the men. My mother would say to do this or that for my father. I have to do this for my brother. But nobody ever said that I had to do it for me. So I grew up with that mentality—that I had to make sure that I'm pleasing the males for the most part. Until one day…that soon stopped.

This life-changing shift helped her to better handle situations that were difficult. When [White] parents would push back, at times, it was important for Dr. Peachtree to "define it clearly, right, and know what it is you are trying to accomplish."

Likewise, Dr. Cherry's confidence was exhibited in her continual search for growth, whether through education or learning from other leaders—oftentimes White men. She had made

a commitment to seek the highest degree, after her car ride with Dr. Mays. She felt it was necessary to have knowledge and credibility in leadership. While serving as an assistant principal, and later as a principal, in whatever school she was in, she was consistent in her leadership abilities. She did not feel the need to change her leadership style based on the population she was serving. "Wherever I went I was the same. I had the same expectations. I didn't alter."

Experiencing no straightforward path to leadership

The participants in this study had varied pathways to leadership, as recorded in Table 5. Consistent with much of the literature that says there are stark contrasts in male leaders' paths to leadership and female leaders' paths to leadership, the participants' lived experiences exemplified multiple routes to school leadership (Bailes and Guthery, 2020; Bastian and Henry, 2015; Bryant et al., 2017; Kim and Brunner, 2009). The nonlinear paths, for the most part, reveal a mix of unexpected opportunities, encouragement from unexpected people, and promotion for excellence in work.

Table 5

Participants' Paths to Leadership

Participants	**Path to Leadership**				
Mrs. Pearl (Arkansas)	Teacher	Assistant Principal Summer School Principal			
Mrs. Leone (Alaska)	Teacher	Social Studies Committee Chair	District Reading Coordinator	Principal Intern	Principal
Ms. Jessamine (South Carolina)	Teacher	Assistant Principal	Administrative Assistant	Principal	
Dr. Peachtree (Georgia)	Teacher	Staff Developer	Central Office Position	Principal	
Dr. Cherry (Georgia)	Teacher	Assistant Principal	Principal		

The idea of leadership came over time for each of the participants. In Georgia, Dr. Peachtree articulated that she never wanted to go into leadership. She said, “I was sort of forced to go into it.” That encouragement came from an area superintendent who said that the district needed someone like her.

In South Carolina, Ms. Jessamine insisted she never thought she would become a principal. “I didn’t. I never thought about it. I was a teacher. We [women] were not groomed to think that we could go beyond the classroom. So I never thought I would be a principal.” The superintendent at the time approached her, initially, for a principalship at an elementary school. Jessamine was known for being able to discipline and lead children in the classroom; yet she had a positive reputation with leadership.

Similarly, in Alaska, Mrs. Leone repeatedly contended leaders “couldn’t give me enough work to do.” After serving as a teacher, a department chairperson, and other local school-level leadership, Leone stated that her supervisor said that she “needed” to go into administration. The process towards principalship included becoming a principal intern before being placed over a school.

In Georgia, Dr. Cherry indicated that she had an explicit desire to go into school leadership. The encouragement that she received from Black women and men, who were already in various levels of leadership, culminated in an unexpected opportunity when someone in her local school building became ill. While completing her doctoral work, the instructor—the district superintendent—suggested Dr. Cherry. Her first administrative position was as an assistant principal in the school she taught in.

In Arkansas, Mrs. Pearl was the only participant who did not explicitly state that she was encouraged to go into administration. She felt, after nearly twenty years in the classroom, that

she could be in a better position to help students. She even said that "she felt a need" to become an administrator. She had already earned her master's degree; so she got her leadership certification, and became an assistant principal. At that time, Black women were not high school principals, nor allowed to be, but they could be summer school principals. With that, Mrs. Pearl served as a summer school principal for a total of 10 years. She said that, even though she stepped in as principal when her White male principals were out of the building and successfully led summer schools at three different high schools, she never got promoted to principal.

Research Question Two: Sensemaking in Desegregated Settings

In this dissertation, sensemaking refers to how individuals structure the unknown, and based on that structuring, determine the best way to act in it (Ancona, 2012; Weick, 2009). As individuals, they worked within multiple contexts that required that they make sense of their roles as Black female leaders, and determine from that positionality, how to act. Based on participants' experiences, color codes were created based on similar experiences. The different colors allowed me to trace multiple ideas that emerged, which aided me in the interpretation process shared in Chapter Five. Those similar connections, differentiated by color, were determined to be common themes among the participants. Three themes were extrapolated regarding the participants' sensemaking as Black female school leaders and are aligned with the second research question.

Table 6

Associated Themes to Research Question Two

Research Question	They made sense by	Response from sensemaking
How did five Black women school leaders make sense of their roles in a desegregated school setting between 1965 and 1985, after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision?	Synthesizing personal values, and viewing themselves as agents of change, with a professional responsibility and moral imperative	Participants made sense of their roles as leaders and decided to: • Be visible to students, staff, and the community • Expose students to life and the world • Represent themselves with excellence

Be visible to students, staff, and the community

Visibility in schools was a way of asserting leadership, building trust, and breaking down stereotypes. Each participant highlighted the importance of being visible to students, staff, and the community throughout their tenures as leaders. It was important that their presence, in whatever school they led, was seen and felt. Ms. Jessamine said, "I wanted to let kids see me in the lunchroom, let them see me in the hall. I was always visible." That meant learning how to delegate other responsibilities to others. She said, "I had people who ran the office, dealing with clerical stuff, so I didn't have to do it."

Mrs. Leone ascribed her lack of problems in her schools to being visible. "People didn't have to wonder who the principal was." She detailed her thoughts this way:

> I would walk down the hall and go to every classroom after school. I went into every classroom twice a day. That's what they taught us in school…Administrators need to be visible. I used to go to work at six o'clock in the morning. I beat the day, man. Because I did that, I got my work done. And then I would stay after school to get my work done. So when school was in session, you could find me in the classrooms. I came in those classrooms; and that's why I didn't have a lot of problems.

She, along with Pearl, Jessamine, and Cherry, asserted that they were in charge; therefore, it was important that they be in places where they could be seen. Dr. Cherry made an additional point: "if people did what they were supposed to do, and there would be no issues." She clarified that, while she was visible to everyone, she made sure to be visible when something was not aligned to the standards that she established.

Visibility took on another form in Dr. Peachtree. In response to being short staffed, put her apron on and became a part of the cafeteria staff, to "serve children at all cost, because that's the job that you should do." When it came to staff, teachers, coaches, or parents, she conducted regular meetings, to keep the lines of communication open and remain accessible.

Further, being visible enabled others to be visible, too. In 1981, Mrs. Leone led in a state (Alaska) that was not traditionally known for a large Black population. With that said, she said, "When I become a principal, the first person I hire will be Black." She continued:

> You know why I did that? Because somebody had to hire me, right? *Somebody had to hire me*…So the guy called me and told me, I needed to come over there by the school district and get the key to the school, because I was appointed the principal. I left the base and came over there to the school district's office, and went upstairs, and got the keys to the school. When I came back downstairs, I said, 'Alright John, get me somebody. Get me somebody.' He said he didn't have anybody there now, but he had this woman in Mississippi. I told him to get that girl on the phone. When I talked to her, I told her, 'I'm offering you this job now. *I can offer you this job*. You can take the job; but you got to keep it.

Representation mattered to Mrs. Leone, which is why she offered that job to that teacher in Mississippi. She let it be known in the interview that the woman stayed and still lives in Alaska.

Mrs. Pearl likewise recounted, “one of the things my father also told me is that when you move up in something, carry somebody with you.” While being an assistant principal the latter half of her career, interspersed with being a Summer School principal due to women not being high school principals, Pearl was intentional about trying to support and develop teachers.

Expose students to life and the world

One of the major challenges Dr. Cherry said she dealt with was the inequity she saw in her schools. Serving in the early 1980s in Atlanta, she faced the issue of leading within a north-side- south-side difference in how students were provided for and perceived. Historically in Atlanta, there was knowledge that in many school districts, there was a dividing line that separated communities. This dividing line usually distinguished one socioeconomic class from another, and it also differentiated one race from another. While the *Brown v. Board of Education* decisions neutralized legal racial segregation in schools, it did not neutralize the inequity oftentimes experienced by schools in the proceeding years.

As a leader, Dr. Cherry was committed to ensuring her students—whether in all-Black or diverse schools—had broad exposure to experiences and opportunities. She made the point in our interview sessions to note, “it was exposure that separated my students,” which prompted her to provide opportunities for them to travel out of state, to be introduced to local and national celebrities, and be exposed to teachers of diverse races. She recognized her own experiences personally, and professionally, informed her behavior as a leader. “I always wanted to give my students the same experiences I had from my teachers, and that is to push them as far as they could go.” Further, her knowledge of the local context helped her recognize that providing the best education required pushing for opportunities that exposed her students to the unfamiliar.

Likewise, Dr. Peachtree, who led in the early 1980s, shared several encounters she had with students that prompted her to be more intentional about exposing them to more than what they had previously been taught. Dr. Peachtree acknowledged experiencing racial bias more overtly than the other participants in this study. She said, "they [White people, particularly White parents] came *to* me and *at* me." Even with this, she conveyed a story of a conversation with a young, elementary-aged White girl who said that Dr. Peachtree didn't look like her mama said she would look. Dr. Peachtree continued,

> The White children, especially the little girls, would come to me and they would say things like I don't look like what their mama said. I said, 'What did your mama say?' A girl said that her mama said I was going to have hair like barbed wire. And I said, 'Do you want to touch it?' She asked, surprised, if she could touch my hair. She touched it and said that it felt like her hair. She said again that I didn't look like her mama said. Again, I said, 'What did she say?' The girl said that I was going to be charcoal black. I smiled. I said that I was black. The girl said that I wasn't; I was brown. It's not the same. This was a child; a second-grade student talking to me at lunch.

