Race, Resilience, and Resistance: A Culturally Relevant Examination of How Black Women School Leaders Advance Racial Equity and Social Justice in U.S. Schools

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RACE, RESILIENCE, AND RESISTANCE: A CULTURALLY RELEVANT QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF HOW BLACK WOMEN SCHOOL LEADERS ADVANCE RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN U.S. SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This culturally relevant qualitative examination of the leadership of Black women educational leaders (BWEL) committed to advancing a social justice leadership agenda within the contested spaces (Stovall, 2004) comprising United States (U.S.) P-12 schools, employs an African centered emancipatory methodology (Kershaw, 1990, 1992; Tillman, 2002), situated in a conceptual framework grounded in the research on applied critical leadership (Santamaria, 2013). It examines, highlights, celebrates, and makes transparent, the unique leadership of BWEL. Engaged to rebuke the silencing and marginalization of women educational leaders of color in the educational leadership discourse, this study bridges engages a multiple case study approach, phenomenological analysis, and participatory orientation to better understand how eight complexly diverse BWEL leverage positive aspects of their multicultural perspectives and subjectivities to respond to equity challenges linked to educational inequality for HMMS, while simultaneously navigating 21st century school reform policies and practices situated in white privilege, power, and anti-black oppression. This study also opens up brave liberatory space for participating BWEL to engage in a recursive cycle of critical reflection, dialogue, problem-posing, and action on the site-based equity challenges they face within their respective leadership spaces in real-time, filling an important gap in the educational leadership research. Specifically, it responds to calls for more constructive models of social justice leadership praxis centered in the voices and experiences of those engaging the work in communities confronting the equity challenges of our time, thereby comprising research and theory in action, and provoking a necessary dialogue on what it means to lead for social justice. Having implications for how the field might reimagine and reconstruct educational leadership, theory and development, this research bridged critical race and critical multicultural education theories to the discourses in
educational leadership, birthing emergent themes for an alternate and culturally-centered approach to leadership I call critically relevant transformative multicultural leadership or CR-TML. This study has import for practicing educational leaders, those who develop educational leaders, legislators and policy makers impacting the work of educational leaders, and anyone with an interest in educational leadership for social justice.

**Keywords:** educational leadership, social justice, critical race theory, critical multicultural education, applied critical leadership, critically relevant transformative multicultural leadership
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to view life through a multicultural prism of possibilities rather than a glass half empty; how to believe in the possibilities I see before me, holding on to them with the incredible faith and audacious hope of our African ancestors; how to take bold and unapologetic action when evil and deceit wrapped in the colonial project steeped in intersectional racism rears its ugly head, how to do so by following in the footsteps of our elders who blazed the trail so that I could engage the work; how to lean into my inner nerd, asking questions, seeking knowledge, and remembering to share the lessons I discover with others; and most importantly, how to breathe and simply be, even as I am becoming, with the most sacred and spiritual understanding that every moment of my lived experience is a blessing delivered at the discretion of Goddess’ grace and it is up to me to find pleasure and joy as long as I am allowed to live and walk on this side of what has been an amazing life! Not only are you a model of what true #BlackWomanMajic can produce mom, you are also my shining example of what it truly means to walk the talk of social justice. It was you who ignited in me my passion for all things intellectual by responding to my natural child-born curiosities with a book, yet another question, and the encouragement to seek knowledge and it was you who lit the fire of my contrarian spirit that won’t allow me to ever stop raising my fist and stomping the grass in the grassiest of grassy grass roots (as verbally shared by Rosemary Flores, 2017), demanding restorative change until it comes. I thank you for all of these things but more importantly I thank you for simply being you. I didn’t understand all of your ways then, sometimes I don’t even understand them now, but I know that you are my greatest blessing, and I am ever grateful for you. I appreciate your unconditional love and support, I love you to the moon and back, and I am ever mindful that there is nothing I can’t do as long as I have you to remind me to believe that I can!
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I dedicate this work to Ms. Thalia Littlefield, my Big Mommy, because this work was as much your dream as it ever was my own. We finally did it!
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For the purposes of this study, an educational leader is defined as an individual working within P-12 educational spaces to engage others in a process of leadership knowledge, skill, capacity and dispositional development by enlisting and guiding their talents and energies (as framed by knowledges, skills, dispositions, proclivities, and experiences), toward the achievement of a common educational aim or goal (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). The leader might be a non-licensed professional serving in a leadership capacity, a teacher or other licensed professional leader, a parent leader, the school principal or another administrative leader, a PK-12 educational community advocate leading a school-based, student-oriented initiative or program within the school, and/or a student/youth leader. Applying this definition of educational leadership, an BWEL would include any individual who meets this definition and self-identifies as female and racially, ethnically, and culturally Black. It is worth noting that the definition of leader being operationalized for this inquiry is a unique one. It also aligns with the theoretical framework the inquiry engages in that it is a radical departure from traditional and hegemonic definitions of leadership and instead embraces an anti-colonial and anti-racist one by problematizing codifications of leadership as hierarchical, assigned or appointed, and occurring solely from an organization’s administrative tiers. Instead, it recognizes that educational leadership is multi-layered, relational and distributive (Spillane and Halverson, 2001), recognizable and acted upon at all levels of education, and engaged by and within all stakeholders connected to teaching and learning spaces at any given time (Blackmore, 1989; Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis, 2016). Furthermore, the inquiry embraces a pedagogy that understands that there is much to learn from the ways in which BWEL engage leadership, regardless of where they are positioned within P-12 schools as an institution. Having multiple
entry points from which to understand the leadership of BWEL will teach us much about how to effectively engage all students and all stakeholders, particularly those not currently being served.

The following definitions represent additional terms used within the context of this study.

**Colorblind Racism:** The belief that race and racism are no longer a problem (that we are a post-racial society) and that we all have equal opportunities, making discussions of race unnecessary and branding those who engage them racists, yet continuing to operationalize racists practices rooted in white privilege and power (Bonilla-Silva, 2017).

**Critical Reflection:** critical reflection is an essential element of critical pedagogy and CPD (Kohli, Picower, Martinez, and Ortiz, 2015) and is characterized by a process that requires individuals to take a meaningful look at, in order to make meaning of, beliefs, values, and assumptions with the intent to change existing frames of reference, thinking, and actions in transformative ways (Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1994, 2000).

**Critical Dialogue:** also an essential element of critical pedagogy and CPD (Kohli, Picower, Martinez, and Ortiz, 2015), critical dialogue is characterized by the ongoing “collective inquiry into the processes, assumptions, and certainties that comprise everyday life” resulting in an exchange of ideas or opinions through discourse with others about these things (Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1994, 2000; Schein, 1993).

**Educational inequities:** “biased or unfair policies, programs, practices, or situations contributing to a lack of access, opportunity, and equality in educational performance, results, and outcomes.” (In edglossary.org,), particularly for HMMS.

**Educational policies:** rules and laws derived from principles and government-based policy making in education, that govern the procedures and norms operating education systems, and that require those with authoritative power to make decisions absent personal subjectivities
as framed by individual beliefs and values as determined by culture/race/other social factors (Miller, 2010).

**Equity:** the principle of fairness, or the idea that each individual and group receives what s/he requires to have access and opportunity to high quality education and the material and human resources required to succeed and achieve in school and in life beyond school, including making considerations for the ways that access to education and life success might be equalized given factors resulting in the current lack of fairness as a result of systems steeped in socio-historic conceptions of power, privilege, and oppression. Equity is not equality or the exact same provisions for every individual or group (Banks, 1994, Freire, 1970, Ladson-Billings, 2006).

**Historically Marginalized and Minoritized Students (HMMS):** Minoritized students are “individuals from racially oppressed communities—both legally and discursively—because of their nondominant race, ethnicity, religion, language, or citizenship.” (Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis, 2016, p. 4) amongst other factors (gender, sexuality, ability, etc.). This study, like Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis’ (2016) recognizes that all minoritized students bring a rich legacy, heritage, culture, and “history of agency, appropriation, and resistance to oppression” (p. 4), however the terminology used seeks to focus on and recognizes the history of oppression minoritized students have faced in the past, currently face, and will face in the future, as situated in the need for schools, educational systems, and the field of educational leadership to resist, deconstruct, and dismantle the continuing contexts of oppression and reconstruct them into systems of power, equity, and justice.

Historically minoritized and marginalized students are those students traditionally classified as students who fall into the above definition for minoritized, including students of color, students of low socioeconomic status, students who speak languages other than English,
students identified as having a mental and/or physical disability (Banks, 1988, 1993, 1994, 2004, 2009), and students who adopt and/or express themselves through non-hegemonic gender and sex norms, who by virtue of the colonial project have been labeled using identity traits connected with social constructions rooted in white supremacy. To marginalize students that fall into these categories is to treat them as insignificant or peripheral, particularly within educational institutions; considerations for individual or group perspectives, experiences, and cultural knowledge are not considered when making important and relevant leadership and educational decisions about school and schooling (In Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, 2017)

**No Tolerance Discipline Policies:** These are discipline policies that apply punitive measures regardless of context or reason for actions and that lead to an inequitable application of disciplinary consequences (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002)

**Oppression:** prolonged, cruel, and unjust treatment, delivered by those individuals and groups of people in power, and resulting in the stripping of an individual’s or collective group of peoples’ human right to dignity, freedom of expression, and liberty. This treatment is ratified and upheld through socially constructed ideology, governments, and politicized, social and societal policies and practices. The goal of oppression is to limit those being oppressed access to the physical, material, and financial resources they need to live, survive, and thrive as a human being fully expressing the true essence of self (as individual and identity group) in any given society.

**Social Justice:** full and equal access, opportunity, and participation of all individuals and groups in a society, and its institutions, resulting in an inclusive vision of relationships between them that are not mutually shaped to meet everyone’s needs, so that equitable and fair distributions of wealth, power, and equal outcomes are realized, and markers of socio-historic
privilege, domination, marginalization, subordination, and oppression are eliminated (Adams, Bell, and Griffin, 1997).

**Standpoint**: Perspectives include the beliefs educators harbor about and take away from their behaviors, interactions with others, and work in education (goals, purposes, conceptions of students, curriculum, leadership), including how they make and give meaning to these things as framed by social context and lived experiences within power and privilege as a result of this context (Collins, 1997 and 2004).

**Transformative**: Learning, actions, and/or systems indicative of a dramatic change in beliefs, values, assumptions, procedures, policies, systemic structures, and different ways of being towards those steeped in a more inclusive, non-discriminatory, equitable, and reflexive stance/process/way of being, and resulting from a reframing of perspective, standpoint, organizational structures, and/or operational policies and practices. It occurs as a result of a dynamic and fluid process of learning and change characterized by critical self-reflection, dialogue, and action on these things (Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1994, 2000)
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

I am an invisible man [woman, child]...I am a man [woman, child] of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people re-fuse to see me...because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes.

- Ellison (1995)

As a Black woman educational leader committed to advancing racial equity and social justice, I entertain a natural curiosity about the leadership of other Black women leaders. I am curious because my experiences are a living testimony of the value and power we bring to the spaces in which we lead. As we enter those spaces, we do so bringing all of who we are as people, our “gender, race, ethnicity, worldview, beliefs, ideologies, assumptions, values, perceptions, past experiences, personal history, biases, and attitudes” (Pine, 2009, p. 201). We also bring our unique sensibilities—sensibilities rooted in African-centered ways of being, thinking, and knowing (Dillard, 2000, Dillard, Abdur-Rashid, & Tyson, 2000; hooks, 1994; Hilliard, 1991, 1995, 2002; Kershaw, 1990, 1992; Tillman, 2002. 2006), nurtured through lived experiences, and that give birth to multicultural perspectives and equity-based leadership approaches (Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014)—approaches proven effective when employed within schools serving our most vulnerable and underserved student populations (Foster, 1994, 1997; Irvine, 1989; Lotomey, 1987, 1989, 1990; Milner, 2006; Milner & Howard, 2004; Scheurich, 1998; Santamaría, 2012, 2013; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014; Tilman, 2004).
Viewed through colonial constructions of the inner eye, these approaches are also enshrined in deficit laden perceptions of our personhood and ability, rendering our leadership, and us, invisible. Despite our invisibility, we continue to lead, bringing all of who we are along with us. “We cannot escape who we are, nor can we keep who we are out of the classroom [and schools]” (Pine, 2009, p.201). Who we are, is formed and shaped by our lived experiences (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991), becoming the backdrop for our personal narratives. These experiences also form the filter and prism through which we view the phenomena that is teaching, learning, and leadership (Scaetti, Ramsey & Watanabe, 2008). What we see, how we engage others, the actions we undertake, the educators we visualize ourselves becoming, and even what we stand for, all gets shaped by our experiences; and it this shaping that forms the core of our leadership practice (Santamaria, 2013; Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2013, 2015). As Pine’s words remind, we are who we are, we take ourselves everywhere, and if educational leaders and researchers, that includes into the nation’s classrooms and schools, as well as our research about these things.