The exposure to her humanity was significant in this situation. Dr. Peachtree primarily served in the greater Atlanta area, like Dr. Cherry, and recognized the differences across the city. This prompted her to focus on centering humanity in her leadership.

Part of that "centering" was focusing on the safety of students. Dr. Peachtree thought it important to teach certain survival skills to her students as a teacher—particularly her Black boys during the Atlanta Child Murders, between 1979 and 1981. She recalled,

> Each morning, I would tell somebody to go up to the office for me and come back. And then I would ask the other students, while that student was out, who was missing. I was

> making them alert. Then, we would go to the parking lot and describe what kind of cars were there. They didn't know a sedan; they didn't know a four door. They knew none of those things. We did all that. We had a policeman to come. He helped.

Dr. Peachtree sought to expose her boys to survival skills. She carried that intentionality into her leadership a few years later, given the different racial populations she had stewardship over.

The thought to expose students to more carried throughout Mrs. Pearl's administrative career. As a trained music teacher, she thought the arts should have been more emphasized to all students. She said, "I told students to set goals for themselves. Ask them, 'what is it that you want?' Find something you're interested in. I always encouraged students to take a class in industrial arts or take a class in music." To develop well-rounded students, Pearl sought to broaden their perspectives, especially for Black boys who were heavily focused on sports but struggled in core subjects.

Mrs. Leone, in Alaska, had a different context. While she had a diverse group of students throughout her career as principal, the majority of students were either Caucasian or members of a specific Indigenous group. She would incorporate anecdotes and knowledge from her personal experience of growing up in Virginia into her teaching, while in the classroom, but also in her decision making as a principal. Even though she grew up in segregated, Black contexts, prior to moving to Alaska, she felt as if her knowledge was valuable wherever she went.

Similar to Leone, Ms. Jessamine relied on her lessons growing up. One of those lessons was learning structure and discipline. She recounted a story of when she addressed her school as the new principal:

> I went to that school with an idea to straighten that school out. I had 750 students…In the auditorium, we had big, wooden floors. It was a beautiful structure in that building. And

> it was huge for us and my middle schoolers…Much of the time, once students got in there, they were acting crazy; in there just making all kinds of noise. So, I made it a point to always wear heals, so that anytime I walked, they knew I was coming. In the auditorium, on those wooden floors, they could hear me coming. So, on that day, I walked across the stage, took that microphone and said 'I would never walk in this auditorium with all of this noise. When you see me walk into this auditorium, I don't want to hear a pin fall.' I said that; and that was all I had to say.

Order was something different for this school, according to Jessamine; therefore, she felt the need to assert a shift in how things would operate. To expose her students to structure was something she felt was necessary for them and the trajectory of the school. It coincides with her personality of order and discipline for the sake of creating a healthy school environment.

Represent themselves with excellence

The subject of how the participants presented themselves was one of significance during the interview sessions. While the subject of how a woman dressed could be seen as superficial, participants viewed it as a tool for challenging stereotypes, inspiring respect amongst staff, students, and the community, and even modeling what success could look like. Mrs. Pearl reminded me that before 1968, there were no Black women as high school administrators in Little Rock, Arkansas. When she, and three other Black females, became vice principals that year, it was important that she adhered to the advice from her father, "never leave your house when you don't look neat. You don't have to be all dressed up, but look neat." For her, attire connected with being prepared and instilling confidence. She said one of the challenges she dealt with were the ways White female teachers, particularly the younger ones, came dressed to the school. She recounted,

> The other problem we had started with dress. They dress a little different than we dress. I had one White teacher who was teaching the 10th grade, and every day she would send me three or four boys out of her room…They would kind of be hesitant, a lot of times to tell me why they couldn't pay attention in class. And I just insisted that they tell me, even if it was something I didn't want to know. They would tell me that I needed to just come into the room and see for myself. They said that they couldn't get what she was saying. So, I went and saw that her dress was so short; they were seeing so much of her body. The boys thought it was funny. It was just unreal. I had two or three cases where they were wearing short, short dresses, or sitting on top of the desk with their legs open.

Mrs. Pearl would go on to say that she had to deal with those circumstances to remind teachers that when they came to work, they were professionals and should dress as such.

Mrs. Leone, similarly, rooted her perspective in the Black tradition she was raised within. "I was equipped, and I carried myself like that. You know, Black folks—we came from the South—we dressed at that time when I grew up. You were at the high; you were at the pinnacle of the totem pole. If you were an educator, you were somebody…and if you teach at a school, you know you gotta look like something."

Similarly, Ms. Jessamine, who always "wore heels and wore suits" and was "always dressed up…immaculately dressed," asserted, "I cannot run a school where no one's in charge." In a dialogue about interactions with parents at a predominantly White school she was offered to lead, she relayed that they were thinking they were the leaders of the school. She felt that she had to claim and exert her authority, to let them know there was only one principal. She recounted that she decided to leave that school after about six months, because she was not going to subject

herself to them trying to run the school she was selected to run. She asserted her authority not out of arrogance, but out of a commitment to maintaining the high standards she set for her school.

Similarly, Mrs. Leone made her educational leadership mindset, and expectations clear to those she supervised. This was evident in how she operated on a day-to-day basis. For example, she relayed how she did not accept staff being late to meetings. “If a meeting started at 8 o’clock, and you were not there, I had the secretary making phone calls to see where you were.” She would add to that “if they could not be there, they needed to set aside time to be at school early the next day to receive the information they missed.” She said she reminded her staff all the time about her high expectations and made them clear.

Dr. Peachtree’s goal, too, was clarity in her expectations. People cannot follow what is unclear, was a sentiment that threaded her administrative experience. Clear expectations align with effective communication, which is a sign of a high standard of leadership. As her school’s leader, she would be sure to convey district policy in terms that made sense. She took this seriously because she said schools need to have order and structure; policy helps to provide that order and structure. However, Peachtree was clear that part of her job was making the established policy fit her context, for her people. She said, “the district may have told us the *what*, but they never said *how* we had to take care of it. That means, we still have the power.” This statement highlights empowerment and agency, emphasizing ownership of unchangeable situations while ensuring the school aligned with a higher purpose and tapped into its creative potential. She said that she would encourage her staff not to say the word “can’t,” because “there are few things we can’t do; but we should focus on the things we can do—or can have a hand in doing.”

Dr. Cherry’s display of consistency from school to school suggested a strong sense of conviction in her leadership values. The principles that she stood on guided her as an assistant

principal, and later as a principal. Policy, too, was emphasized heavily in her interview sessions. It focused on structure and creating the right environment for student learning.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided state and national historical context for each of the areas where the five participants served as school leaders. The goal was to situate each within a larger context to further understand their roles as school leaders. Subsequently, I distilled the themes associated with the two research questions. In the next chapter, I will delve deeply into the themes and data, through the lenses of intersectionality and sensemaking, to respond to the research questions of this study.

5 DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a summation of the study and significant conclusions drawn from the findings in previous chapters. This hermeneutic phenomenology was done to describe, and understand, the lived experiences of Black women who served as school leaders as they led during a pivotal part of United States history; and furthermore, it was to understand how these leaders made sense of their roles in evolving school settings. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the lived experiences of five Black women school leaders who led in the aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision?
2. How did five Black women school leaders make sense of their roles in a desegregated school setting between 1965 and 1985, after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision?

This study was not meant to be exhaustive—as limitations were clear—but it was conducted to provide a glimpse into the lived experiences of a group of women who made contributions to education, and American education writ large. The data from the semi-structured interviews represents their personal stories about their time in leadership, ranging in time from the late 1960s to the mid 1980s. These interviews included reflections on the participants' upbringing, educational and personal mentors who shaped their personalities and philosophies, leadership styles, and perspectives on their roles as school leaders as Black women. As the researcher, and primary listener, I sought to listen intently and deeply to understand the phenomena emerging related to the lived experiences of these Black women in school leadership. Data from the interviews revealed the successes and challenges, even while experiencing varied circumstances as Black women leading schools. This discussion will include

(1) an overview of *intersectionality* and *sensemaking*, and how they connect to this study

(2) a discussion of the key findings of the research

(3) implications for educational practice and educational policy

(4) recommendations for future research and conclusions

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Black women school leaders, and how they made sense of their roles in desegregated schools after *Brown*. While the role of Black women in education is well articulated, the focus on their contributions in educational leadership is not as developed in scholarly literature. The participants in this hermeneutic phenomenological study shared their experiences of leading schools under very different circumstances. The timeframe established for the focus of this study, 1965 to 1985, was chosen to get a glimpse into the experiences of Black women after the process of integration was more widespread across the United States. While the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision was over a decade before this timeframe, many states, particularly in the South, did not begin the desegregation process until well into the 1960s. Furthermore, the integration of staff and administrators was not more forcefully mandated until the late 1960s. Lastly, the dearth of literature regarding the experiences of Black women school leaders during this time, or anywhere in the latter half of the 20th century was apparent and warranted attention (Lomotey, 2019).

It is important to note the lived experiences of these five Black women varied in relation to the overt, or subtle, engagement with racism and/or sexism noted in some literature regarding Black women in leadership. In other words, depending on the location of their leadership, the timeframe that they served, and their immediate professional contexts, their experiences may differ in how they were impacted. Ms. Jessamine made a point to say that she felt as if she did not

receive overt negative treatment or engagement from other leaders or staff, but also said she did not know what may have been said or done when she was not around. As the researcher, I made the assumption that most, if not all, of the participants for this study experienced overt discrimination based upon their race and sex in their leadership capacity. The data, however, does not fully support that assumption. I believe that this warrants a brief comment about the evolution of racism and sexism, from more overt to subtle ways. One question I had was: does the absence of overt discrimination mean the absence of discrimination altogether?