Situated in an organic blend of my leadership experiences as an educator in U.S. P-12 schools, the current discourse in educational leadership, and curiosities about the leadership experiences of other Black women educational leaders (BWEL), this culturally relevant qualitative study, grounded in African centered emancipatory research methodology (Kershaw, 1990, 1992), and emphasizing the salience of race, gender, and the socio-historical policy contexts shaping leadership for social justice in the U.S. provides a portrait of the leadership of nine BWEL advancing racial equity and social justice within the contested spaces of U.S. P-12 schools. Contested spaces (Stovall, 2004) refer to those places within U.S. educational institutions steeped in whiteness, harboring a hidden curriculum, and engaging education policy
as an act of white supremacy (Gillborn, 2005). Within this study, whiteness is understood as a social construction situated in white supremacist epistemologies advocating the superiority of wealthy (capitalist), white, heterosexual, able-bodied, cisgender-male identified, English speaking, Christian men embodying Western European ethnic and cultural backgrounds and mannerisms, over others, with its opposite Blackness positioned as most inferior, particularly along an oppression spectrum rooted in whiteness as a property interest. Situated in Harris’ (1993) definition, whiteness as a property interest positions whiteness as solely possessed, used, and disposed of, as well as transferred and enjoyed by those embodying its characteristics. This interest emboldens those who enjoy it with white privilege and power. In contrast, individuals and groups sitting on the opposite spectrum of socially constructed definitions for whiteness, experience various gradations of anti-black oppression. Operationalized in a recursive colonial cycle, the individuals and groups who enjoy white privilege and power also define the parameters by which power, privilege, and anti-black oppression are, can, and shall be engaged. Which means, in a U.S. socio-historical context, the context within which U.S. P-12 schools are situated, Black girls and Black women are positioned opposite of whiteness rendering them without white privilege and power, and amongst those most susceptible to the interlocking anti-black oppressions (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) rooted in the socially constructed dimensions of whiteness as a property interest, and implanted in the policies and practices being employed through the hidden curriculum. They are also amongst those least able to retreat to whiteness as a property interest along class, gender, and racialized colorlines because of this positionality, explaining their oft stressful and traumatic experiences teaching, leading, and learning in the contested school spaces they inhabit.
The hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1992) operates subversively within the contested spaces forming U.S. P-12 schools. It is transmitted through racial, cultural, and social norms rooted in whiteness. Specifically, the hidden curriculum refers to the informal, unofficial, and unwritten lessons, values, and perspectives shaping a school’s climate and culture, and implicitly transmitted to students and other stakeholders. Within the current school reform context, the hidden curriculum can also be transmitted through the application of education policies and practices like high-stakes testing, accountability measures, and no tolerance discipline. Powered by neoliberal school reform efforts promoting free market-based economies (Lipman, 2011) as the primary answer to societies most prominent social concerns (Stovall, 2004), these policies and practices are typically employed aversively as an act of white supremacy (Gillborn, 2005) and result in an ever-increasing diverse student body experiencing an unequal education. According to scholar Ladson-Billings (2006), they also exacerbate the education debt owed historically marginalized and minoritized peoples, especially children and youth enrolled in U.S. P-12 schools, leading to the equity challenges many contemporary educational leaders confront.

Responding to curiosities about these phenomena, including inquiries about the ways Black women confront these challenges as they advance racial equity within contested spaces forming U.S. P-12 schools, this study centers the work in the voice and experiences of BWEL currently advancing a social justice agenda within them. It does so expanding on and challenging hegemonic research paradigms, adopting culturally relevant research approaches (Dillard, 2000; Collins, 1990, 1992; Kershaw, 1990, 1992; Tillman, 2002) instead. Specifically, this study utilizes a conceptual and research framework that captures the full-range of BWEL leadership within diverse educational contexts by taking a culturally-sensitive participatory action orientation and situating it in African centered emancipatory research methodologies. In
doing so, it positions eight BWEL as co-researchers engaging an inquiry about the leadership of Black women with me, rather than as objects of an inquiry for me. Together, on the pages of this document, we lead hand-in-hand, side-by-side, situating this work, as well as our leadership in an illustration of our reclamation of our West African indigenous ways of knowing, thinking, and being, including restoring our intellectual epistemologies by resisting exploitation of and domination over Black intelligentsia, expressed through our authentic Black female experiences, voices, and narratives, restoring its power, and liberating ourselves, as a way to liberate others from the lies that whiteness would have us believe about ourselves, our communities, and our Black woman inspired leadership. Engaging the research in this way creates sacred and brave space for the eight participating BWEL and myself, to engage this work as intellectuals fully equipped to problem-pose, reflect on, discuss, and solve the critical equity issues we confront in our daily leadership practice. It also provides space for us to support each other as we explore new and innovative ways to lead, serving as a catalyst for restorative and transformational educational change within ourselves, others, and the leadership contexts within which we lead (Kershaw, 1990, 1992). Centering our voices and experiences in this discourse also reveals the ways we leverage and use critical components of our unique multicultural identities to advance racial equity and social justice in U.S. P-12 schools. Implications drawn from this study prove significant for school reformists, policy makers, P-12 educational leaders, and those who prepare, support, and supervise P-12 educational leaders.

The remaining sections of this chapter provide a detailed overview of this study. I begin with a culturally situated leadership testimonial describing my experience as a BWEL navigating the hidden and oft racialized curriculum of contested school spaces and illuminating its impact on me, my leadership praxis, and this study. My testimonial is followed by a framing of the
problem, including expounding on the socio-historical policy context shaping the current
discourse in educational leadership, particularly in relationship to the critical equity challenges
educational leaders are forced to confront when leading in contested school spaces. I follow this
with a brief description of the rationale and purpose for the study, before exploring how I situate
it in my standpoint as a Black feminist thinker seeking to reclaim multiconsciousness (Collins,
1987, 1992) by walking the talk of African centered emancipatory research methodology
(Dillard, 2000; Kershaw, 1992; Slaughter-Defoe, 1995) engaged as a restorative applied critical
leadership liberatory praxis (Freire, 1972; Kohli, Picower, Martinez, & Ortiz, 2015; Santamaria,
2013). The research questions come next, followed by an overview of the theoretical and
conceptual frameworks guiding the study. I close the chapter with an explanation of the study’s
significance, as well as a summary of this chapter. I will discuss the literature framing this study
and to which this study contributes in more detail in chapter two and the methods used to engage
the study in chapter three. Findings are explored in chapters four, five, and six. Conclusions and
implications are shared in chapter seven.

Testimonial of a Black Woman Educational Leader

The Incident: A Poetic Critique of No Tolerance Policy

They teased her because she was Black. But they had no idea she was not.
Nobody stopped it! They taunted her, calling out “You slut!” She was not. Her teachers
and peers did nothing! They pushed and prodded her body, patted her hair, hurled the
epithet “nigger” her way. Because she was different! Steeped in an ignorance that
refused to see HER! All they understood was that she was different, and so she, began to
see it too.
She used to love her differences, that is, until they taught her she shouldn’t. She tried to love her differences anyway, but they wouldn’t let her. Neither would her teachers. They had no idea that difference is what made her unique. Difference is what made her who she was! She learned to hate her differences, even as she tried to feel differently. And so she wrote, and she wrote, and she wrote some more! Until, all she could do was write, because writing is where she found respite. Writing was how she maintained her sanity. Writing was where she found her dignity! Her voice! Her agency! It was how she fought back, solving her problems, without her fists, or her anger, or her Black body. But… They still refused to see past her differences! They refused to notice that her differences were what made her unique! They were what made her, well, HER! Now, there she was…sitting in the Principal’s office. Shrinking! Little by little! More with every second! Not to be believed! And there I sat. Beside her! Watching! Invisible! Not to be believed, either!

Just moments ago this beautifully vibrant, brown faced, wide eyed, fourth grader was willingly telling me all about how she had come to transcribe “the kill list” into her journal during lunch. If only she hadn’t tried to be so self-assured, to in her words, “solve the problem on her own, without the adults, because they never listen to me anyway.” But she had. So now, there she was, shrinking, and then, she just sat! Head down, shoulders slumped, hazel eyes boring into an invisible spot on her lap…her voice? Barely audible.

“I don’t know!” she whispered, shoulder shrug affirming her sudden memory loss. Until little by little, all there was, wuz the shrug. No sound! Just a body bended, her legs swinging back and forth in a frantic motion; eyes still boring into her lap. There she
was. Shrinking! Broken! All her faith lying in me! And me? I just sat there. Silent! Watching her! Shrink! How dare I! How dare he! How dare US!

How did we even get there anyway? One minute we, she and I, were bodies leaned in, eyes on fire, mouths moving, me the adult, and she the child, secrets floating between us as if old girlfriends catching up on things unspoken, and the next, a police officer was standing at my office door.

I saw him before she did. I know because she was still smiling, still leaned in, still hanging on my every word, even as those words began their uncertain trek inward. “No!” “Can’t be?” I thought. Echolocations of an outsider’s consciousness, shielded by the mask of insiderness, but never completely hidden. “Not a police officer!” “Not for this?” More echolocations. “He must be on his regular sweep through schools.” “Yeah?” “That’s it?” “He’s here for sweeps?” No longer shielded, and no longer hoping, because there he stood, and there she sat, finally noticing him, her outsider’s consciousness and insider’s mask, reaching out to my own, as my own outsider’s consciousness and insider’s mask battled each other, uncertain of who would win, or if there could ever be a winner at all, both...all, becoming one, an uncertain embrace, there in my office space!

Waiting, we watched him. He walked in, so I stood, then she turned, and secrets once floating between us, lost all air and fell like the heavy burden of racism, deep inside her psyche. I watched him some more, just standing there at first, but soon arrogantly invading the space inside of the door, our space, hers and mines, confident gait in tow, chest poked out, smirk on his face, and a quick head nod letting me know that he’d take it from here!
He took over, and I let him, even as the burn started and my spirit said “NO!” I LET HIM! He sat, and she knew too. She knew, because I knew, and we, our outsiderness and insiderness both one, clumsily stumbled by and through each other, interlocking with the all too familiar margins of whiteness, as pushed there by NO TOLERANCE. Policies meant to racialize, dehumanize, and push out! Right there! In my office! In charge!

He introduced himself, said he was there to help. We, she and I, two outsiders, once inside, forced back out, knew different! He made himself comfortable, reached for his pen, flipped through her journal, shared what he knew, then directed his gait her way, and I LET HIM. Because that was what I was supposed to do. Right? Always the professional! Right? That was what I was expected to do. Right? Always the professional. Right? That was what I had to do! Right? Always the professional. Right? The Outsider WITHIN! An insider now! Right? Always the professional. Right? “Yeah, RIGHT!”

Never mind her eyes searching my own, drowning, begging for a life boat, asking me what to do and how to respond, she, the younger one, looking to me, the older one, for a way to push outside back in, because that’s where we really belong. Right? Within? But I had no answer, and he had begun, so instead, I sat, and he started, and I LET HIM! And then it happened.

The first question pushed out of his wicked mouth! Accusatory tone, reminding us, yet again, that it was he who was in charge! And that’s when, as if on cue, she first…began…to shrink! “You know you’re in trouble, right!” Second question pushed
out of his wicked mouth! Dripping sarcasm in tow, she shrank more. Third question, pushed out of his wicked mouth - “What do these words, Kill List mean! Who do you want to kill!” Contempt! She shrank a little more! Fourth question, pushed out of his wicked mouth. Paternalistic! She shrank all over again. A single tear rolled down her cheek. She was trying to be strong. But she was visibly hurting! Yet, that didn’t stop him! And neither did I! Fifth question pushed out of his wicked mouth- “When and why were you planning to hurt these people!” Antagonistic!

She shrank, she shrank, she folded into herself, as if she could get lost, become invisible, right there, IN FRONT OF us. More, and more questions pushed out of his wicked mouth, and with each one, she shrank! She SHRANK! And me! I just sat! At first! Then, like her, I shrank too! There we were, the two of us, shrinking, together. She a child and I an adult, both of us, shrinking, both of us shrinking, the outsiders-within, shrank!

What was I doing? How could I? She was counting on me. I was charged with her care! I was supposed to empower and listen to her voice! I was supposed to push back! I was supposed to take charge! But instead, I sat! Silent! Feeling helpless! Just like her! Allowing this to happen! The older one, refusing to rescue the younger one; incapable of rescuing herself! He flipped through the pages of her journal again, this time glaring at her with those all knowing I don’t believe a word you’re saying eyes. He continued as is custom, no tolerance allowed…instead, he hurled accusations and taunted her with declarations of I know you did it, you know you did it, everyone knows you did it, she shrank some more! He also ignored me, the leader in the room because as far as his inner eyes were concerned I was invisible…unimportant, marginalized, Silenced!
So could I stop it! No! Could she stop it? No! Would he stop it? No! There we sat! She sat! I sat! He criminalized her! He marginalized and silenced me! Two more Black female bodies pushed out! No one stopped it! He pushed! She’s out! He pushed! I walked out! It happened! I let it! How dare I! How dare he! How dare us! Enough! No more!

Tonya Walls (2014; 2017)

My poem illustrates how one leadership incident, situated in the complex web of having to choose between my core values as an educational leader advancing a social justice agenda and enacting educational policies that run counter to those values, pushed me out of school based administration and birthed this inquiry—an inquiry inspired by my experience serving as an assistant principal in a small, suburban, elementary school with a primarily White, middle-class, mono-lingual, culturally homogenous faculty and staff and a majority white middle-class student body, though the small population of historically marginalized and minoritized students (HMMS) had recently increased. The incident featured describes my response to the application of no tolerance discipline policies as remedy and solution to a perceived student infraction. In this case, a small-framed, bubbly, self-identified Latinx fourth grade girl named Amara (pseudonym), who presents visually as Black, was accused of making a threat on the lives of two white, fourth grade male counterparts. The evidence constitutes a list of names inscribed in Amara’s journal and titled “The Kill List”. What the poem doesn’t capture is the list of names was dictated to Amara by a white, blue-eyed, fourth grade girl named Becky (pseudonym), who administration believed “could never do that” (name of school principal, personal communication, November 7, 2014). Like Amara, Becky had been harassed by the same group of fourth grade males whose names appeared on the list, but unlike Becky, Amara’s harassment
also included racialized epithets. In response to their harassment, Amara and Becky, along with a few girls from their fourth grade classroom, formed a critical action group (my words not Amara’s), met during their lunch period, and collaboratively brainstormed ways to band together to put a stop to the harassment; the list was an afterthought. Becky, knowing Amara always kept her journal close by—writing was how Amara processed the world around her and her journal was her security blanket, taken with her everywhere, even to lunch—asked Amara to take down the names and proudly branded the list of names the “Kill List.” Despite Amara confessing that it was Becky who dictated the list, and that she was simply trying to use a collaborative process and her budding leadership skills to solve a much more serious problem, Amara was not believed. Instead, she was ruled a safety threat, subjected to police interrogation, taken through a psychological threat assessment, and suspended from school for ten days.

Upon Amara’s return to school, she was subjected to a series of dehumanizing disciplinary indignities, including a daily search of her backpack, person, and any other property she brought into the school space. These searches occurred first thing in the morning, requiring Amara to report to the principal’s office before being allowed to enter the cafeteria for breakfast, and/or the playground to be with her peers. If the principal was not available, I as assistant principal was to conduct the search. This search of Amara’s personal belongings was justified as a safety measure, both for Amara and the other students within the school. I pondered the absurdity of surmising that subjecting Amara to a daily punishment of search and seizure constituted ensuring her safety. Perhaps the physical and emotional assault on Amara’s psyche and body, all because she responded to chronic sexual and racial harassment in ways consistent with her being as a Black girl in need of communal care and healing, was institutional racism and spirit killing at its best instead. I also wondered why Amara’s safety was so important now,
when it wasn’t considered when she was being sexually and racially harassed. Finally, I questioned how students who never realized nor communicated they were unsafe were somehow being assured a new safety as a result of these daily morning interactions between Amara and our administrative team. Yet, they were carried out for the remainder of the school-year. The incident occurred in November. It is worth noting that Amara was the sole individual subjected to disciplinary action as a result of the incident. Neither Becky, the other girls involved, nor the group of boys responsible for harassing Amara was suspended or subjected to daily search and seizure for their behaviors. A truth often indicative of the racialized manner in which girls wrapped in Black bodies and presenting in divergent gendered expressions of emerging womanhood are criminalized, disciplined, and pushed out of traditional P-12 schools (Crenshaw, Nanda, & Ocen, 2014; Morris, 2016; Winn, 2011). As represented in the poem, Black girls may not be the only ones being pushed out of P-12 schools.

As a BWEL leading in the contested spaces of P-12 education, I was also disparately impacted by the policies resulting in Amara’s physical and emotional assault and subsequent suspension. Though silent during the police interrogation, I finally found my voice soon after. I tried speaking up on Amara’s behalf by sharing what she confided in me with my administrative team, but they didn’t believe me either. I also conducted a more thorough investigation after the suspension was levied; an investigation not properly conducted during the time of Amara’s interrogation, and found that Amara’s truth could be substantiated by hard facts. I pointed these out along with the racialized implementation of no tolerance policies only to be accused of calling my principal racist. After Becky’s mom called my principal to confirm what I shared, informing her that it was indeed Becky who conceptualized, dictated and titled the Kill List I was sure Amara and I would be believed. I was wrong. Becky’s mother’s confession was also
ignored, Amara remained the only one suspended, her harassment was never dealt with, and for questioning my principal’s handling of Amara’s case, I was excluded from discipline meetings and decisions. My principal also attempted to punish me with a poor evaluation. Fortunately, my knowledge of the supervisory contract and process, willingness to advocate on my behalf, and continued applied critical leadership overshadowed these attempts, disrupting racialized discrimination before it could take root. I wound up receiving a stellar evaluation, the evaluation I felt I earned, but Amara was still subjected to her daily searches and at the end of the school year, for my part in all of this, my principal requested that I be transferred to another school site. As is traditional when whiteness engages education policy as an act of white supremacy (Gillborn, 2005), her “boss”, a white male, complied with her request, and without any consultation or notice beyond the email I received a few weeks before the new school year was to begin, I was transferred to a school in a traditionally Black neighborhood twenty-three miles across town. Seeing the writing on the wall well before the transfer was to take place, I had already sought, secured, and accepted a position in higher education. Walking away from my career in P-12 education was one of the most difficult decisions I ever had to make, yet it seemed like the only other thing left to do after witnessing what occurred with Amara, and experiencing what occurred with me. Taking a position in higher education preparing aspiring school leaders to lead with a social justice agenda was necessary. It was also an act of resistance. If hegemony refused to open space for me to lead for social justice with integrity in the trenches of local classrooms and schools, remaining authentic to my true being as a BWEL while doing so, then I would infiltrate the academy, taking space and putting my talents to work to develop a strong cohort of allied social justice leaders with the skill and will to infiltrate the trenches equipped with insider knowledge and ready to dismantle the master’s house using tools steeped in critical
pedagogy and resolute to engage leadership as an act of resistance. Though I was able to turn a traumatizing situation into an opportunity to advance a social justice agenda, ultimately, like Amara, I too was punished and pushed out!

After much reflection and dialogue with other BWEL peers, I recognize that by carrying out no tolerance policies and practices as a school leader, I was placed in the position of having to make and execute difficult leadership decisions that ran counter to my core values as an educator for social justice. As a result, I struggled. I struggled because though difficult to confront, I realized by employing no tolerance policies, my leadership decisions had negative impact on my ability to engage leadership situated in a social justice orientation. It also meant I was contributing to the oppression of HMMS in ways I believed I was committed to disrupting. As an educational leader formally assigned to an administrative position emboldened with the privilege and power to make leadership decisions that could disrupt inequitable educational practices in my school, and yet not immediately positioned to do so, I became the oppressor. As an educational leader whose Black body operationalized indigenous Black and cisgender female cultural norms in schools and societal structures built on white privilege, patriarchy and colonial oppression, I became the oppressed. This complex inner astriction between oppressor and oppressed, characterized by the tension between my social justice leadership orientation and the inequitable policies I was expected to employ as an educational leader operating within the contested spaces of U.S. P-12 education led to a re-evaluation of my leadership and leadership decisions, especially those situated at the intersection of race, gender, and the socio-historical school policy context within which I was being asked to lead. This reflection ignited my interest in examining the leadership of BWEL committed to eliminating racist educational practices that lead to racial inequities for HMMS in U.S. P-12 schools. That interest also informed my
decision to explore these phenomena as part of my dissertation experience. Thus, this study was born.

I seek to answer how race, gender, and policy impact and influence the leadership of BWEL. I have decided to explore this inquiry for all of the little girls wrapped in Black bodies like Amara, who will grow up to be beautiful Black women like me, each fighting for their humanity within the contested spaces forming P-12 schools. My hope for this work is that it will provoke critical reflection, dialogue and a call to action so that Black girls and Black women learning, teaching, leading, and serving in education, experience the right to be who they are, unapologetically, in all of their beautifully intersectional Black Girl Magichoods. I stand in solidarity with each of them, fighting, so one day we can express ourselves authentically, and be seen, loved, cared for, nurtured, understood, valued, affirmed, and provided with the space, time, and place, to learn, serve, teach, and lead, without being pushed out.

Statement of the Problem

The current discourse in educational leadership ironically centers on our nation’s growing effort to reform and improve P-12 public schools by providing greater educational equity and equality for HMMS (Blackmore 2002, 2006; 1999; Duncan-Andrade, 2005; López, Magdaleno, & Reis, 2006; Noguera, 2003; Stovall, 2004; 2006). As Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayer (2011) proclaims, “Until we get equality in education, we won’t have an equal society.” One challenge we face is developing educational leaders equipped with the knowledge, skills, and will to help achieve this feat. A second challenge we face is sustaining and retaining educational leaders committed to doing this work and already attempting to do so within the contested spaces of U.S. P-12 education, especially educational leaders of color (ELOC). These challenges are two-fold.
First, P-12 educational leaders face increased expectations to meet accountability and achievement mandates pushed into schools by advocates pushing market-based school reform educational enterprises (Elmore, 2004; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003) situated in whiteness as an act of white supremacy (Gillborne, 2005) but delivered aversively through policies and practices grounded in the colorblind racism of which scholar Bonilla-Silva (2009, 2017) speaks. This racism proclaims we live in a post-racial society, declares race and racism a thing of the past, and dismisses those suggesting race and racism are woven throughout the fabric of U.S. society, including within its schools (Bell, 1991, 1992). Those advocating for education policies and practices situated in colorblind racism work to maintain hegemonies grip on the status quo by privatizing public institutions seemingly made fairer by progressive gains, including public education and schooling. For example, scholar Janelle Scott’s (2009) use of document analysis to examine the philanthropic funding strategies employed in education, reveal a complex web of school reform efforts engaged by networks comprised of venture capitalist, philanthropic foundations, state legislators, policy makers, education non-profit organizations, charter management organizations, and the entrepreneurial education-based businesses formed to serve their needs. These networks fund, lobby for, and push legislation with lucrative implications in their favor while dismantling public school systems, including the civil rights for students that come with. Steeped in their efforts, legislation that support common standards, school choice, charters and vouchers, educational accountability, and state control of public school, infrastructure, and curriculum show up in local schools (Stovall, 2004) as: (a) state achievement zones that remove community representation on publicly elected school boards and reposition control of schools at the state’s legislative level (Holley-Walker, 2007); (b) school takeover and turnaround programs endowed with the power to close public schools and replace them with
charter schools couched as nonprofits but that siphon off public funds for private gain (Scott, 2009); (c) inequitable school funding formulas that re-segregate schools rendering them separate and unequal (Kozol, 2005, 2012); (d) for profit charter school proliferation which leads to school closings in low-income communities of color requiring students to attend charter schools out of their area and without the protections afforded them by civil rights legislation (Scott, 2009); (e) high stakes testing, often tied to a student’s ability to graduate and a teacher’s evaluation factors that lead to skill-based instruction situated in teaching to the test over a well-rounded education meant to teach the whole child and that drives a wedge between unions and the workforce weakening education as a profession and exacerbating the inequities HMMS face (Au, 2010, 2011); (e) no tolerance discipline policies that feed school-to-prison pipeline economies sending students of color to jail and feeding ‘free-labor’ markets rather than educating them (Alexander, 2011; Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010); and (f) increased accountability measures born of No Child Left Behind and the Every Student Succeed Act, both requiring educational leaders to create and implement high-stakes leadership action plans that have a disparate impact on teaching, learning, and educational leadership, with the latter placing extreme pressure on leaders to achieve what may seem like insurmountable results (Darling-Hammond, Bae, & Cook-Harvey, 2016).