As society evolved, especially after major court cases (e.g. Brown v. Board of Education) and Congressional legislation (e.g. The Civil Rights Act), the expression of oppression evolved. Bonilla-Silva (2014) used the phrase "color-blind racism" to describe:

> the dominant racial ideology as the mechanisms and practices for keeping blacks and other racial minorities 'at the bottom of the well' changed. I have argued elsewhere that contemporary racial inequality is reproduced through 'new racism' practices that are subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial. (p. 14)

Oppression was not eradicated but evolved over time. Alexander (2010) used the phrase "racial caste" as the foundation for her argument that the criminal justice system in America is set up to sustain a racial caste. This "new Jim Crow" (Alexander, 2010) continues the pattern of subjugating Black bodies to undue punishment, just not in the overt ways experienced during the period of slavery.

Further, the work and social environments for many women, of any race, have been described as hostile, where more overt ways of harassment have been expressed throughout history, such as sexist language, or physical or sexual assault. Hostile forms of harassment evolve to the

less obvious benevolent form of sexism, which is seen as innocent, or in the form of care or protection for women (Mastari, Spruyt, & Siongers, 2019; Salmen and Dhont, 2021). Sexism is maintained in ways that are more subtle, but no less harmful. The goal of this evolution seems to be for the oppression to be preserved. Koudenburg, et al. (2021) argued that sexism and prejudice may be rarer, and the social norms that are in place continue to keep the inequality in place. They surmised that certain social and cultural norms are oftentimes maintained in the normal activity of human interaction, such as conversation. They asserted:

> persistence of such biases may be a consequence of a quite normal and pervasive human tendency: the desire to maintain good conversational flow in an attempt to avoid controversy and awkwardness. Whether in televised or face-to-face conversations, maintaining the smooth flow of conversation after a sexist statement can be sufficient to communicate to passive observers that the sexist views of the speaker are widely shared. In this way, being polite and accommodating may end up reaffirming prejudices. (p. 1482)

Further, women are often seen as animal-like and more associated with nature (Salmen and Dhont, 2021). The pervasive nature of sexism is evident, even if in a different form. The intersection of race and gender further impacts the lived experiences of Black women, but still follows the trend of changing, not being eliminated.

Situating the Black women in this study within a broader social and cultural context provides additional viewpoints, compared to other Black women in society. Their views do not dismiss the intersecting oppressions that have been noted in the extant literature, but it does open another avenue for scholarly discourse regarding how Black women negotiated their work. What is to come in the rest of this discussion section is a conversation between the extant literature, the findings of this study and relevant documents, and my reflections as the researcher.

Most scholars ascribe the origin of the term "intersectionality" to Crenshaw (1991), who defined it as "the location of women of color both within overlapping systems of subordination and at the margins of feminism and antiracism" (p. 1265). While wide-ranging in scope (Collins, 2019), the use of "intersectionality" as a theory in this study will focus specifically on the location of the lived experiences at the intersection of race and gender. I am not dismissing the other identities of the five Black women participants; I seek to focus on this intersection to better understand their experiences in the shadow of *Brown*. Race was the primary factor within the court cases that comprised *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). However, most of the conversations related to education were initiated by, and executed by, men; therefore, the inclusion of gender into this study's conversation is intentional. This study examines how race and gender intersect in educational leadership in the context of one of the most pivotal Supreme Court decisions in American history.

Concurrently, "sensemaking," as defined by Weick (1995), is "the making of sense" (p. 4). Originally grounded in organizational theory, "sensemaking," is central because it is the location where meanings materialize that inform and constrain identity and action (Mills, 2003, p. 35). This theoretical framework was chosen for this study, in connection to *intersectionality*, to focus on the ways these participants made meaning of their contexts, their positionality, and their roles; and subsequently, how they determined the actions that would proceed from this meaning making. In this study, I sought to understand how the participants processed the moments they lived and led and better comprehend the behavior that followed.

Discussion of Key Findings

Research Question One

Research Question One asked, "What are the lived experiences of five Black women school leaders who led in the aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision?" The following themes were revealed: (1) Faith and service being at the core, (2) Working hard until the job is done, (3) Loving *all* children, (4) Confidence cultivated over time, and exercised throughout leadership, and (5) Experiencing no straightforward path to leadership. These themes provide deeper insight into the lived experiences of these school leaders.

Faith and Service Being at the Core. The first theme, *faith and service being at the core*, provided a confirmation of a lifestyle that Black women have used to navigate oftentimes oppressive environments. Their faith provided the resilience and purpose to handle the day-to-day interactions with students, staff, and parents. Their faith confirmed Lomotey (2019), when he asserted, "For Blacks, spirituality fosters a sense of optimism and offers the promise of survival. It is viewed as a buffer in the midst of institutionalized White racism" (p. 339). This intersecting of faith, race, and gender is consistent with the extant literature. Black women have traditionally relied upon their Christian faith, particularly, to traverse the journey of life, let alone leadership. All the participants for this study identified as Christian—either Roman Catholic or Protestant. Historically, the connection between faith and service for Black women was cultivated within "The Black Church." Witherspoon and Taylor (2010) asserted the Black Church refers to the "social and religious collective realities that African Americans experience" (p. 137). The Church was a place where social, religious, political, cultural, and educational activity took place (Cannon, 1988; Raboteau, 2004). It was the place that religion and spirituality provided a sense of identity and community, a basis for conduct and explanations for life (Postman, 2011). The spirituality of Black women, and Black women leaders particularly, is noted throughout the literature. Some acknowledge their commitment to their students as being a call from God

(Bloom & Erlandson, 2003), or a mandate to uphold spiritual integrity and moral leadership (Witherspoon & Arnold, 2010).

Each participant spoke of her Christian faith explicitly and without shame. Some of their actions as leaders would not be allowed, or accepted, in current P-12 public school settings. Dr. Cherry spoke of her private prayer time, while also sharing that she publicly played Gospel music for her school in the mornings. Dr. Peachtree, likewise, set the tone of the day with a devotion to her elementary-aged students. Mrs. Leone would repeatedly discuss that her trust, and her decision making, were rooted in God. Mrs. Pearl and Ms. Jessamine both emphasized their commitment to continuing in the faith tradition that they were raised in, because they found that it had never steered them wrong.

Coupled with faith, service is a necessary component to life. Lomotey (2019) asserted that "the discussion of spirituality in studies of Black women principals is not counterintuitive… they often draw upon their sacred upbringing and their connection to their place of worship in their daily lives. Akin to this connection is a focus on civic responsibility" (p. 339). Each of the participants were, and still are, active in their respective communities. Four of the five participants are affiliated with either Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. or Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., and have been active members since their times of leadership. A major component of these Black sororities is serving communities across the country and around the world. The participants' service-oriented leadership stemmed from a personal, and culturally informed, ethic of care that was instilled within them from their families and Black communities they were a part of. This aligns with what Alston (2005) referred to as tempered radicalism, "a commitment to servant leadership within and at variance with education for its constructive transformation to

benefit students" (Aaron, 2020, p. 149). Dr. Peachtree conveyed an experience from her childhood that illustrated her desire to do for others:

> I never heard my mother or father say, 'I love you.' I think they showed love; but they didn't speak it. But we knew they loved us. Because they sacrificed… We had a garden in the backyard. The whole backyard was a garden. One day I said, 'there's somebody out there in the garden.' He (her father) said that there was more than enough food to feed everybody. Let anybody in the community come and pick whatever they want. That taught me the lesson of giving to those in need.

This "showing" of love was cultivated in a communal context, whereby she learned to help people. In leadership, her focus was on doing the most to make sure her students were provided for, even if that meant she had to serve in the cafeteria when staff was short or sweep the front of the building every morning.

Dr. Cherry, in talking about her reference to her mindset of "Buckhead on Bankhead," told her students, "We are Buckhead on Bankhead. Anything they can accomplish in Buckhead, we can accomplish here in Bankhead." This mindset shaped her commitment to equity and her determination to provide all students—especially those who struggled to see their potential—with the same level of education and opportunity.

This idea of serving others is consistent with the extant literature. It coincides with a Black feminist ethic of care, which deals with relational accountability, a resistance to oppressive systems, and emotional labor rooted in moral values (Collins, 1990; Gilligan, 1982; hooks, 2000). Historically, there is a connection between Black women and caring (Graham, 2007). The commingling of faith and service for these participants shows a continuation of the ways Black

women have often acted in ways that aligned to their deepest moral values. Except one, all participants have been a member of her sorority for several decades. The number of years of membership ranges from 35 years to 78 years. Further, each of these participants lived through the Civil Rights era and participated in various ways. Some were more politically active, like Mrs. Pearl who served in various positions with the Democratic party in Arkansas since the age of 19. Dr. Peachtree was active in protests in the 1960s, while still attending an HBCU in Georgia.

The description of how their faith has shaped their lived experience highlighted the authenticity of what they believe. They spoke of God in personal terms, often referring to those people who introduced them to their faith. They spoke of faith-in-action, which was exhibited in their choice to enter education, as well as educational leadership.

Working Hard Until the Job is Done. The second theme, *working hard until the job is done*, reflected a common way of living for many African Americans. For some African Americans, there *was* a heightened obligation to prove their competence in environments that challenged their authority or questioned their credibility and qualifications (Pollard, 1997). The "work twice as hard" narrative drives how they operate in social and professional spaces. However, none of the participants in this study explicitly stated they felt they had to be "twice as good" or "work twice as hard." Dr. Cherry flatly stated that working hard "was just me." Mrs. Leone said that she was "equipped" to handle any type of situation she was in. Whether in the late 1960s with Mrs. Pearl, or in the early 1980s with Dr. Peachtree, the notion of *working hard* being the way to make things happen may coincide with the tenets of politics of respectability.