Reaching benchmarks established under such pressure becomes difficult and achieving the results expected can often require educational leaders to engage practices and make decisions that run oppositional to the national call for equity and equality in education, exacerbating the challenge to lead by ten-fold, and rendering those calls language appeasement at best and racism rooted in white supremacy at its worst (Gillborn, 2005). Leaders, who lead within this context, are required to engage a courageous and radically different kind of leadership. This leadership
requires engaging paradigms rooted in resilience, as well as a desire to continue to develop as cultural change agents equipped with critically relevant “knowledge, support, strategies and valor to make curriculum, instruction, student engagement, and family partnership culturally relevant and responsible” (Cooper, 2009, p. 3). It also requires a keen understanding of and preparation to confront the various oppressions underlying contemporary reform efforts, including the policies leaders are charged with confronting (Ladson-Billings, 2006). As we struggle to find ways to develop, sustain, and retain such educational leaders, especially those willing to work in the contested school spaces housing the reform efforts discussed, we can look to the growing body of scholarship advocating the purposeful development and support of educational leaders equipped with a unique set of leadership skills and practices that ensure leadership for social justice for answers (Dantley, & Scheurich, 2008; Normore & Jean-Marie, 2008; Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Stovall, 2004; Theoharis, 2007; 2008; 2009; Tillman & Scheurich, 2013; Tooms & Boske, 2010). As the data from this research suggests, leadership advancing a social justice agenda (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Grant, 2012; Stoval, 2004; Theoharis, 2009), and doing so employing the unique multicultural sensibilities of women of color leaders may be just what we need to address this critical problem (Santamaría, 2013; Santamaría and Jean-Marie, 2014; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2013, 2015).

Though there is hope in developing, sustaining, and retaining P-12 educational leaders with the knowledge, skills, and will to engage courageously radical leadership, these leaders also face a second problem – the problem of leading while serving within contested school spaces situated in the socio-historical context of schooling as a colonial project (Stovall, 2004; White, 1996). Schooling as a colonial project refers to the use of public schools and education as a tool to maintain society’s racialized, classed, and gendered hierarchies. Formed during colonial
times, for the purpose of educating white, male children of property owners (Applied Research Center, 2013), P-12 public schools fail to demonstrate consideration for educating HMMS, and when they did, this education was unequal, rife with inequities, often dehumanizing, and delivered primarily as a weapon to control, acculturate, and maintain caste status as separate, unequal, and unworthy (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Sixty years after Brown vs. Board of Education (and other national rulings calling for equal education for all), the education of HMMS remains unequal, and has given rise to an education debt owed them as a result of ignoring their rights and failing to ensure their academic, psychological, emotional, social, spiritual, and societal needs are met (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Demonstrating the courage to engage transformative, culturally-centered, and responsive leadership within this context requires leaders equipped with an adept understanding and assessment of the racial, cultural, economic, and socio-historical factors impacting education for all children but especially HMMS (Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Lynn & Parker, 2006; McGee Banks, 2001; Nieto, 1992; Parker & Villalpando, 2007). I describe some of those factors and challenges below.

The Persistent Education Debt

The persistent education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) speaks to the political, social, historical, and moral debt owed to HMMS as a result of systemic oppression- racism, sexism, and classism, as intersected with other forms of discrimination. Most codify and name the persistent education debt as an achievement gap. The achievement gap discourse centers deficit laden pathologies and is marked by a long litany of statistical indicators demonstrating the academic failures of HMMS as compared to their White counterparts. Traditionally explained using culture of poverty theories (Lewis, 1966; Moynihan, 1965), achievement gaps root the educational challenges of HMMS in their oft racialized and othered lived experiences, including
characterizing dimensions of their families and communities dysfunctional. For example, using the achievement gap rhetoric, one might read that high school graduation and academic achievement indicators for white students far surpass those of Black, and Latinx groups, with the 2012-2013 gap between Black and White students being 15.9% and that of Latinx and White students being 11.4% (NCES, 2014). These numbers are often explained by factors connected with impoverished backgrounds, poor language skills, families who devalue education, and other community ills. While statistical figures are certainly accurate, and there is a validated relationship between poverty and educational outcomes (Kozol, 2005, 2012), solely contextualizing the information in this way insidiously implies that the problem is within the student, the family, and the community, rather than the educational system (Gorski, 2008; Small, Harding & Lamont, 2010). As a result, efforts to reform schools focus on surface level changes to address the problem in individual students and their home-lives, rather than on transformative liberatory efforts that address problems within inequitable policies and practices endemic to those schools and institutions.

Fortunately, critical scholars working to counter deficit narratives describing the lived experiences of HMMS, affirm Ladson-Billings’ (2006) reframing of the achievement gap as a historical education debt (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995; Stovall, 2004, 2005; Tate, 1997; Yosso, 2005). Others also affirm the need for educational leadership research and theorizing that builds on the long struggle for equity and social justice in U.S. education (Blackmore, 2002; Brown, 2006; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Riester, Pursch, & Skrla, 2002; Santamaria, 2013; Stovall, 2004). This collection of scholars views educational leaders and the field of educational leadership as
capable of addressing the challenge of the education debt through the application of critical and culturally responsive leadership (CRL) pedagogies. Their assertions are confirmed by Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom (2004) who assert the importance of effective school leadership, noting it comes second only to teacher quality as being among the most important indicators of student learning and school success. Thus, the potential impact of critically conscious school leadership on school success for HMMS is not to be diminished.

**Racialized Access and Opportunity Gap**

As a result of the education debt, HMMS lack access and opportunity to the resources and learning experiences required for school success. This poses a challenge for school leaders seeking to transform schools into equitable places to teach, lead, and learn. For example, Black and Latinx students are more likely to attend schools that lack adequate funding (Kozol, 1991), supplies and resources (Darling-Hammond, 2015), and adequate access to college-prep programs, courses, and curriculum (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Programmatic elements like advanced placement courses, and resources like textbooks, digital software, and 21st century technology, are often in short supply, if available at all. By experiential observations made locally, Black and Latinx students are also denied access to specialized courses such as art, technology, music, and Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) (Ford, 1990, 1998, 2010) programs and instead required to double-up on remedial courses meant to serve as credit-retrieval or intervention supports. Some attribute this watering down of the curriculum, and virtual erasure of rigorous and robust instruction to policies linked to accountability measures sold as providing all students with universal access to high quality schools and instruction, but that have the opposite effect instead. As a result, Black and Latinx students are more likely to attend schools that offer a scripted curriculum focused on high stakes test prep and instructional
remediation, and access to high quality, critically conscious licensed educators and resources needed for success is highly improbable (Au, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2006). This limited access to high quality instruction, socially-conscious, culturally responsive teachers, and equitable schools renders their education unequal. These challenges do not occur in isolation. Instead, they are linked to socio-historical systemic factors with origins in the colonial project and weaved throughout the fabric of society and U.S. institutions (Gay & Kirkland, 2003, Gillborn, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006), making it a more complex challenge to solve as a school leader, and supporting the notion that there is truth and power in recodifying this challenge as a racialized access and opportunity gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010).

**The Student-Educator Racial Gap**

The widening racial gap between a mono-cultural, monolingual, white female majority teaching population and an increasingly multi-cultural, multi-lingual and racially diverse student body is a third equity issue that P-12 educational leaders are challenged with confronting (Ingersoll & May, 2011). This challenge is particularly important because research provides evidence that educators of color, especially Black teachers, bring valuable life experiences as former HMMS-experiences important for the achievement of all students (Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015). In 1988, University of Chicago scholar Jacqueline Jordan Irvine reported on the problem of the disappearing Black teacher, noting that Black teachers often serve a critical role in education for HMMS. Nearly two decades later, contemporary scholars continue the conversation (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Ingersoll & May, 2011) and affirm her findings, rearticulating the value that Black teachers bring to the P-12 school setting, including, serving as caring academic role models and impactful practitioners who help elevate the self-concept and
value of students of color. They also provide mainstream students with an opportunity to gain accurate perceptions of our multicultural society (Egalite, et al., 2015). This may also have the effect of countering the negative stereotypes some white students harbor about people of color, particularly as perpetuated by ignorance, prejudice, isolation, and distorted media depictions (Irvine, 1989). Scholars also prove that Black teachers are less inclined to harbor negative attitudes and beliefs about HMMS and more inclined to hold higher expectations for them than their white educator peers, resulting in the development of more caring relationships (Roberts, 2010), more impactful teaching and learning experiences, and improved achievement for all students (Milner, 2006). It is also worth noting that students of all races, even white students, report a greater affinity towards teachers of color (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). As Cherng & Halpin (2016) found in a recent NYU Steinhardt study, “Minority teachers may be perceived more favorably by minority students because they serve as role models and are particularly sensitive to the cultural needs of their students”, however, teachers of color were also viewed more highly than White teachers by White students who cited that Black teachers were more inclined to hold them to high expectations, support their efforts, help them understand and organize content, and explained ideas clearly, including providing critical corrective feedback. These findings about teachers of color, and Black teachers more specifically, underscore the importance of fully understanding their teaching, learning, and leadership practices, also holding promise for investigating ways to sustain and retain Black educators in educational leadership roles.

Because the racial gap between teachers and students is widening, in part due to a growing inability to sustain and retain teachers and leaders of color in the profession (Ingersoll & May, 2011) it makes sense that there is also a diversity gap between students and ELOC. This is
particularly troubling since theorists find ELOC engage teaching, learning, and leadership
“through different filters of experience than their mainstream peers, rendering their leadership
practice qualitatively different” (Aleman, 2009; McGee Banks, 2001; Santamaría & Santamaría,
2013; Horseford & Tillman, 2012). As evidenced by historical research (Gooden, 2005;
Lotomey, 1987, 1989, 1990; Pollard 1997; Reitzug & Patterson, 1998), the leadership of ELOC
has proven qualitatively critical to our understanding of leadership for social justice (Santamaría,
2012, 2013), and provides us with important insights into how they leverage the best of their
intersecting racialized, cultural, and social identities to engage CRL pedagogies (Crenshaw,
1989, 1995; Gay, 2010; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Santamaría,
2013). As Ingersoll & May (2011) argue, “Improving the retention of minority teachers
recruited into teaching by addressing the factors that drive them out could prevent the loss of
investment to recruit them in the first place and also lessen the need for more recruitment
initiatives.” (p. 6). This study examining the leadership experiences and practices of BWEL, an
important subpopulation of ELOC, affirms and builds on the knowledge we have about how to
make work places more desirable for the teachers of color and ELOC that work there (Ingersoll
& May, 2011), especially Black women. Findings can also be used to help us understand how to
begin to alter the trajectory of the colonial project, instead engaging the kind of restorative and
transformatively liberating practices that render education equal for HMMS.

The School Discipline Racial Gap

A final equity challenge P-12 educational leaders will need to confront is the school
discipline racial gap. This gap is characterized by disproportionate numbers of Black students
being suspended, expelled, and otherwise pushed out of P-12 schools (Skiba, Arredondo, &
Williams, 2014). In the 2013-2014 school year, U.S. Department of Education data showed K-
12 Black students were 3.8 times more likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions than their white student counterparts. While only 6% of all students received one or more out-of-school suspensions, the rates were 18% for African-American boys and 10% for African-American girls. When compared to the percentage rates for their white counterparts: 5% for white boys and 2% for white girls, it appears that Black students’ suspension rates significantly outpace whites, doubling and even tripling that of their white peers.

Locally, secondary suspension rates for Black students during the 2011-2012 school year was 20% while they were only 10% and 7% for their Latinx and White peers (ACLU, 2012), despite these two demographic groups combined making up the student majority in local public schools. Unfortunately, students who face school push-out like high suspension rates, are often pushed into detention and prison systems, giving birth to the school-to-prison pipeline (Crenshaw, et al., 2014; Morris, 2016). Not only does this student of color push-out, prison push-in phenomena represent the disproportionate criminalization of HMMS, specifically Black students, for minor disciplinary infractions currently coded as crimes under no tolerance education policies, it also has serious implications for the impact of education policy on the leadership decisions and practices employed by school leaders leading for social justice. This makes the school-to-prison pipeline and the accompanying no tolerance policies yet another serious equity challenge for P-12 educational leaders to overcome. This inquiry reveals how BWEL advancing a social justice agenda leverage their leadership to do so.

**Rationale for Inquiry**

P-12 educational leaders grapple with these and other equity issues as they lead our nation’s schools. Developing the knowledge, disposition, skills, and will to confront and meet these challenges while simultaneously leading within contested spaces can become stressful and
traumatic. A promising and emergent body of work arguing that women educational leaders of color employ a unique brand of cross-cultural applied leadership, bringing an alternative approach to leadership practices, and possibly holding the key to developing school leaders equipped with the multiple perspectives, effective equity-based leadership approaches, and transformative strategies to solve the equity challenges current and future educational leaders confront provides hope (Santamaria, 2013; Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2013, 2015). This scholarship asserts the value of examining the leadership of women educational leaders of color advancing social justice and educational equity (Santamaria, 2013). It also calls for more research focused on a single racialized group of women leaders of color (i.e. Latinx women leaders or Asian women leaders) because despite the growing body of work in this area (Astin & Leland, 1991; Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009; McKenzie et al., 2008; Normore & Jean-Marie, 2008; Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014; Skrla & Scheurich, 2003; Tillman & Scheurich, 2013; Tooms & Boske, 2010), there still remains a dearth of research explicitly examining the experiences of women educational leaders of color (WELOC) by centering their voices and experiences in the discourse. Employing a culturally relevant research approach steeped in a Black feminist thought (BFT) standpoint, this study bridges social justice leadership (SJL) theory to a collage of critical pedagogies, inclusive of critical race theory (CRT) and critical multicultural education (CME) to build on, amplify, and expand the body of research providing insight into how WELOC leverage their unique approach to school leadership. It also reveals how when challenged to find ways to lead schools where HMMS experience unequal education, BWEL rely on culturally-centered resiliency to confront and solve the problem. Finally, this study mitigates against taking the traditionally hegemonic, technical, and linear approach to research, embracing African centered emancipatory methodologies.
instead. Specifically, it draws on the voices, experiences, and stories of nine BWEL to broaden the discourse in educational leadership, meeting the demand for culturally-centered leadership approaches situated in the experiences and perspectives of WELOC (Santamaría, 2013; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014) advancing racial equity and social justice with a goal to dismantle inequities in U.S. P-12 schools, and revealing how the leadership approaches gleaned can become a catalyst for educational change in leadership, leadership development, and educational leadership research (Kershaw, 1990, 1992).