Black respectability, often referred to as respectability politics, is rooted in the notion that Black people could push back against systemic racism, and move upward socially and professionally, by adhering to certain behaviors, values, and appearances that typically align with

White norms (Gaines, 2012; Higginbotham, 1994; Collins, 1990). Writing about Black Baptist women's experiences, Higginbotham (1994) stated that the politics of respectability prompted a reform of individual behavior and attitudes for a greater goal of reforming race relations in America. While asserting that the politics of respectability "did not reduce to a mindless mimicry of white behavior or a 'front' without substance or content (p.197)," Higginbotham (1994) highlighted the subversive nature of respectability and how it challenged negative stereotypes of Black people, especially Black women, in society.

Each participant acknowledged a very solid work ethic. While none acknowledged that they felt the need to work hard for any external reason, they all subscribed to the notion that hard work would pay off in the long run. Prior to her promotion to principal, Dr. Cherry relayed a story about her, and another woman's, experience being told that the district was not going to promote any of the internal assistant principals. There was a former parent of a student she instructed, who was also a member of the board of education, who vocally advocated for Dr. Cherry because of the hard work she observed. In the same vein, Mrs. Leone arrived at school before everyone. She would "beat the milkman" to get things situated for the school day. Mrs. Leone and Dr. Peachtree had something in common in that they would stay late to check in with teachers, and make sure halls, bathrooms, and classrooms were clean and ready for the next day. In being intentional about providing a quality environment for all their students, each of these leaders established a high standard for themselves and others.

Additionally, the cost of a rigorous work ethic was articulated as another part of the lived experiences of my participants. Mrs. Pearl stated clearly, "being an administrator is the loneliest job." Leaders are in a category unto themselves; but being a Black female administrator made it even lonelier. Mrs. Peachtree and Ms. Jessamine both experienced divorces while serving as

school leaders. Mrs. Peachtree noted that it was "all that energy… and because I spent so much time in the school environment, trying to make students who they were that I didn't give enough time at home, to be perfectly honest." Jessamine, more acutely, mentioned that when she was 38 years old, her then-husband announced that he wanted their marriage to end, and it did. Mrs. Leone, while remaining married, mentioned having to rely on her network of friends to help her take care of her children while she was principal, when her husband was occupied with his own career. These aspects of their lives showed the complexity of navigating leadership in an evolving time, while trying to maintain a balance in private.

Lastly, Black women have historically laid the foundations of, and maintained, institutions. This took place even though Black men were in the spotlight. They labored in Black schools as teachers, in Black churches as mothers and spiritual nurturers, in Black movements as fundraisers and advocates and encouragers. The women in this study walk in that same tradition. In that these women were all teachers, before and after *Brown*, and all attested to the influence of Black teachers uplifting them as students, I was not surprised by the desire to continue this legacy. Their lived experiences were shaped by a Black ethic of hard work that they walked out, and that which they expected from their students and staff.

Loving All Children. The third theme, *loving all children*, reflected the participants' understanding of inclusion and equity in their care of students. Each one of the participants lived the process of desegregation at some point in their lives—either as a student, a teacher, and/or a leader; therefore, their time as school leaders reflected a difference in how inequities presented themselves in their respective schools. Their lived experiences as Black women shaped their ap-

proaches to how to ensure that all students felt loved and received a quality education. This coincided with their desire to love and nurture the children in their stewardship, regardless of their race.

To be clear, my choice of the word "love," in relation to "care," is intentional. "Care" is used in extant literature to describe women in education, generally. As it relates to Black women in education, "other-mothering" (Collins, 1990) and "ethics of care" (Hill, 1990; Gilligan, 1982) are used to describe the ways they engage and protect children. While it is appropriate to discuss the participants' actions, the term does not fully capture the motivation or beliefs driving their behavior. The conversation about love in education seems very stark with the participants' lives and should be more prominent in scholarly conversations. "Love" reflects the affection for people, and a willingness to devote an aspect of themselves to see another person on their terms, while also seeing better for them. Sanchez (1998) said, in conversation about reminding young people of the lineage and impact of Black women:

> But in spite of our oppression, we have maintained our humanity. We might be in danger of losing it with this younger generation, so our work is very important. We must work hard to make them understand the history/herstory that we have in the world–the humanity and the love that we have. (p. 218)

This passage highlighted the significance of understanding "herstory," as humanity has been maintained and strengthened because of Black women. Winfield (2007), in her dissertation, articulated the significance of love in the context of pedagogy and learning. I add the concept of love to this discussion:

> True learning and effective pedagogy must have at its genesis, love. If you can continue to love after you have been hurt, after you have suffered and prepare yourself to forgive,

> before you have been hurt–then you are fully human. Only the fully human can be appropriately taught. Only the fully human can effectively learn. True learning flourishes in an environment of love. And only the loving can transform society in a way that is beneficial to all members of society. (p. 54)

In the social, political, and cultural contexts that these five women led, they all experienced personal and professional hindrances to their growth. While oppression took shape in different forms for each woman, they each were grounded in the virtue of love that was expressed in how they engaged students, staff, and parents.

The love for all children as a school leader is consistent with that love for all children as a teacher. Mrs. Pearl, who became a teacher in 1949, prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, made note of the time Black teachers took to make sure Black students learned. She highlighted the time they devoted to make sure that students understood and mastered each skill. She contrasted this with how some White teachers engaged with Black students during Little Rock's desegregation phase. She described some as less patient and teaching in a way that did not effectively engage Black students. Her reflections connect with hooks (1994), who believed:

> School changed utterly with racial integration. Gone was the messianic zeal to transform our minds and beings that had characterized teachers and their pedagogical practices in our all-Black schools. Knowledge was suddenly about information. It had no relation to how one lived, behaved. It was no longer connected to antiracist struggle…When we entered racist, desegregated, White schools we left a world where teachers believed that to educate Black children rightly would require a political commitment. (p.65)

As a leader, Pearl "did not make a difference when it came to children," and sought to make sure the teachers she led did the same thing.

Ms. Jessamine, who began her career in education in 1960, saw the progression of integration, first in Alabama and later in South Carolina. She mentioned that under her leadership, her school had the first English as a Second Language (ESL) program in the county. Because of where her school was located, and the demographics of the surrounding community, the school population was very diverse. She made it a point to note that, at times, there was conflict between the Black students and the Hispanic students. But she would not allow this to disrupt the school environment and was committed to ensuring all students felt a sense of belonging.

Dr. Peachtree openly admitted that her priority was to her students rather than the adults. She sought to make sure that she treated all her students with love. She said,

> I treated them well by knowing their names and giving them hugs…I would spray perfume right in the middle of my stomach, because that's where the little kindergarteners' heads would be; and they would always talk about how I smelled. I would always have something for them as I would go into every classroom in the building.

There are expressions of love that Peachtree wanted to express, and wanted her students to feel, emotionally and physically. She noted that she served schools that were racially different, but also socioeconomically diverse.

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, Ms. Jessamine and Mrs. Pearl described "being harder" on Black students and desiring to "protect" them. Even with diversity in their schools, there was still special attention to Black students. Whether in primarily Black schools, or ones with more diversity, Drs. Cherry and Peachtree still could address the obvious inequities negatively impacting minority students in relation to their White counterparts. This is important to note that loving *all* children did not negate taking care of one's *own* children.

Confidence Cultivated Over Time and Exercised Throughout Leadership. The fourth theme, *confidence cultivated over time and exercised throughout leadership*, highlighted the ability of the participants to navigate intersecting oppressions while drawing strength from lived experiences. There were internal and external barriers to confidently walking in leadership, initially. Dr. Peachtree acknowledged what many women have noted in literature, that women were often unprepared for leadership, as it was traditionally seen as a space reserved for men. Peachtree articulated that she had to unlearn some things as it related to the philosophy of women giving deference to men. In her words, there was:

> Nothing about our needs; it was about the men. My mother would say to do this or that for my father. I have to do this for my brother. But nobody ever said that I had to do it for me. So I grew up with that mentality—that I had to make sure that I'm pleasing the males for the most part. Until one day…that soon stopped.

The phrase "that soon stopped" was emphasized firmly in the interview. She no longer felt that she had to submit to the notion that her voice was secondary. She admitted that she was the one in meetings who would ask all the questions, no matter what looks came back at her. She asserted her position when in many of those same meetings, when a need for a notetaker was announced, eyes looked her way, because she was often one of few women in the room. She would respond, "I'm not gonna be your secretary today, guys." The assumption from the men that Peachtree should be the notetaker was emblematic of a stereotype placed upon women that they do the work for the men, despite the fact that she was a leader, too.

Further, Peachtree felt unprepared to engage in certain work and conversations. Several times in our conversations, she repeated the phrases, "I hadn't been taught" or "No one taught

me how;" and with that she desired to prepare herself through education, as well as bringing people in to help her with those things that she knew were not her strongest points. The act of recognizing strengths and weaknesses was prevalent throughout several narratives. Ms. Jessamine acknowledged her weakness in writing, so she felt confident in getting certain messages crafted through one of her assistant principals. In order for her to be out and about in classrooms, Mrs. Leone leaned on her office staff to handle things, so she didn't feel tethered to her office. All of these actions required self-awareness; it also required confidence in releasing some of the leadership burden, so energies could be expended elsewhere. Further, it shows a response to perceived weakness; and with that, asserting that they would not allow weaknesses to hinder their leadership.