Situating the Work

Given the importance of story and voice to this study, it is important for me to situate the work so the reader is aware of what biases, if any, inform the manner in which the leadership experiences and stories shared with me, are engaged and (re)shared by me. First, I admit to engaging this work wrapped in the fear of a Black female educational leader afraid of not being seen and heard, but refusing to be silent anyway. Standing in my truth, and speaking boldly, I wage this study as restorative liberatory praxis (Freire, 1972; hooks 1994) – the kind of praxis rooted in the audacious hope “that grows from the concrete scholar Duncan-Andrade (2009) speaks about when he channels Tupac Shakur’s (2009) poetry to remind educators of their obligation to help students become critical agents of change who feel capable of and responsible for addressing social inequities and injustices within their own communities” (Walls & Cornejo, 2017). I do so seeking to provide sacred and brave space for BWEL to rebuke invisibility and step out of the shadows of marginality, entering the discourse in educational leadership and bringing ideas “honed at the juncture between movements for racial and gender-based equality” (Collins, 1986, p. S15) with them. I bring the leadership stories of my sistahs in Black women leadership with me, that our multi-cultural approaches, culturally centered methodologies,
expressed leadership experiences and collective proclivities may transform the way we theorize about and engage educational leadership in the U.S. (Biesta & Mirón, 2002; Parker & Villalpando, 2007). Dedicated to dismantling inequities in education, including disrupting the colonial relationship between racialized and gendered hierarchies that result in the silencing and marginalization of Black women, I also profess to employing this study with the clearest of clear understanding that my subjectivities as an anti-racist, homophobic, anti-homophobic, African American, heterosexual, mono-lingual, able-bodied, ablest, anti-ablest, Christian, cisgender female informs the work. Finally, recognizing that I am fully operationalizing my standpoint as a Black feminist scholar activist who is committed to bringing Black women’s knowledges and ideals into the center of this analysis that it may reveal aspects of educational leadership “formerly obscured by more orthodox approaches” (Collins, 1986, p. S15), I engage this work fully committed to: (a) occupying theorizing space with my unique ways of seeing reality from “both the outside and the inside out…and understanding both” (hooks, 1984, p. vii); (b) writing in my own voice, authentically and unapologetically expressed through first-person narration (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2003); (c) raising the voices of other Black Women leaders, with an understanding that their stories sit side-by-side with my own, our collective voices and shared leadership experiences being more important than my role as researcher and this work itself (Stovall, 2005), (d) engaging in the kind of truth-telling necessary to understand my work in education, educational leadership, and research, as intentional, and uncompromisingly political (Stovall, 2005), and (e) doing all of these things as an act of resistance and liberation from hegemonies grip on my leadership, advocacy, activism, research and personhood, thus intentionally seeking to restore my African centered and Black U.S. ways of being, thinking, and knowing (Dillard, 2000; Kershaw, 1990, 1992; Tillman, 2002).
Within this study, the application of African centered emancipatory methodologies (ACEM) is situated in a blend of definitions offered by scholars whose works focus on culturally-sensitive research methodologies (Dillard, 2000; Hilliard, 2001; Kershaw, 1990, 1992; Tillman, 1998, 2000). Specifically, ACEM is research that focuses on the cultural, historical, and contemporary experiences of Blacks, the significance of those experiences, the uniqueness of Black experiences and their relationships between the academic and nonacademic community” (Tillman, 2000, p. 5). It uses research findings as a way to generate practical knowledge about the forces that have import and impact on the Black lived experience in order to describe empirical realities, identify convergence and divergence in realities between the group and those codifying objective reality, develop tools to empower, and generate practical, useful, and emancipatory knowledge and theories for use in the broader scope of the targeted field. Within this study, ACEM is utilized as a way to generate practical, useful, and emancipatory knowledge and theories within the field of educational leadership, with hopes of empowering education leaders with tools to dismantle inequities, transforming the contested school spaces into places where all students experience an equal education. I situate this study in ACEM because as Audre Lorde (1995) says, “When we speak, we are afraid our words will not be heard or welcomed, but when we are silent, we are still afraid. So it is better to speak.” Pushing back on traditional research methodology and engaging a radical culturally relevant qualitative approach instead, I choose to speak.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study is also framed in literature on Black teaching, learning, and leading (Delpit, 2006; Foster, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1997; Henry, 1996; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lotomey, 1987, 1989, 1990), research providing evidence that women leaders of color who are
also members of HMMS communities in the U.S. practice educational leadership through different filters of experience than their mainstream peers (Aleman, 2009; McGee Banks, 2001, 2007; Santamaría and Santamaría, 2013, 2015), and my understanding of the unique value and relevancy of the culturally centered narratives and pedagogies BWEL have to share. It seeks to accomplish four tasks: (1) elucidate socially just leadership practices resulting from the positive aspects of the multicultural identities of BWEL advancing racial equity and social justice within U.S. P-12 education; (2) illuminate the impact that current educational policies have on BWEL, particularly as situated within a socio-historical context influencing national school reform efforts; (3) determine how BWEL leverage diverse multicultural perspectives and educational leadership approaches as a tool to disrupt and dismantle policies and practice that lead to inequities in U.S. public schools, replacing them with policies and/or practices that are racially and socially just; and (4) provide culturally centered narratives of educational leadership in order to inform important education stakeholders about how educational leadership development and research might be constructed differently.

**Research Questions**

In order to achieve the stated purpose, this study answers one overarching primary question and three secondary questions. The primary question is *How do BWEL committed to advancing racial equity through the development of a social justice leadership praxis experience and engage educational leadership in U.S. P-12 schools?* This question is shaped by my understanding of the leadership of BWEL as one rooted in the intersecting and multicultural identities informed by their social experiences (Scaetti, et al., 2008), particularly those situated in race and gender (Collins, 1986) and helps to illuminate positive attributes of our leadership for social justice (Santamaría, 2013; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2013).
Attributes evidenced to have import for the education of our nation’s diverse student population, especially those most underserved and most in need of educational equity as a means to thrive as well-balanced human beings in a diverse global world (Grant, 2012). I pose three equally important and descriptively connected secondary questions. These questions help tease out answers to the primary question. They include: (a) How do BWEL understand the impact and/or influence of race, gender, and policy on their leadership experiences? (b) How do BWEL navigate these understandings, particularly when making leadership decisions and engaging leadership action? (c) What leadership practices emerge as a result? These secondary questions guide reflection on the nature of participating BWELs’ leadership as situated in leading in their respective contested P-12 school spaces and forces introspective exploration on the impact of race, gender, and the school policy context on their educational leadership experience (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski & Flowers, 2004). They also help explicate each BWEL’s response to her specific leadership context, with attention given to how, and if, multicultural identities are leveraged towards a social justice agenda. Questions also guided reflexive action in phase III of the study, allowing me to bridge theory and practice to better understand how the leadership experiences and resulting leadership practices BWEL engage, including how they perceive these things to effect teaching, learning, and achievement within their respective schools, connect to achievement and well-being outcomes for HMMS. Working with participating BWEL to inquire about, and develop new understandings of our leadership, I employed a conceptual framework I am calling culturally responsive transformative multicultural leadership or CR-TML. CR-TML is a culturally relevant strand of the applied critical leadership approach (Santamaria, 2012) employed by BWEL to advance racial equity and social justice within education. Also employed as liberatory praxis by participating BWEL in this study, CR-
TML helps us to highlight leadership knowledges pushed to the margins. In this way, this work and the leadership experiences shared within contribute to the field of educational leadership, helping us all understand how to combat educational inequities through the engagement of a social justice agenda.

**Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

CR-TML, the conceptual framework guiding this work, is grounded in three research studies examining the leadership of WELOC (Santamaría, 2012, 2013; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014) and the unique culturally relevant strand of applied critical leadership (ACL) they employ. CR-TML is engaged as paradigm, process, pedagogy, and praxis. As paradigm, CR-TML advances a SJL agenda, informing the theoretical and conceptual framework within which this study is situated, including aligning with participating BWELs’ lived experience and leadership identity as a Black women (Scaetti, et al., 2008), and shaping my decision to employ CRT and BFT standpoint as the culturally centered epistemological lens through which the research process unfolds. As process, CR-TML informs how I conducted the study, including shaping my decision to employ an African centered emancipatory methodology by utilizing an inquiry-based, interpretive multiple case study approach, participatory orientation, and phenomenological analytic process, combined with principles of critical autoethnography (Hughes, Pennington, & Makris, 2012; quicke 2010). The process I undertook to conduct this study also shapes the culturally-sensitive pedagogical practices (Tillman, 2002) I engaged as a researcher. In this regard, CR-TML as pedagogy informs the study’s methods, including my decision to embody and model African-centered cultural ways of thinking, believing, and knowing (Dunbar 1999a, 1999b, 2001; Hilliard, 2001), shaped by methods centered in interdependence, cooperation, collectivism, synergism, and verve, and employed through
theoretical constructs forming CR-TML, even as this study also examines those constructs in participating BWEL. Given these phenomena, this study bridges education leadership theory to education leadership action, allowing participating BWEL to engage CR-TML as a unique strand of racially, culturally, and ethnically centered restorative liberatory (Freire, 1972) ACL praxis. We do so as we examine whether or not, and how, this same praxis shows up in each of us. Few, if any studies in educational leadership engage culturally centered research approaches highlighting the voices, experiences, and practical day-to-day constructive examples of women leaders from historically marginalized and minoritized backgrounds engaging leadership for social justice committed to disrupting inequities experienced by students from similar backgrounds in real-time in this way. These stories are traditionally left out of, or marginalized within, the current educational leadership discourse. Given the dearth, and near absence of educational leadership research utilizing a culturally relevant theoretical and conceptual framework like CR-TML, as employed through ACEM congruent with the backgrounds of researchers and co-inquirers, this study and its approach form a departure from hegemony, rendering it radically different and qualitatively unique, particularly to educational leadership, development, and the research informing both. A brief explanation of the theoretical and conceptual research framework birthing and framing CR-TML follows.

**ACL: Theorizing by a Woman Leader of Color**

Grounded in evidence-based knowledge about teachers of color, CRT, social justice education, CME, and multicultural education (ME), and initially theorized by a Black Latinx woman educational leader and scholar examining the SJL of WELOC (Santamaría, 2012, 2013), ACL is comprised of a complex collage of theories, including CRT, ME, CME, culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), and transformative leadership (TRL). Developed based on a series of
three qualitative studies of culturally, linguistically, and gender diverse education leaders, it is a culturally responsive approach to leadership, engaged to advance a social justice agenda.

Santamaría & Jean-Marie (2014) argue “when women leaders of color, otherwise marginalized individuals, or those who may choose to practice leadership through a CRT lens make leadership decisions, they do so as informed by positive cross-cultural attributes of their identities” (p. 338). They also assert that employing ACL “pushes education leaders’ thinking about leadership for social justice toward thinking about leadership practice or qualities that result in social justice and educational equity. This consideration moves educational leaders from engaging in an intellectual and professional exercise or duty to concrete and possibly measurable action.” (p. 11). Finally, Santamaría (2012, 2013) asserts that ACL directly links educational leadership theory to practice where leaders are less focused on reporting actions that make them look good to engaging a more focused action for good. Through this study, and the application of CR-TML, I build on, explore, and amplify theorizing on ACL. Doing so employing a culturally relevant African-centered research approach, I also move from solely focusing on reporting on the actions of BWEL, to reflecting on, discussing and engaging transformative action in real-time alongside them. Characterized by leadership with a social justice orientation, and toward a goal of reconstructing a more just education system that serves and empowers all stakeholders, especially students least served by the system now, ACL through CR-TML bridges theory to action. Specifically, it engages eight BWEL, nine including myself, in a recursive and reflective leadership process in order to restore humanity in, and liberate self from oppression, while also dismantling inequities in education for others, thereby providing space for others to liberate themselves (Aleman, 2009; Freire, 1972; Senge, et al., 2004).
I chose to ground this study in CR-TML because I added three critical theories and one methodology not present in Santamaría’s initial theorizing of the ACL framework but necessary to engage this study. They include: (1) an explicit and culturally-specific standpoint, in this case BFT (Collins, 1986; Ware, 2006), to account for the unique multicultural subjectivities that we as BWEL bring, and that may not show up in the experiences of other WELOC as examined in Santamaría’s (2012, 2013) original works, as well as a way to respond to Santamaría’s (2013) call to engage additional research rooted in the ACL framework but that focuses on a single-raced group of women leaders of color; (2) SJL (Stovall, 2004; Theoharis, 2007, 2008, 2009), a culturally-centered leadership approach and theory that takes into account the need to situate educational leadership for justice not just in the actions of the leader as accounted for by leadership theories like TRL, but also in the integrated social web comprising the socio-historical context in which educational leadership is situated, the immediate school policy context in which each of the participating BWELs engage their leadership, and each BWEL’s lived social experience, all important in shaping the leadership experience and practices they bring to the research space; (3) critical pedagogies, inclusive of critical professional development (CPD) (Kohli, et al., 2015), which infuses a participatory component focused on developing leadership in action as the research process is engaged; and finally, (4) an ACEM meant to enable me as researcher to fully walk the talk of dismantling inequity centered in whiteness by doing so in my research as well.

ACEM was codified in previous sections. I explain each of the constructs forming the CR-TML framework in the next section. Figures one and two provide a visual upon which to anchor this explanation. Figure 1.1 codifies each of the theoretical constructs forming CR-TML as situated in this study and figure 1.2 illustrates how ACL becomes CR-TML, transitioning
from theory to activist research. As codified in this study, CR-TML is an anti-racist, anti-colonial leadership and research praxis employed by BWEL, to restore, sustain, and retain humanity within the globally diasporic historically marginalized and minoritized community, by first doing so for self, liberating ourselves from white supremacy, power, and oppression, then drawing on co-constructed knowledges and multicultural consciousness to disrupt, dismantle and destroy inequities in the educational institutions within which we lead, including U.S. P-12 schools. Doing so, we as BWEL, restore them into racially and socially just spaces, simultaneously igniting the power in others to do the same (within schools and society). Situated in this definition, CR-TML is an anti-colonial liberatory leadership and research praxis employed by BWEL to achieve racial equity and social justice in education. It has indigenous grassroots origin, bridges theory to activist research, and is waged through a unique brand of critically relevant, culturally responsive, transformative, multicultural leadership action characterized by six emergent themes resulting from the leadership narratives of the eight BWEL engaging this study alongside me: (1) engage a CRT lens shaped by a culturally-situated multiconsciousness, (2) maintain simultaneity of purpose situated in the needs of historically marginalized and minoritized students and communities, (3) build complex reciprocal relationships, (4) engage in self-care through communal care; (5) operationalize leadership as an advocate, ally, and activist; and (6) engage in reflection, dialogue, and critical race praxis.

**Moving from ACL as Theory to CR-TML as Research and Leadership Praxis**

CRT is the first theoretical construct forming ACL and embedded in CR-TML. CRT provides the epistemological foundation for CR-TML and this study. Specifically, it provides the analytical lens through which I view and situate the work, including how I read the world around me in which the research sits. Recognizing the prevalence of race in U.S. systems,
including P-12 schools, CRT allows me to engage analysis by remaining mindful of racial
realism, foregrounding race and racism (Bell, 1995) as intersected with other colonial
oppressions, both at the individual and systems level (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2006; Ladson-
Billings & Tate, 1995; Stovall, 2004; Yosso, 2005). It provides a lens through which to
recognize and critique inequitable and oppressive systems and equips me as researcher with a
tool to center the voices and experiences of BWEL using interpretive storytelling as one way to
disrupt deficit narratives about their leadership. Applying CRT also provides for an authentic
and reliable reading of our leadership experiences, including understanding our experiences
within and across multiple complex leadership settings and contexts, and unpacking the impact
of race, gender, and policy on these experiences (Powers, 2007; Aleman, 2009), as well as the
practices that result.

*Figure 1.1. Constructs forming CR-TML*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACL</th>
<th>BFT</th>
<th>CRT</th>
<th>CME</th>
<th>SJL</th>
<th>CPD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A theoretical framework and approach to leadership engaged by women leaders of color and theorized by Black female scholar Maria Santamaria (2013).</td>
<td>Situates study in a unique strand of ACL by engaging the inquiry through a Black Feminist Standpoint.</td>
<td>Provides the epistemological lens through which ACL is operationalized.</td>
<td>Already included in the ACL framework but used in this study to help explain and understand the leadership experience as connected to each leaders’ desire to engage a social justice agenda.</td>
<td>Bridged to CRT and CME to help understand if the leadership practices engaged by participating leaders align with identified definitions and characteristics of social justice leadership, as well as to determine what characteristics if any are unique to BWEL.</td>
<td>A theoretical frame providing the means for BWEL to engage an authentic critical pedagogy in action, allowing them to walk the talk of social justice action for liberation, and bridging theory to action comprising Freire’s theorizing on a praxis that has the power to liberate (1970).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounds study forming the foundation upon which inquiry and leadership is engaged.</td>
<td>Link between thought, history, lived experience, and situated context.</td>
<td>Multi-consciousness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Steeped in a collage of critical theories it asks: How does my identity enhance or impede my ability to see and engage difference as a leader?</td>
<td>Self-Valuation &amp; Reclamation of voice, experience, &amp; agency – only Black women can speak truth about the Black female experience (Yosso, 2005)</td>
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ACL, thus CR-TML, also draws on the robust literature in CME to shape and define understandings of what it means to advance a social justice agenda in education (Grant, 2012; May 1999; McGee Banks & Banks; 1995; Nieto, 1992, 2004; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995), including determining what it means to engage culturally-relevant and responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2010) in leadership. Combining CME with a CRT lens strengthened the framework, as well as my ability to apply it as a tool of analysis to help understand and make sense of the leadership context each BWEL was situated in, the leadership experiences they had as a result of these diverse contexts, and the ways in which both may have influenced their leadership practices (Aleman, 2009; Harris, 1993; Lopez et al., 2006).

I then bridge CRT and CME to SJL. While CME and CRT provide context to better understand how BWEL experience leadership, SJL provided a balanced way to make meaning of the leadership practices engaged as a result of these experiences (Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006; Jean-Marie, Normore, & Books, 2009; McKenzie et al., 2008; Santamaría,
2014; Theoharis, 2007, 2008, 2009). It was not enough to view the leadership practices of BWEL outside of their leadership experiences, as both are complexly interrelated (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2013). SJL helped to unpack and understand leadership actions and decisions, providing a framework within which to determine whether leadership actions were consistent with culturally-centered and critically responsive praxis, as well as a social justice orientation, and if so, how and why. Placing SJL within a conceptual framework and analytic lens employing CRT and CME helped me to understand the relationship between leadership context, experiences and practices, allowing for a holistic and balanced analysis of the reciprocal nature of the impact of experiences on the practices BWEL engage.

The final two elements of the CR-TML framework, rendering it slightly different but not separate from ACL is the employment of CPD and a BFT standpoint. CPD is a dialogical professional development model that engages educators in an analysis of critical practices (Kohli, et al., 2015), in this case, critical leadership decisions. CPD positions educators as agents of change, challenging them to take control of their own social justice-oriented professional growth through solution-based problem-posing rooted in five essential components of Freire’s (1972) critical pedagogy: cooperation, community building, shared power, centering the perspectives and needs of ELOC, and liberatory praxis, or the bridging of theory and action through critical reflection, dialogue, and leadership action (Kohli, et al., 2015, p. 11). The critical leadership action group engaged during phase III of the study was established using CPD. Relying on CPD as process and method, participating BWEL qualified stories shared through survey responses and interviews, while building a network of support within which to problem- pose and develop solutions for real-time equity challenges. Data captured from these
conversations added to rich descriptions of individual cases, while also painting a clearer portrait of the ways BWEL engage culturally-centered leadership approaches from diverse perspectives.

Because this study examines the leadership of BWEL, with lived experience and core values grounded in the three key themes of BFT as captured by Collins (1986), and because all participants self-identified as Black women engaging leadership to advance equity and justice, it was important to situate this study in the affinity oriented and racialized culture-specific theory BFT. BFT as theory is culturally-centered, born of the scholarship and lived experiences of Black Women thinkers affiliated with the study of sociology, yet trying to make sense of their positionality in a world where they experience multiple, intersecting oppressions. My decision to root the study in this standpoint is consistent with the goal to engage this work as situated in Black Women subjectivities and a culturally relevant research approach with consideration for core values rooted in my Blackness and womanhood. Specifically BFT scholars (Collins, 1986), studying Black women and their racially gendered womanhood argue three things.: (1) while “others” (non-Black Women) engage work rooted in a Black feminist experience and the thinking that results, only Black women can capture it authentically, truthfully, and experientially, holistically; (2) though Black women are not monolithic and represent lived experiences across a vast global and African diaspora making them complexly diverse, they “possess a unique standpoint on, or perspective, of, their experiences” (p. S16) that produces commonalities they each share; and (3) in spite of these commonalities, given their diversity, especially as situated in intersecting multicultural and social identities, Black Women express themselves differently, especially with consideration for social identity factors rooted in “class, region, age, and sexual orientation [and religion, nationality, and language]” (p. S16).
Like CRT, BFT provided the unique analytical lens through which we as a collective body of cooperating leaders engaging inquiries viewed the world, and the inquiries we engaged, allowing us to draw on (and out) our unique subjectivities as outsiders within (Collins, 1986). We did so to make sense of our leadership experiences and practices, as well as find common ground upon which to build brave space to engage theory to action during the participatory phase of the study. Our intent in doing so was to better understand how to liberate self from policies and practices rooted in whiteness, in order to open up space for others, including the teachers, students, families, and communities we lead in service for, to do the same. In this regard, BFT, more than any other factor, is what codifies CR-TML as a unique strand of restorative liberatory ACL praxis, particularly since it has been strategically situated in the standpoint(s) and experiences of Black Women leaders. BFT is consistent with CRT and SJL in many ways, including: recognizing the intersectional nature of race, racialization, and racism (Crenshaw, 1991); affirming the importance of situated context when exploring and attempting to make sense of social phenomena (Collins, 1986); recognizing the importance and value of story and naming one’s truth for self through narrative (McKay, 2010), and engaging critique to call out and disrupt oppression (Ladson-Billings, 1986; Lorde, 2012). Together, and fused with the other theories forming CR-TML, it was engaged in a perfect blend of paradigm, process, pedagogy, and research praxis, bridging leadership theory to leadership action and providing space to “explore, examine, and describe a phenomenon to gain an in-depth understanding” (Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014, p. 339) of the leadership experiences and practices of participating BWEL. Though in its emergent stage, and still in need of further validation, CR-TML enabled this study and helps the fields of educational leadership, CRT, and CME better understand leadership for
social justice engaged by BWEL with a commitment to advancing racial equity and social justice in the contested spaces of U.S. P-12 schools.

**Significance of the Inquiry**

Cited literature prompts continued research that examines the impact of SJL on the educational outcomes of HMMS (Muhammad & Hollie, 2011; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001), including calling for more inquiries that examine the ways women leaders of color, an important subgroup of the diverse U.S. population, leverage the positive aspects of their identities to lead for social justice (Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014). Others advance the added value of teaching and leadership approaches situated in the experiences of Black women educators (Collins, 1992; Dantley, 2005; Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ware, 2006;) and affirm the power of the unique and culturally specific knowledge, skills, ideals, and strategies they bring to the teaching, learning, and leadership space (Santamaría, 2013; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2013, 2015; Tillman, 2000). This is significant, because many of the critical contributions to research connected with equity-seeking pedagogical strategies in the fields of multicultural education and teacher education were first developed by Black women scholars (Collins, 1990; Darling-Hammond & Liberman, 2013; Delpit, 2006; hooks, 1994; and Ladson-Billings, 2009), and often as a result of studies focused on the teaching experiences and practices of this same subgroup. An example of a seminal and ground-breaking research in this regard is that conducted on culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and responsive (Gay, 2000) pedagogy. The research undertaken by national scholar Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) as codified in her now classic book, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, received much acclaim and her theorizing, buffeted by contributions from scholar Geneva Gay is now regarded as a major theoretical construct across various
professional fields. Professions like counseling, medicine, and business use CRP theories in their labor and workforce development work. Ladson-Billings’ (2009) CRP is also used to shape national conversations about culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002, 2010), culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), culturally responsive leadership (Aguilar, 2011; Johnson, 2007; Khalifa, et al., 2016), cultural competence (Lynch & Hanson, 1992), and cultural proficiency (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003). It has also led to similar theoretical works focused on cultural compatibility (Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987), cultural collusion (Beachum & McCrary, 2004), culturally relevant care (Roberts, 2010), and cultural humility (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998), all of which speak to the need for educators and educational contexts to understand, respond to, incorporate, and ultimately affirm the “languages, literacies, spiritual universes, cultures, racial proclivities, behaviors, knowledges, critical thought, and appearances” (Khalifa, et al., 2016, p. 7) of the students, families, and communities they serve. Additionally, Ladson-Billings’ (2009) CRP theory, along with the works coming out of the fields of CRT, CP, and CME, forms the foundation upon which educational leadership for social justice, employing equity-centered, culturally responsive pedagogies, has been built (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Gay, 2003; Muhammad & Hollie, 2011). Given this knowledge, it is a rational undertaking to conjecture the promise of innovative approaches to leadership with the power to change the way we address equity issues in P-12 schools as situated in the leadership of Black women educators, possibly those already serving as educational leaders within our nation’s most contested school spaces.