As school leaders, these women were often compared to the men. Their confidence was personal, first; but it also was a statement in the face of the barriers presented to them. Those barriers included explicit and implicit bias from male leaders, push back from parents and members of the community, and students who had a false sense of who these Black women were in contrast with what they had been taught at home. I would say one place that helped to cultivate these women's sense of self was the Historically Black College and University setting that they all attended for undergraduate studies. Prior to this, they all were educated primarily by Black female and male educators. For these women, this protective space helped them to see role models, understand what professionalism was, and what high expectations looked like (Horsford, 2010; Walker, 1996).

Education provided the sense of credibility and knowledge base needed to stand as a leader. Drs. Cherry and Peachtree both stated they were intentional in achieving their doctoral degrees. Cherry went further by saying that "if I was going to go to school, I was going to

achieve the highest degree. And I did." While not earning doctorates, each of the other three participants earned their master's degrees. They desired to follow in the footsteps of the teachers and professors who encouraged them to pursue their education. This is in line with extant literature regarding the high level of education among Black educators, particularly among Black women. Karpinski (2006), in an analysis of the expulsions, firings, and demotions of Black teachers and school leaders after *Brown*, asserted, "The loss of teaching and principal positions by African Americans removed some of the most competent educators in the U.S. public school system" (p. 248). Black women are the most educated demographic in the workforce, generally, and in the field of education (Guerra, 2013; Pinto et al., 2024). While important for professional credibility, earning advanced degrees for these women was also important for their personal growth and development as leaders. In spaces that were primarily dominated by males, it was important for these women to have the same, or higher, level of degrees to try to dismiss the accusations that their experience was feeble.

Experiencing No Straightforward Paths to Leadership. The fifth theme, *experiencing no straightforward path to leadership*, shed light on the obfuscated, nonlinear ways Black women ascend to school leadership. The absence of a clear path to leadership highlighted the systemic hindrances that these participants, and others, faced, rooted in racism and sexism. Bailes and Guthery (2020) discussed the differences between the trajectories of males ascending to school leadership and that of females. They asserted that for males, the ascension is more vertical, while females traverse a more horizontal path. Additionally, traditional ideas of leadership, which elevate Whiteness and emphasize masculine traits, contradict with the experiences of some. These women assert their race and gender may contribute to their marginalization and invisibility (Anzaldúa, 1987; Collins, 1990; Maher & Tetreault, 1993).

For Black women specifically, they experience what Catalyst (1998), a nonprofit working to build workplaces that empower women calls a "concrete ceiling," in contrast to a "glass ceiling." Concrete is impossible to see through and much harder to break, which describes the professional experiences of many Black women (Green and King, 2001; Thomas and Love, 2014). The "double whammy" (Andrews, 1993), this dual penalty of being Black and female, often impacts their career trajectories in the workforce. The variety of paths that these five women took towards leadership confirm, in many respects, what later literature supports. While varied, the leaders in this study described opportunities to higher positions in non-obstructive ways. In other words, while there may have been sexist and racist resistance, there was not always great, prevailing resistance to their ascension to leadership, as I had assumed.

Each participant achieved the position of principal, except Mrs. Pearl. For 10 years, while serving as an assistant principal in Little Rock, she was a summer school principal at several local high schools. According to her, at that time Black women could not hold the position of principal of a high school. This clearly shows the bias against women, and Black women specifically, when it comes to certain positions. The publication of the Arkansas Teachers Association, "The Bulletin," revealed that Black women held several principalships throughout the state, but primarily in elementary schools, junior high schools, and training schools[11]. This does align with literature that confirms that women make up at least a half of secondary teachers, but the minority in secondary administrative roles (Coleman, 2001; Morris, 1999; McLay and Brown, 2001).

[11] An additional source was helpful in determining the positions Black women held throughout Arkansas. Smith, C. C., & Joshua, L. W. (2003). *Educating the Masses: the Unfolding History of Black School Admin in Arkansas*. University of Arkansas Press. As with other sources, there was no definitive answer to when Black women held high school principalships in Little Rock. Mrs. Pearl believes that the first Black female high school principals in Arkansas, at least in Little Rock, may have been Linda Watson and Marian Lacey.

Ms. Jessamine, too, served as an assistant principal in a high school setting; however, her principalship was in a middle school. Mrs. Leone, Dr. Cherry, and Dr. Peachtree all served in elementary or middle schools, respectively. These experiences align to the idea that Black women may be in school leadership, but only in certain contexts. In my interviews with Ms. Jessamine, I found out that after she retired as a principal in 1996, she was named as a director of the detention school for a few years. Also, Dr. Peachtree, after serving as principal for a short period of time, navigated several central office positions, rising to become an associate superintendent by the end of her P-12 career.

How should this information be read? The scope of my study centralized the lived experiences of these five women during their years of P-12 school leadership; therefore, I did not delve deeply into their careers after they were no longer school leaders. However, each participant found themselves where they desired to be. While there was a difference in pathways to their ultimate leadership position, none articulated feeling deprived from another position or that they could not be successful in the leadership roles they attained. After retiring in 1987, Mrs. Leone consulted with a book company, was a travel agent, served on several boards of nonprofit organizations, and continued work with her sorority, of which she had been a member since 1969. Mrs. Pearl, after her retirement in 1992, focused on her political work with the Democratic party in Little Rock, and helping to establish 17 chapters of her sorority on college campuses around the country. Ms. Jessamine, other than directing the detention school, continued being on the board of the credit union, of which she has served since 1985. After her first retirement, Dr. Peachtree served in higher education for another ten years before retiring again. Dr. Cherry, the youngest of the participants, served as principal until 2007, but was called back in 2016 to step in as an interim, and continued to step in as situations arose. In analyzing this last theme, I concluded the

career paths of the women of this study exemplify a mix of what they desired as professionals, accepting the opportunities that were given to them, and a realization of some of the constraints of being Black women in educational leadership during the time they held those positions.

Research Question Two

Research Question Two asked, "How did five Black women school leaders make sense of their roles in a desegregated school setting between 1965 and 1985, after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision?" They made sense by synthesizing personal values, and viewing themselves as agents of change, with a professional responsibility and moral imperative, and determined to: (1) Be visible to students, staff, and the community, (2) Expose students to life and the world, and (3) Represent themselves with excellence. These themes provide a glimpse into the sensemaking process—the ways leaders interpreted, constructed, and responded to their environments—in their roles as assistant principals and principals, respectively.

Be Visible to Students, Staff, and the Community. The first theme, be *visible to students, staff, and the community*, highlighted a sense of responsibility to make sure that their presence was known throughout their respective schools. Visibility reinforced their identity as leaders who were accessible, involved, and committed, which impacted how they were perceived, and how they viewed themselves in their roles. In our interview sessions, each of the participants' tones were authoritative when asserting that they held control in their respective roles. To be clear, it was not an authoritarian tone; rather, it was one that articulated a definitive position of who they were as leader.

This theme is connected to sensemaking in that it first, focuses on Weick's (1995) first property on how the participants constructed meaning from their identities. They all articulated a desire to be accessible, which is why they felt the need to be in the hallways and classrooms

throughout each school day. They said they wanted to be involved and committed leaders, which was revealed through their attentiveness to the lives of students outside of school. It was important for each of these women to be looked at as one who was present and took their responsibilities as leader seriously. In a way, this strategy seems to be able to manage the perceptions from others to dispel any notion that they lacked something in their leadership.

Mrs. Leone articulated that her visibility was to assert her role as leader of the school, and to deter any notion that someone else was the leader of her school. She made it clear that she was in charge. Her work in private, like getting to work at 6:00 a.m., or staying late, allowed her presence to be seen and felt throughout the school hours, for parents, students, and staff to see. She would tell parents that "you may run your house one way, but when your child comes to my school, I'm going to run it my way." In defining who she was in this context, Leone determined to eliminate any confusion about her role to everyone she interacted with. That particular statement emphasizes the control over her school and how she wanted others to understand how it would operate. Ms. Jessamine conveyed the same sentiment in like terms. It was important that people heard *one* consistent voice. These leaders' conception of themselves revealed itself in articulating a clear authority figure in their schools and determining that they would remain visible as often as possible.

Furthermore, since sensemaking is a *social* process, in line with Weick's (1995) fourth property, whereby their presence and behavior as school leaders creates opportunities to construct new meaning of what education could look like for students. Because of the social context, depending on the school, these women may have been the first or only Black administrator some students had. Mrs. Leone, in Alaska, was one of few Black female administrators in the state.[12]

[12] Mrs. Leone succeeded the first Black female principal in Anchorage, Alaska, Etheldra Davis.

Likewise, Mrs. Pearl was elevated to vice principal in Little Rock for the sake of satisfying the integration needs established by legal precedent; therefore, some of the White students had never engaged with a Black administrator prior to her entering the high school she was assigned. Ms. Jessamine, in South Carolina, was also the only Black female assistant principal in the 1970s, and one of the few Black female principals even in the 1980s. Drs. Cherry and Peachtree came into leadership in Atlanta, where there was a greater quantity of female leaders; however, it was still miniscule in certain contexts, based upon the interactions they received. For example, Dr. Peachtree noted a conversation of an elementary-aged White girl stating that Dr. Peachtree did not look like her mother told her she would look. The girl expected a darker-skinned woman with barbed wire-like hair. Their positionality as school leaders was more than just running a school; it was seen as an opportunity to construct a new reality in the schools they led.

Further, visibility was not just about them; it was about making others visible too. Extant literature reveals that the presence of a Black school leader has positive implications for the retention, and elevation, of Black teachers, as well as on Black students (Johnson, 2006; Kelley, 2012; Tillman, 2004). Recognizing the evolution of their school environments to include a diverse student body, they understood that representation mattered. Whether it was Mrs. Leone who made it her priority as a principal to make her first hire a Black person, or it was Mrs. Pearl who kept her father's words in mind to "carry someone up with you," they saw that it was important to make the presence of Blackness apparent.