The eight leadership stories and two testimonials shared as part of this study provoke dialogue about how we might re-imagine the development of educational leaders prepared to confront critical equity issues in U.S. P-12 schools differently. It also enhances our
understanding of the impact of education policies and practices on leaders committed to equity and justice, especially BWEL, and equips us with necessary knowledge to leverage human resources to combat those that are negative. Finally, it helps us recover knowledge(s) of marginalized and silenced, about how best to address inequities in education, while informing us on how we might rethink our approach to the leaky national teacher and educational leader of color pipeline characterized by the teacher-student racial gap. As shared previously, teacher education instructors, school leaders, district leaders, legislators, policy makers, and scholars in the field will all benefit from this study’s findings.

**In Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the study, including situating it in my standpoint and experience engaging no tolerance policies in the contested spaces of U.S. P-12 schools. Chapter two will provide a detailed review of the relevant research within which this study is grounded, as well as upon which this study builds, and chapter three will provide a detailed overview of the methodological approach employed to engage this study. Findings, an analysis of findings and a discussion of next steps will be engaged in chapters four through seven.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

If we have been gagged and disempowered by theories, we can also be loosened and empowered by theories (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxvi). Indeed, if some knowledges have been used to silence, marginalize and render People of Color invisible, then ‘Outsider’ knowledges (Hill Collins, 1986), mestiza knowledges (Anzaldúa, 1987) and transgressive knowledges (hooks, 1994) can value the presence and voice of People of Color, and can reenvision the margins as places empowered by transformative resistance (hooks, 1990; Delgado Bernal, 1997; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).”

~ Yosso, 2005, p. 70

Chapter one provided the premise and rationale for this study, including situating it in the need to develop educational leaders equipped with the knowledge, skill and will to grapple with the equity challenges historically marginalized and minoritized students (HMMS) face and P-12 school leaders are forced to confront. The purpose of this chapter is to address the literature providing the direction for the study. Engaged in response to Yosso’s (2005) challenge to leverage our outsider knowledges towards empowered transformative resistance, and explored under the rationale that if historical literature provides evidence that effective teachers adjust their pedagogical response to students to meet their diverse cultural and social needs (Foster, 1994; Gay, 2010; Irvine, 1989, 1992; Villegas & Irvine, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2008), then using a similar approach with the entire school community might benefit educational leaders (Khalifa, 2012; Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis, 2016), this literature review examines the growing body of works calling for social justice leadership (SJL).
I begin by sharing how this review was conducted, bridging this discussion to a historical overview of the research in educational leadership and emphasizing the emergence of a focus on culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) pedagogies like SJL. This section references how the educational praxis of Black educators has contributed to the field of knowledge in education, giving birth to new theories examining leadership for social justice as a possible solution to educational leadership’s most challenging dilemmas. It is followed by a review of the literature on SJL. This brief but important review defines and describes social justice leadership, including acknowledging how works examining the leadership of women leaders of color has begun to reshape the discourse in educational leadership, including situating this study in applied critical leadership (ACL), a leadership theory born of the literature on women leaders of color, conceptualized by a woman leader and scholar of color (Santamaría, 2013), and informing the development of the conceptual framework used to guide this study. I follow this with a review of the literature on SJL describing ACL as well, which I employ through culturally responsive transformative multicultural leadership (CR-TML). This description includes an explanation for how I move CR-TML from a complex conceptual framework situated in the integration of SJL, critical race theory (CRT), critical multicultural education (CME), critical pedagogy (CP) and critical professional development (CPD), to activist research situated in my Black Feminist standpoint as grounded in African centered emancipatory research methodologies (ACEM). I close the chapter with a review of the relevancy of the study, positing a need to continue to build on and amplify research and theorizing centered in the leadership of women leaders of color.

Through this literature review, I affirm the assertion I made in chapter one that in order to sustain, retain, and develop educational leaders with the will and skill to advance racial equity and social justice within U.S. P-12 schools, the field must first listen to and understand the
leadership experiences and stories of those most marginalized, silenced, and left out of the leadership discourse in these schools, in this case BWEL (Aleman, 2009; Collins, 1990, 2000; Dillard, 2000; Santamaría, 2012, 2013; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014; Tillman, 2000). Given the current educational leadership and school reform policy context, their intersecting multi-cultural perspectives and subjectivities have much to offer the discourse and must be considered, explaining why I chose to engage this study and underscoring the importance of situating it in a validated body of research, opening up space to engage this work. The section that follows describes how I situate the study in a robust and validated body of literature by explaining how the literature review was conducted.

**Situating the Literature Review**

This literature review was conducted using two research search engines: Google Scholar and Eric. Using the Boolean search technique, I searched for relevant articles using the following key words and phrases: educational leadership, educational leadership theory, SJL, African American (and/or Black) female leaders, and African American (and/or Black) leaders. I mined scholarly works written in the last ten years, searching for peer-reviewed research articles, conceptual essays and literature reviews. I also cross-checked reference lists of the works read, in search of prominent scholars and seminal pieces of scholarship that I missed finding in my initial search. When discovered, I added these works to my review, even if written prior to the ten year mark. In this way, I was able to include those critical works shaping theory in the various fields I explored, including shaping later works read as part of my initial review. After exploring the historical record for educational leadership more broadly, I conducted a more advanced search focused on selections that explicitly named the social justice leadership of Black women school leaders situated in the current school reform and policy context within U.S. P-12 schools. There
were few; an initial search uncovered two. An additional search at a later date yielded five. What follows is a description of the review of the literature. It reveals how earlier theories of educational leadership have been combined with theories of SJL to inform the conceptual and theoretical framework that guides this study.

**A Historical Overview of Educational Leadership**

The role of the educational leader has shifted from one solely situated in the school principal as a manager of administrative tasks and people, to one where leaders serve at multiple levels of the school, engaging complex leadership responsibilities, including balancing the challenge to meet the needs of an increasingly diversifying student population with the challenge to engage leadership towards a vision of equity and justice while mired in a national school reform policy context situated in inequities discussed in greater detail in chapter one. More recently, researchers interested in developing leaders prepared to dismantle such inequities have begun to theorize educational leadership approaches that are culturally responsive (Khalifa, et al., 2016). As a result, leadership for social justice has emerged, and with it, a body of work that highlights the practices and actions, mannerisms, policies, and discourses of leaders who lead in this way (Stovall, 2004; Santamaría, 2012, 2013; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014; Theoharis, 2008). This body of work reveals important information about how educational leaders committed to disrupt inequities in schools can influence and have impact on teaching and learning from a leadership lens. This study builds on and amplifies that body of work by expanding the discourse to include a bridge between leadership theory and practice to critical race theory (CRT), critical multicultural education (CME), and critical pedagogies (CP). In an effort to contextualize this study, this section, and the next, describes my review of the historical literature on approaches to educational leadership, with a
targeted focus on its evolution from theories advocating managerial leadership styles to those advancing leadership for social justice.

**Managerial Leadership**

Theories of educational leadership have evolved. Former theories of educational leadership focused on taking a managerial or business-like approach. This is known as Managerial Leadership (ML) (Caldwell, 1992; Bass & Stogdill; 1990). Leaders employing ML incorporate a goal-orientation and focus on planning, budgeting, and evaluating plans that have been implemented. Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999) later define ML as leadership that places the authority for school leaders in the formal positions of an organizationally defined hierarchy. An additional focus of leaders utilizing this approach is efficiency in the completion of tasks. ML presumes if tasks are completed efficiently then the leader has been effective. According to Leithwood et al. (1999), this model of leadership also presumes that if the leader carries out each function with efficiency and effectiveness then all others will as well, since their behavior is assumed to be rational and based on leadership from the top.

Transactional Leadership (TL) is one form of ML. It promotes compliance by followers through rewards and consequences and is defined as leadership “in which relationships with teachers are based upon an exchange for some valued resource (Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996). Interaction between administrators and teachers is usually episodic, short-lived, and limited to the exchange of transaction” (Miller & Miller, 2001, p. 182). Ultimately, ML approaches are associated with authoritarian, hierarchical, management styles, and deemed to be an effective approach within bureaucratic systems where tasks are clearly defined and centralized, control and order are needed, and no visionary change is desired (McLennon & Thurlow, 2003). They are insufficient to support the kind of visionary leadership needed to address
equity challenges that transform schools and tend to lead to the development of leaders who “do not own innovations but are simply required to implement externally imposed changes, without enthusiasm” (Bush, 2003, p. 46). In this regard, employing an ML approach can have the effect of leading to ineffective leadership and continued inequities for HMMS.

**Visionary Leadership**

The inadequacy of ML (Bass & Stogdill, 1990) gave birth to visionary leadership (VL) theories, including instructional leadership (IL) (Blasé & Blasé, 2004) and transformative leadership (TRL) (Avolio, 2005; Bass, 1997) approaches. IL emerged in the eighties as a result of a need for a more visionary approach to leadership and was first defined by leadership situated in the school principal with a focus on top-down leadership models where the leader understood matters of curriculum and instruction and made considerations for these things in their vision for effective teaching and learning (Hallinger, 2003). In this conceptualization, the school principal is the most important and sole leader in the school. Responsibility for setting goals, curriculum development, instructional supervision, and all duties related to teaching and learning are guided by the VL of the school principal (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). According to Hallinger (2003), IL is strongly focused on improving teaching and learning, including improving the professional learning of teachers and the academic achievement outcomes of students. It is characterized by three key dimensions focused on engaging a mission as situated in the leader’s vision, foregrounding the management of teaching and learning, and maintaining a school climate conducive to engaged student learning. Within these three dimensions, principals have different functions (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Several theoretical essays and empirical studies proposed dimensions, characteristics, and strategies to codify instructional leadership (Duke, 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Murphy, 1988; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001), however, the underlying emphasis
amongst all of the literature is on instructional leaders as visionary leaders who develop and manage school culture by building norms of trust and collaboration that support effective teaching, learning, and student achievement.

Given the isolating nature of IL as a leadership approach centered in the vision of a single school leader, IL theories were expanded to consider a more participatory approach, including denoting school principals, instructional coaches (traditionally teacher leaders), and central district officials as key leadership figures (Elmore, 2000; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). These new theories codified key elements of effective IL with an emphasis placed on maintaining a culture of continuous learning characterized by the management and implementation of instructional materials, curriculum, and instruction that lead to effective, student-centered, and data-informed teaching and learning (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). While IL is viewed as a comprehensive framework to drive effective educational leadership within schools, it often takes on a color-blind approach to leadership, resulting in an insufficient or inadequate framework to address the equity challenges rooted in race and systemic racism and faced by P-12 educational leaders and HMMS. Scholars began to explore inspirational leadership models like TRL as a result.

TRL is a second type of VL. It springs from research on political leaders and roots leadership in the charismatic qualities of a single school leader who works to cause change towards identified goals in both individuals and social systems (Avolio & Bass, 1995). In its ideal form, TRL creates valuable and positive change by inspiring stakeholders within the school to collaboratively engage eight identified dimensions (Leithwood, 1994): building school vision, establishing school goals, providing intellectual stimulation, offering individualized support, modeling best practices and important organizational values, demonstrating high performance expectations, creating productive school culture, and developing structures to foster participation in
school decisions. TRL has as a central focus, developing and transforming the commitments and capacities of organizational members and assumes that if everyone in the school has a high level of personal commitment to the goals of the school then they will put in great effort to achieve those goals and greater productivity towards accomplishing those goals are inevitable (Bass, 1997, 1999). In this way, the transformational leader becomes an inspirational leader charged with motivating followers to achieve identified goals.