Expose Students to Life and the World. The second theme, *expose students to life and the world*, emphasized these leaders' role in aiding students' interpretation and maneuvering of new and unfamiliar realities. These Black women sought to help students make sense of their place in an evolving world, and how to connect what students were learning in the classroom to

what was taking place in their respective worlds. This theme is connected to sensemaking in that it shows how these leaders understood the environment and desired to construct new ways of understanding for students. The collective school leadership experience of these participants began in 1968 and ended in 2007, in four different states. Within that timeframe, and respective locales, each leader had to determine what to expose students to and how to do it, because the contexts were different.

Croft (2023) articulated the legacy of Black educators and school leaders providing opportunities for students to experience aspects of life beyond what was immediately within grasp, even in her own life growing up through the pre-*Brown*, post-*Brown* transition. From opportunities "to participate in journalism and publish our work…" to "our annual trip to the symphony orchestra" to learning "Robert's Rules of Order and practicing them in democratic class elections," (p. 40) she spelled out how Black educators and leaders provided for their students. Morris and Morris (2000) confirmed the intentionality of Black leaders who sought to expand the horizons of Black children. To expose students to life and the world they lived within, the participants in this study made sense of their lives and the world they lived within. There was a collective sentiment among the participants about desiring to provide something they had received in their upbringing and give to their schools.

Much of the framing around certain opportunities afforded to students was due to the reflection done by these leaders. This is a further connection to Weick (1995), related to the property of *retrospection*. Dr. Cherry was the most direct in stating that "I always wanted to give my students the same experiences I had…" There was a clear recognition that many of her students, White and Black, had not had the experiences to be able to imagine a different reality for them-

selves. In reflecting upon her personal history, Cherry was making a way for students to experience a path to newness that she did. This standpoint suggests that Cherry's reflection about her life, for the sake of her students, was not simply personal; it was deliberate. She acknowledges that her students may not have had the resources, and access, as other students in the same district; but she desired to frame the opportunities for her students in a way that pushed against perceived inadequacy and inferiority.

Mrs. Leone, in her articulation of the ways that she was "equipped," conveyed that she was provided with an education that broadened the way she thought and wanted to carry that with her into the classroom, and then into leadership. Her undergraduate education, for example, was more than just what her major required; it encompassed music, the sciences, and knowledge of global affairs. She carried this experience into both her classroom and administration. The diversity of expertise pushes against the idea that Black women do not have the knowledge or skill level compared to their Black male, or White counterparts. Leone's behavior acknowledged her reflective process, and how that shaped her identity. Further, her leadership behavior shows how she was internally engaging the *social* property, as she was determining what she believed to be pertinent for her to do, based upon her immediate context.

Mrs. Pearl, Ms. Jessamine, and Dr. Peachtree all acknowledged a focus on exposing their students to aspects of life that had not previously encountered. Whether teaching survival skills to their Black boys, or revealing their humanity to little White girls, or exposing all their students to Black men in the classroom, each of these women thought it necessary to understanding the information that the context was providing and determine the best response. In mixed school environments, there were a mixture of circumstances to navigate; therefore, it was imperative for

these women to understand, and interpret, the "cues," as Weick (1995) stated to resolve them in the best ways.

These women broadened the academic and experiential horizons of their students, to allow them the opportunities to engage life beyond the classroom. Weick's (1995) work is revealed as they navigated the evolving educational landscape. They drew from their life's experiences, and from their perceptions of social and political issues to craft learning opportunities that extend the legacy of Black educational excellence. Their actions helped create, and sustain, equitable educational experiences for all their students.

Represent Themselves with Excellence. The third theme, *represent themselves with excellence*, focuses on how these leaders constructed their identities and presented themselves in their respective environments. This theme is connected to the politics of respectability in that there was a sense that carrying themselves with a higher standard would yield a different perception of them, as well as convey their expectations to everyone they supervised and led. Each of these leaders provided a glimpse into how they interpreted their leadership as the standard for others to follow. This theme connects with sensemaking in that it is grounded in *identity construction*, and how that construction influenced the areas around them (DuRue & Ashford, 2010; Ely et al., 2011). Excellence, as a practice, for these women may have been a way to challenge stereotypes and biases against them. This "self-definition" (Collins, 2000) was a part of their resistance against notions that Black women were not apt for school leadership. It further could provide an opportunity for students, staff, and parents to understand leadership in a different way through the presence of these Black women.

Holding high expectations for themselves, as well as others, constituted a significant part of how these women navigated their day-to-day lives as leaders. Whether through their dress,

their work ethic, or their adherence to policy, these Black women represented what they felt was right and good for their respective contexts. Their aesthetic was not merely a matter of presenting themselves well; it was to assert their authority further. Furthermore, by modeling hard work, and having high expectations for themselves, they sought to establish the standard that everyone was to follow. In the end, it was for the students' sake, knowing they were receiving the best from the adults in their lives.

This theme also connects to the property of *retrospection* (Weick, 1995), in that these leaders had to reflect upon their actions and adjust accordingly. This would ensure that they continued to operate at a high level for the sake of the roles they were in. When asked about success, and what it looked like for them, each woman responded differently. Each response reflected how their leadership behaviors directly influenced the outcomes. The iterative process of *retrospection*, and their high standards for themselves and others, dictated whether success was achieved.

Success as a leader was deeply rooted in 1) providing to students what was provided to them when they were students, and 2) seeing students achieve and become who they were meant to be. Dr. Cherry stated, "We set the goals we desired, and how we were going to achieve those goals. If we achieved them, then we know we were successful. If we didn't, then we know we needed to do something differently." This, more straightforward definition, provided a clear, focused idea of what it meant to achieve—no matter the context Dr. Cherry was in.

Likewise, Dr. Peachtree articulated the necessity of having a common measurement of success, so that her administrative team and faculty knew what they were striving for. She stated that data was a significant component to her leadership; it was important that she made decisions based on that data. She explained how her administrative team meetings functioned,

> My leadership team and I met every Monday morning at seven o'clock in the morning. I would bring breakfast. I knew that was the time that I knew I could meet with them…Every week, I would ask them to tell me the best two teachers they saw and the worst teacher they saw. And I need to know how we can help the worst; and I need to know how we make the better teacher even better. If the teachers are doing well, the students are going to do well.

She committed to defining the traits of effective teachers to establish a clear vision of success. To her, "you can't go in that classroom and look for success if it doesn't align with what we have agreed upon what success looked like." Her habit of being inclusive with decision making, and collaborating on definitions, highlights her goal of making everyone feel they belonged and had a voice.

Mrs. Leone said "success" comes from doing something for someone else; it was about passing on something that she had received. To her, it was not for her to keep, to begin with; therefore, whatever gifts, skills, or knowledge she had, she freely gave. "God may do things for you, so that you can do it for somebody else," she shared. Even in a school environment, as a teacher or as principal, Leone thought it important to give back. She felt that the environment would not improve if she did not give of what she had; therefore, by processing her context and reflecting on her life, she adopted a generous approach.

Mrs. Pearl adhered to her father's wisdom, which connects to Weick's (1995) notion of *retrospection* and *identity construction*, in striving to see something through, and make sure it is done in a certain way. She asserted, "I like to see a job well done…I do things, not for the publicity of them, but to see them well, finished, and ready to go." Success meant doing a job well. Likewise, Ms. Jessamine stated that, at times, she did not feel successful, because her school was

consistently at the bottom. It was seen as being "lowest on the totem pole." With that, morale was low amongst teachers and students. Success came when the district recognized the school for the small improvements; success came when her staff felt motivated to keep achieving, even when the gains seemed small. She would say that if teachers did their best, and "showed up," then students would learn. In this way, Jessamine would utilize Weick's (1995) third property, where she is aiding in the creation she is interpreting. In other words, she recognized how the district viewed her school; but together with her teachers, she decided to shape the narrative differently.

Excellence begets success. While defined differently, each participant knew their communities well enough to gauge where they were and provided guidelines for achieving more. These Black women led through sensemaking, guided by *retrospection*, *identity construction*, and *enactment*. The high standards that they held for themselves, and others, were rooted in personal values, which also had an impact on the schools that they led. In viewing themselves as role models, grounded in excellence, they shaped the way they guided their school environments. The decisions they made—through data, through collaborating with teachers and fellow administrators, or through their faith—demonstrated the ongoing sensemaking they conducted. Ultimately, their responses to circumstances were not a reaction to what took place; they sought to shape them through an active converging of interpretation and subsequent action.

Implications

Educational Practice

The implications for educational practice related to this study are multifaceted. They emphasize the priorities of equity, inclusion, and representation in educational leadership and could

positively impact public education in the United States. Further, these implications could position the Black female educational leadership history as a contrast to predominately White leadership norms, fostering transformative change in educational spaces of all students.

First, I propose integrating historical context into leadership training. While *the act of* promoting Black women leaders is taking place in various parts of the United States, it is important that their histories are not marginalized. How Black women school leaders lead is important. The history of Black educational history is rich, and the history of Black educational leadership is developing in the scholarly literature; therefore, Black women school leaders who are serving now can be empowered by the lineage of their forebearers when developing their leadership skills and leading schools that are steadily evolving demographically. This would include an emphasis on Khalifa's (2020) Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) practices, as well as a framework to acknowledge the power structures, inequities, and expectations Black women leaders navigate, so that school leaders are able to appropriately respond to the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and other identities represented within their school communities. If history is truly embedded within CRSL, students can truly see themselves within the curriculum. Further, leaders rooted in history can respond to the needs of leadership by seeing how leaders from the past handled their respective circumstances.

Second, I propose cultivating school cultures that encourage identity-conscious leadership. Conformity to predominately White leadership norms is one strategy that some Black women embrace when ascending to school leadership in the American context. The double standards that Black women often face in leadership (i.e. expected to lead with authority with the perception of aggressiveness or perceived as unfit) are remnants of White normativity. These double standards reinforce biased perceptions of who is deemed "fit" to lead. If there is not a

space to address those standards, the implications of this can be detrimental to them as leaders, but also to the schools they lead. Thus, it is important that district and state leadership foster spaces where Black women, and other leaders within marginalized groups, are encouraged to embrace their cultural identities while leading. Honoring the nuances of intersectional oppression is important to tear down hindrances for Black women to fully be free to walk in who they are as leaders. Even if formal spaces, through district or state offices, do not create spaces, Black women can create spaces that serve to build themselves up, honoring the fact that they have the self knowledge to lead effectively.

Third, I propose creating platforms for dialogue, where Black women assistant principals and principals commune to share their experiences, for educational purposes to rising leaders, but also to stakeholders to understand the unique perspectives of these leaders. Black women can provide mentorship to others aspiring to leadership about their racialized and gendered experiences, while also being the most significant advocates for inclusion and equity in educational practice and policy conversations. Communication among Black women in leadership cannot be understated, as Black women have oftentimes been excluded from certain networks; it must remain strong for the sake of the visibility, the representation, and the increase of Black women in school leadership.

Fourth, I propose prioritizing the history of Black educational leadership in university and certificate programs that train school leaders, generally, and a specific focus on Black women's contributions, specifically. This should include the historical and social components, so that there is an emphasis of the diversity of voice and perspective when developing future school leaders. Many school districts actively recruit, and even prepare, their aspiring and current leaders; but this emphasis on history within the preparation would gird future leaders with context to

see trends and patterns in the field, as well as provide encouragement from the past when the stress of leadership presents itself. Further, it would decentralize, and decolonize, curricula that is written by, and promoted for, White scholars and writers. While there should be a general study into Black educational leadership history, a focus on Black women would allow scholars and practitioners to understand the differences with that of Black men's and White men's and women's experiences as school leaders.

Fifth, I propose creating spaces for Black women school leaders to serve as bridge builders in the communities they serve. This can take two forms: first, by empowering these leaders to create their own spaces that foster connections across diverse community groups; and second, through support for district leadership, which can facilitate authentic community-building by endorsing and investing in initiatives led by Black women leaders that intentionally engage local organizations. As described in this chapter, Black women are heavily involved in social, political, and religious organizations. Their cultural expertise would allow for stronger partnerships to be made within communities, which would strengthen the cultures of the local schools. Too often schools are isolated from the communities that they serve. To change this, school leaders should become, what Khalifa (2020) encouraged: more community oriented. He stated,

> Traditional school leaders are often visible only within the school walls and at a few sporting events…This shift significantly expands traditional notions of school-community relationships: it not only requires a mutual presence, but also an engagement in and advocacy for community-based causes...the nature of the relationship must begin with the community's interests (not test scores, grades, or student behavior) at the heart of the agenda. And last, principals' advocacy for issues important to the community is the secret

> ingredient that will eventually give principals the credibility, rapport, and trust that they so often long for. (pp.170-171)

Black women are heavily involved in political, civic, and religious organizations; they have tremendous influence in the community. These women in positions of school leadership would only benefit a school in that they are able to build bridges where oftentimes there are separations.

Educational Policy

The implications for educational policy related to this study are also multifaceted. They focus on the history of Black educational leadership, the pipeline of leadership ascension, as well as the institutional mechanisms of racism and sexism that persist in American public education.

First, this study emphasizes the significance of understanding the historical background in shaping and preparing contemporary leadership. Historical context in leadership development could help current and rising leaders to understand the persistent impacts of the legacy of the *Brown* decisions in contemporary public education. Inclusion of historical education would be significant to root leadership development and policy in more than organizational theory or business management, that oftentimes govern educational leadership discourse.

Second, I suggest what others have acknowledged in previous leadership studies: policies geared towards the intentional recruitment, support, and retention of Black women in educational leadership (Dillard, 1995; Edwards, 2023; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Khalifa et al., 2016). Beyond this, it is important to cultivate safe spaces for Black women to prevail. It is not enough to elevate these leaders to roles of influence, only to restrict their cultural knowledge, historical insights, and the ingenuity garnered from their lived experiences.

Third, this study shows that Black women experience different pathways to leadership, especially in relation to their White male/female and Black male counterparts. I propose policies

that work towards dismantling institutional barriers that prevent Black women from advancing in educational leadership. While similar proposals have been suggested (Alston, 2005; Brunner & Grogan, 2007), I suggest an emphasis on accountability measures for addressing discrimination within school districts and other educational institutions. For example, these accountability measures could include mandatory equity audits to determine any disparities in hiring, promotion, or pay for Black women in school leadership roles. Further, accountability measures could include workplace climate surveys to identify possible discriminatory practices faced by Black women.

As of this writing (in 2025), there are state and federal assaults on diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives throughout educational institutions, from preschool through higher education. With this said, even I have wonderings on the feasibility of my proposal. The anti-DEI climate calls for Black school leaders—female *or* male—to tap into more subversive leadership. Here is where history can inform us on how to maneuver through these precarious times. Muhammad (2020) wrote about literary societies that were organized to help Black people to read and write when White-run organizations would not allow them to be included. Givens (2021) described the origin, necessity, and means of a "pedagogy of escape," and the impetus to subscribe to more "fugitive" forms of education for the sake of providing educational opportunity to Black people on their terms. Likewise, this is a time for Black [women] school leaders to continue in the legacy of the ancestors, and strategically, unitedly, and fearlessly honor the full humanity of those in their stewardship, in an environment that will continue to impugn human sacredness. This could look like intentionally embedding culturally affirming content and histories around school buildings, ensuring that students are constantly surrounded despite other areas being targeted. Further, by continuing to use language of liberation, of diversity, of achievement, of love,

leaders can affirm what is important through what they say. Lastly, much like Dr. Peachtree asserted: while there may be a *what* mandated by district, state, or federal policy, there may be times when the *how* is left up to school leaders. This is where creativity and justice can be infused into policy implementation.

Recommendations for Future Research

The limitations of my study allowed me to reflect upon several suggestions for future research and inquiry. In my desire to reclaim the tradition of excellence in Black school leadership, I encourage future scholarship that deals with those leaders who were students in the aftermath of the *Brown* decisions. As my participants revealed, having Black educators during their formative years provided discipline, guidance, and role models that contributed to their success—not just as individuals, but also as leaders. In studying the histories of current, or recently retired, leaders who grew up after *Brown* could be insightful to learn how they perceived those leaders, and what lessons were garnered to aid in their personal and professional formation.

Further, as I was seeking participants for this study, I found more Black women school leaders than those who I chose to participate here. Those leaders served as assistant principals and/or principals within, and slightly beyond, my established timeframe. Many could not participate due to being outside of my established timeframe, or due to health-related ailments or personal restraints, even though they expressed desire to participate. Future scholarship, however difficult it will be, should continue to seek out the lived experiences of those women who served as school leaders after the Supreme Court's decree that racial segregation was unconstitutional, for the sake of understanding the perspectives, philosophies, and insights of those who served during the transition from segregation to desegregation. Literature about Black women school

leaders during this timeframe is scant; therefore, studying those who are still alive can provide valuable insights into past experiences and inform future leadership practices.

Additionally, it is important to delve into the implications of the *Brown* decisions on staff and administrators more broadly. Much of the scholarly literature focuses on the student component of the decisions but does not consider the experiences and implications connected with those who taught and led. How could the lessons from the lived experiences of those educators and leaders inform educators and leaders today who are navigating demographic shifts, re-segregation, and precarious political environments?

Conclusion

I explored the lived experiences of Black women who served as school leaders in the wake of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision. Through this hermeneutic phenomenology, I addressed two research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of five Black women school leaders who led in the aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision?
2. How did five Black women school leaders make sense of their roles in a desegregated school setting between 1965 and 1985, after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision?

Through the lenses of intersectionality and sensemaking, I examined how five school leaders navigated educational leadership as Black women, and how their identities shaped how they made sense of their roles. The themes that responded to the first research question were: (1) Faith and service being at the core, (2) Working hard until the job is done, (3) Loving all children, (4) Confidence cultivated over time, and exercised throughout leadership, and (5) Experiencing no straightforward path to leadership. Those that corresponded to the second research question

were: (1) Be visible to students, staff, and the community, (2) Expose students to life and the world, and (3) Represent themselves with excellence. The corresponding narratives that illustrated and explained these themes highlighted how these Black women leaned into their faith, their Black heritage, and their keen intellect and zeal for excellence, in the face of evolving educational landscape.

By centering the lived experiences of Black women, I desired to de-center the often male-dominated narratives in Black history, and White-dominated narratives in educational leadership literature. As a Black male, I found this study exciting and challenging; but I also felt uneasiness and trepidation, at times, because I kept wondering if I was the best one to take on this topic. The impetus behind this study was multifold: First, I had a desire to honor the Black women, personally and professionally, who had a hand in shaping me; second, as a lover and adherer, to Black history, I felt as if there was something missing that should be highlighted; third, as a burgeoning scholar, I recognized the scantness of conversations about Black women in school leadership after *Brown*. With this motivation, I strove to dig deep, in an attempt to step out of myself, in a sense, to understand the lived experiences of those who stood flat footed in the face of challenges I have yet to confront fully.

This study offers significant contributions to the field of educational leadership, because it relies on voices who are oftentimes marginalized even in leadership positions. While leaders in churches, civic organizations, and political parties, Black women have been the backbone of the Black community and beyond. So why not pay more attention to their expertise in leadership? Why not take notes from the Black lineage that fashioned them? As scholars continue researching Black educational leadership, and practitioners continue seeking wisdom, I encourage them to not spend a great amount of time seeking something new; there are proven strategies from

Black women school leaders who stewarded Black children and others towards a better understanding of themselves and the world around them. It is my hope that this work serves as a reminder to center the experiences of Black women in education, because there is transformative power in allowing those voices to be heard and honored. At the time of this writing (2025), the United States, again, is in a period where there is tremendous social and political change. Now seems to be a good time to harken to wisdom of those who have navigated tumultuous periods before.

Future studies should not shy away from examining the experiences of other minoritized bodies in leadership. They should include how Black women, and women of color generally, are addressing challenges like re-segregation, equity-driven educational policies, and how they are exacting culturally responsive leadership. If there are practitioners and scholars bold enough, this type of work has the potential to alter how policies are written, how leaders are prepared, and how education in America will look in the years to come. By building on this study, the field of educational leadership can continue to operate with genuine liberation in mind, justice in focus, and love overall.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Title: Leading Ladies: A Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Black Women School Leaders in the Wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*

Principal Investigator: Dr. Dionne Cowan

Student Principal Investigator: Jairus E. Hallums

Introduction and Key Information

You are invited to take part in a research study. It is up to you to decide if you would like to take part in the study.
The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of Black female school leaders who led in the immediate aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, and how they made sense of their roles in desegregated school settings.
Your role in the study will last 45-to-60 minutes over three interview sessions.
You will be asked to do the following: respond to predetermined interview questions, and possible follow-up questions, and to review interview transcripts after the in-person interviews.
This study will not benefit you. Overall, we hope to gain information about the lived experience of Black female school leaders in desegregated school settings.
If you do not wish to take part in this study, you are free to decline.

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences of Black female school leaders who led in the immediate aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, and how they made sense of their roles in desegregated school settings. You are invited to take part in this research study because you are a Black female school leader who led after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision. A total of four to six people will be invited to take part in this study.

Procedures

If you decide to take part, you will be asked interview questions about your personal background, professional background, and your experiences as a school leader in three separate sessions, over the course of one weekend—Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Each session will take anywhere from 45-to-60 minutes. Each interview will be audio recorded (and video recorded, only with permission from the participant). There are more questions for the first session of interviewing, to establish your background experiences. This will allow time for follow-up questions in the subsequent interview sessions, where there will be fewer questions.

Each interview will take place in a space that is safe, quiet, and private. This could be in your homes, a private room in a local community center, or a private room in a local church. At any

point, then you can remove yourselves from the research study. If in-person interviews are not conducive to you, interviews may be done via Zoom.

Future Research
Researchers will not use or distribute your data for future research studies even if identifiers are removed.

Risks
In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life. No injury is expected from this study, but if you believe you have been harmed, contact the research team as soon as possible. Georgia State University and the research team have not set aside funds to compensate for any injury.

Benefits
This study is not designed to benefit you personally. You will receive a copy of the final manuscript. You will also receive information about the final findings. Overall, we hope to gain information about the lived experiences of Black female school leaders who led schools after *Brown*, which is an underdeveloped angle in American history and educational leadership research.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal
You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time.

Confidentiality
We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. The following people and entities will have access to the information you provide:

- Dr. Dionne Cowan and Jairus Hallums
- GSU Institutional Review Board
- Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)

We will use a pseudonym rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored in a password-protected computer. All audio and/or video recordings will be stored for a duration of five years and then destroyed. When we present or publish the results of this study, we will not use your name or other information that may identify you.

Contact Information

Contact Dr. Dionne Cowan and Jairus Hallums at (DC) dcowan1@gsu.edu and (JH) jhallums1@student.gsu.edu.

- If you have questions about the study or your part in it
- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study

The IRB at Georgia State University reviews all research that involves human participants. You can contact the IRB if you would like to speak to someone who is not involved directly with the study. You can contact the IRB for questions, concerns, problems, information, input, or questions about your rights as a research participant. Contact the IRB at 404-413-3500 or

irb@gsu.edu.

Consent

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

_____

Printed Name of Participant

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

_____ _____

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent Date

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Session 1:

1. Can you share the story of your upbringing and early life experiences, particularly how they shaped your journey into education and leadership?
2. What were the key inspirations or motivations behind your decision to become a school leader, especially as a Black woman in the aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision?
3. How did you make sense of the cultural and historical contexts that influenced your experiences and perspectives as an educational leader?
4. Please share about the mentors and role models in your life.
    a. How did they impact your leadership path?
    b. What type of guidance did they provide?
    c. How did they navigate challenges as a leader?
        i. Did this navigation mirror yours in any way? If so, how?
5. Please describe your leadership style.
    a. Please discuss the values or principles that underpin your leadership style.
    b. Do these values/principles align with your personal beliefs and experiences? If so, how?

Session 2:

1. Reflecting on your experiences as a Black female school leader post-*Brown v. Board of Education*, how did being Black and being a woman shape your leadership responsibilities and the challenges you faced?
2. How did the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision impact your role as a school leader in desegregated schools? How did you navigate these changes?
3. Please share specific challenges you encountered as a Black female school leader during desegregation. How did you navigate these challenges?
4. What are some of your proudest achievements or moments in your career as a Black female school leader?

Session 3:

1. Describe your approaches to engaging students, particularly Black students, after the *Brown* decision. Did your identity as a Black woman influence your interactions with students? If so, how? Did your identity as a Black woman influence the educational strategies you prioritized?
2. How did you perceive the attitudes and reactions of colleagues, students, and the broader community towards your leadership role in a desegregated school setting? How did you respond to these perceptions?
3. In what ways did you address issues of diversity in your school community? Please share specific strategies or initiatives you implemented.

4. How did you interpret the meaning of "success" in your role as a Black female school leader? How has this understanding evolved over time?
5. Reflecting on your experiences, how did you interpret your role as a Black female school leader within the context of civil rights movements and social change?

Appendix C

Recruitment Letter from Researcher

Date

Greetings:

My name is Jairus Hallums, and I am a doctoral candidate at Georgia State University. I am writing to tell you about a study I am conducting entitled, Leading Ladies: Black Female School Leaders' Experiences in the Wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The purpose of this research study is to explore the lived experiences of four to six Black female school leaders who led in the immediate aftermath of the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) Supreme Court decision, and how they made sense of their roles in desegregated school settings. A woman may be eligible for this study if they meet the following criteria:

1) Females who identify as Black or African American
2) Black females who served as a principal or assistant (or vice) principal
3) Black female school leaders who served as school leaders in the United States
4) Black female school leaders who served between 1965 and 1985 (leadership in a de-segregated school preferred)
5) Black female school leaders who served in an elementary or secondary school setting

If you, or someone you may know, are interested in learning more about this study, please contact me at jhallums1@student.gsu.edu. It is important to be aware that participation is entirely voluntary. Any interested female should not feel obligated to respond to this letter, or participate, if they are not interested. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jairus E. Hallums

Recruitment Letter from Others

Date

Greetings:

I am writing to tell you about a study entitled, Leading Ladies: Black Female School Leaders' Experiences in the Wake of *Brown v. Board of Education,* being conducted by Jairus Hallums. He is a doctoral candidate at Georgia State University.

The purpose of this research study is to explore the lived experiences of four to six Black female school leaders who led in the immediate aftermath of the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) Supreme Court decision, and how they made sense of their roles in desegregated school settings. A woman may be eligible for this study if they meet the following criteria:

1) Females who identify as Black or African American
2) Black females who served as a principal or assistant (or vice) principal
3) Black female school leaders who served as school leaders in the United States
4) Black female school leaders who served between 1965 and 1985 (leadership in a de-segregated school preferred)
5) Black female school leaders who served in an elementary or secondary school setting

If you, or someone you may know, are interested in learning more about this study, please contact Jairus Hallums at jhallums1@student.gsu.edu. It is important to be aware that participation is entirely voluntary. Any interested female should not feel obligated to respond to this letter, or participate, if they are not interested. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Appendix D

Participant Eligibility Form

Name_____

1. Do you consider yourself a Black woman?

- Yes
- No

2. Did you serve as a principal or assistant (or vice) principal?

- Yes
- No

3. What state(s) did you serve as principal or assistant (or vice) principal?

- _____

4. Did you serve as a school leader between the years of 1965 and 1985?

- Yes
- No

5. What years did you serve as a school leader?

- _____

6. What level of education (elementary, middle, or high school) did you serve as a school leader?

- _____

7. Did you ever serve as a school leader in a desegregated school setting?

- Yes
- No

Appendix E

Data Collection Chart

Interview #	Pseudonym	Date	Length of Interview	Number of Pages Transcribed
1	Ms. Jessamine	7/5/2024	57:53	11 pages
2	Ms. Jessamine	7/6/2024	1:10:15	14 pages
3	Ms. Jessamine	7/7/2024	51:08	10 pages
TOTAL			2:59:16	35 pages
1	Dr. Peachtree	9/20/2024	1:00:08	12 pages
2	Dr. Peachtree	9/21/2024	51:29	10 pages
3	Dr. Peachtree	9/26/2024	55:43	11 pages
TOTAL			2:47:20	33 pages
1	Mrs. Leone	9/20/2024	1:00:53	12 pages
2	Mrs. Leone	10/11/2024	2:37:09	24 pages
3	Mrs. Leone	10/17/2024	1:08:11	14 pages
TOTAL			4:46:13	50 pages
1	Dr. Cherry	9/23/2024	51:07	10 pages
2	Dr. Cherry	9/24/2024	30:02	6 pages
3	Dr. Cherry	9/25/2024	25:00	5 pages
TOTAL			1:46:09	21 pages
1	Mrs. Pearl	11/8/2024	1:00:07	13 pages
2	Mrs. Pearl	11/13/2024	46:53	9 pages
3	Mrs. Pearl	11/20/2024	1:03:12	13 pages
TOTAL			2:50:12	35 pages
Total (5 female participants)			15:09:10	174 pages