Opponents decry TRL’s over-reliance on a charismatic leader engaging power from an authoritative position to influence rather than engage stakeholders as equal partners (Bush, 2007). Despite these negatives, many politicians, educators, and scholars use the language of transformation to achieve policy and research objectives. For example, and as previously shared, the current discourse in educational leadership calls for transformative change towards equity and justice as championed by transformational leaders at the same time that it lends credence to initiatives like high stakes testing (Au, 2010), no tolerance policies (Skiba & Peterson, 2000), and charter school proliferation (Scott, 2009), situated in the U.S. colonial education project rooted in white supremacy, power, and privilege (Gillborn, 2005) and that exacerbates the education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2004). This symbolic use of the language of transformation also reveals a deep divide between rhetoric and reality, as well as theory and practice, particularly in a context where educational leaders are encouraged to ascribe to district and state prescriptions for curriculum, pedagogy, and policies, which are becoming more and more centralized despite claims and support for leadership autonomy, choice, and participatory democratic action (Bush, 2007)- all perceived benefits of TRL. When viewed through this lens, transformative leadership and calls to engage it, seem more political symbolism for equity and TRL than real-life implementation, becoming
symbolic language appeasement at best and racist at its worst, making it critically important to articulate why and how TRL is used as part of this study’s theoretical framework.

As connected to this study, TRL takes on a less symbolic definition and instead engages a more action-orientation. It does so by bridging CRT and CME to the positive dimensions of TRL theory: a culturally aware charismatic leader with the skill and will to establish school goals rooted in a clear vision and transforming schools into positive and inclusive spaces by providing collaborators with the intellectual stimulation and individualized support necessary to model culturally-responsive practices and important organizational values, fostering inspired participation in all aspects of the school (Hartog, House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1999). This roots TRL in a collaborative culturally-centered pedagogical stance, similar to leadership approaches found in distributive leadership theories (Santamaría, 2012, 2014; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2013, 2015). In this way, TRL evolves into SJL. How it does so is discussed in the sections that follow.

Distributive Leadership

The leadership theories examined in previous sections prove insufficient to address the equity challenges faced by educational leaders in the 21st century, even as TRL has promise. As discussed, they provide formative insight into one particular aspect of leadership, as well as the development of leadership theory in education. However, alone, they do not emphasize the leadership qualities necessary to engage a participatory action oriented leadership praxis that dismantles inequities in schools then rebuilds them toward equity and justice. Distributive leadership (DL) theories prove to be better options in that those employing these leadership styles utilize collaborative approaches to leadership, situate leadership in the multiple layers of stakeholders involved in the school setting, intentionally promote a school climate inclusive of the needs of all students, especially HMMS, and engage the development of a liberatory leadership
praxis centered in advancing an equity and social justice agenda (Khalifa, et al., 2016). Two DL approaches discussed in this review include CRSL and SJL.

According to a review of the leadership literature conducted by Khalifa, et al. (2016), CRSL has been most consistently employed in studies concerned with leadership for equity and justice. They define CRSL as “the ability of school leaders to create school contexts and curriculum that responds effectively to the educational, social, political, and cultural needs of students.” (p. 7). Researchers believe CRSL is relevant and timely because it incorporates aspects of anti-racist, anti-oppressive leadership as well as TRL and is foundational to the emergent literature on SJL (Dantley & Tilman, 2006; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Kumashiro, 2000; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2007).

Early research on culturally responsive leadership (CRL), and specifically the leadership of African American (AA) school leaders engaging CRL, informs recent studies on CRSL (Lomotey, 1987, 1989, 1990; Walker, 1996, 2000). For example, Walker’s (1996, 2000) research on AA leadership practices revealed that AA leaders engage leadership differently when compared to their White counterparts. Johnson’s (2006) research argued this difference can be attributed to the culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and CRL practices that AA leaders bring to the school setting and context. Gooden (2005) asserts that CRL represents leadership towards equity and supports “teaching practices that incorporate culture as a means to teach and empower” (Santamaría, 2013, p. 8).

Lomotey (1987, 1989, 1990) is another early scholar with literature focused on CRL, the established pre-cursor to the literature on CRSL. His work presented case studies of AA principals working in predominantly Black schools in California. These were amongst the first studies that featured AA principals and it, along with other studies from this time period revealed the propensity of AA towards CRSL. The findings are best codified by Santamaría (2014) when she notes that AA leaders’ CRL
“demonstrated commitment of the principals to the education of African American children, and to challenging racism; their compassion for and understanding of their students and communities; their desire to empower students by helping them identify alternative behaviors when faced with confrontational situations; their efforts to advocate for students, setting high standards for themselves, their teachers, and students; and their confidence in the ability of African American children to learn (Case, 1997; Khalifa, 2011; Lomotey, 1987, 1989, 1990; Morris, 1999, 2004; Pollard, 1997; Reitzug and Patterson, 1998). In other words, grounded by their own experiences and their knowledge of their communities, Black principals who provide leadership in predominantly Black communities lead with a practical and lived compassionate understanding of their communities (Gooden, 2005) coupled with the expectation of high academic achievement for their students.” (p. 8)

According to Santamaría (2013), CRSL allows educational leaders practicing this form of leadership to “identify, protect, institutionalize, celebrate” (Khalifa, et al., 2016) and affirm the culture and funds of knowledge HMMS bring to school with them. By doing so, they are performing a complex form of cultural work (Cooper, 2009) that requires leaders to develop knowledge about the students, teachers, families, and communities they serve, situating their practice in this knowledge (Gay, 2010; Khalifa, et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006). A more recent evolution of CRL, CRSL seeks to identify and institutionalize leadership practices that affirm indigenous cultural norms and ways of being for students by challenging school environments that marginalize HMMS.

**Relevancy for CRSL.** Theorists have found a critical need for CRSL. Reviews and studies find that culture shapes the thinking, behaviors, practices, proclivities, mannerisms, and appearances of students, teachers, administrators, parents, and other stakeholders, and in the absence of adequate
cultural knowledge about these things for HMMS, educational leaders can employ leadership strategies that have marginalizing and oppressive effects on their teaching and learning experiences in schools (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998). Because schools are becoming more and more culturally, linguistically, racially and socially diverse, this problem will only increase. Young, Madsen, and Young (2010) reinforce this argument, finding that educational leaders, specifically school principals, are unprepared to lead in diverse schools, especially schools serving a majority HMMS population. This is a problem given the equity challenges they are likely to face. To exacerbate the problem, most educational leadership theorist and theories focus on IL, TL, and TRL and avoid the discussion surrounding culturally responsive, liberatory, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive leadership practices (Khalifa, et al., 2016). If HMMS, especially Black and Latinx students sit at the bottom of every indicator of school success, this positionality is not proof of their inability to achieve school success, but rather proof of the lack of the skill and will of educational leaders and school systems to ensure that they do so (Vavrus & Cole, 2002). As McKown & Weinstein found (2008), low school performance as indicative of the various achievement measures for Black and Latinx students are directly related to the educators in the building that serve the students, and the low expectations for these students held by educators do not match the expectations held for their White peers; they are lower. Khalifa, et al. (2016) argue, if the low expectations are due to lack of knowledge about culture, then CRSL is an important leadership framework to begin the theorizing towards more equitable and socially just schools for HMMS.

**Characteristics of CRSL.** In a synthesis of the literature on CRSL, Khalifa, et al. (2016) identified four major strands. They include critical self-awareness, culturally responsive curricula and preparation, culturally responsive and inclusive school environments, and engaging students and parents in community contexts. These characteristics reveal the relevancy for an exploration of
race and gender, given their importance for identifying practices BWEL use when engaging leadership for social justice (Ah Nee-Benham & Cooper, Aleman, 2009; Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2006; Santamaría, 2013; Tillman & Trier, 2007). Incorporating this knowledge into the conceptual framework used to conduct this study enabled critical self-examination of the ways in which participating BWEL multicultural identities shape leadership experiences and decisions. An important characteristic of CRSL is critical self-awareness. Drawing on tenets of CRSL and the Cultural Proficiency Continuum (CPC) (Appendix M) developed by Lindsey, Robins, Lindsey and Terrell (2009) as a result of research on CRSL, this study employed survey and critical inquiry action group protocols guiding participants to reflect on and qualify answers about leadership disposition, pedagogy and practices, including trying to understand the intent of leadership decisions in relationship to leadership standpoint and experiences, particularly when reflecting on and considering the perceived impact of these decisions on the HMMS they serve.

**CRSL and the Development of SJL.** Given the relevancy of culture for leadership, educational leaders engaging CRSL pedagogies have the potential to help sustain (Paris, 2012) the indigenous cultural norms and ways of being of the students, teachers, and families within the schools they serve (Khalifa, et al., 2016). They can do so by bridging the leadership practices identified for CRSL with those revealed by the emerging literature for SJL (Astin & Leland, 1991; Cochran-Smith, 2008; Grant & Agosto, 2008; McKenzie et al., 2008; Santamaría, 2013; Scheurich & Skrła, 2003; Stovall, 2004). Scholars in the field have encouraged SJL as a viable approach to addressing the equity challenges in education (Astin & Leland, 1991; McKenzie et al., 2008; Santamaría, 2014) asserting its value in transforming and improving educational outcomes for HMMS attending P-12 schools. Theories for SJL are built on the body of work advocating CRSL
pedagogies. This body of work continues to grow. Given the alignment of the tenets of CRSL with SJL, a review of the literature for SJL theory follows.

**Literature Review of Social Justice Leadership**

SJL is “less a thing and more an ethical position” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 40). In addition to being an ideological paradigm, SJL is also an approach to leading that reveals leadership action (Theoharis, 2007). While much of the literature for SJL is conceptual, some is grounded in theory and practice. A small set of the literature investigates how and if educational leaders are prepared to lead equitable schools for all students. Jackson (2000) examined successful educational leadership programs and found that cohorts and problem-based learning held promise as strategies for social justice leadership development. Henze, Katz, Norte, Sather, and Walker (2002) also examined programs that articulated a desire to prepare leaders for social justice and found that while programs articulated this vision, their practices did not prepare pre-service leaders with the tools needed to analyze racial conflict or equip them with the strategies to build inclusive schools. This study was supported by the findings in a similar study conducted by Lyman and Villani (2002) who administered a national survey to pre-service administrative candidates and found that while respondents felt social justice was emphasized in their programs of study, they did not have the knowledge and skills to carry out an equity-centered pedagogy once employed as educational leaders in schools. Finally, the collective body of research in this area has examined SJL as connected to issues such as school improvement and the development of democratic communities (Murphy & Forsyth, 1999), the collaborative process as a way to integrate transformative teaching and learning towards equity (Marks & Printy, 2003), achievement gaps between cultural groups (Shields, 2010), increased diversity in schools (Grogan & Andrews, 2002), the role of high-stakes accountability systems in 21st century
education leadership, the effects of deficit thinking in policy and school-level practice (Furman, 2012), the development of educational leaders who intentionally apply a social justice leadership praxis (Brown, 2004; Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009; Kose, 2009; McKenzie, et al., 2008; Stovall, 2004), and the application of a social justice identity for school leaders in persistently low-achieving schools. As an outgrowth of this collective body of literature, the term SJL is now officially recognized as a specific subset of the literature in educational leadership, it has “captured the interest of increasing number of scholars” (Theoharis, 2008, p.2) with AERA special interest group even forming around leaders for social justice, and as a result, this growing of body of work offers a solid foundation upon which definitions of SJL may be gleaned and future studies grounded.

**Defining Social Justice Leadership**

Theoharis (2008) defines SJL as “principals who advocate, lead and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically marginalizing conditions in the United States” (p. 93). Grogan and Andrews (2002) help us connect social justice leadership and critical pedagogy by reminding that social justice leaders engage in an activist component so as to “interrupt the continued maintenance of the status quo” (p. 115). In synthesis, social justice leadership is comprised of leaders who understand their ethical and moral obligations to create schools that promote and deliver equity and thus serve as change agents by analyzing the aspects of schools and schooling that lead to social inequalities and being willing to engage in action to disrupt and dismantle them reconstructing racially equitable and socially just education systems instead (Ayers, Quinn, & Stovall, 2009; Stovall, 2004). It works in ways that do not allow these inequalities to proliferate and become institutional ideological belief systems, and even when faced with complex, urgent,
and often conflicting leadership expectations, SJL and the leaders employing it operationalize a critical equity pedagogical framework that interrupts historically discriminatory practices, supports democratic schooling (Grant, 2012), and achieves fair, inclusive, and just outcomes, regularly and systematically (Bell, Adams, & Griffin, 2007; Brown, 2006).

For the purpose of this study, SJL is situated in the following definition of social justice: leadership that results in full and equal access, opportunity, and participation of all individuals and groups in a classroom, school, and broader school community, resulting in an inclusive vision of relationships between all stakeholders that are mutually shaped to meet everyone’s needs so equitable and fair distributions of discipline, curriculum, teaching and learning, achievement, leadership voice and power, and equal outcomes are realized, and markers of socio-historic educational privilege, domination, marginalization, subordination, and oppression are eliminated (Adams, et al., 2007). Though aspirational, because it includes elements of power and privilege rooted in the greater global colonial project and outside of the reach, scope, and purview of educational leaders operationalizing leadership in U.S. P-12 schools, when speaking about leaders who advance racial equity and social justice as part of this study, this definition applies.

**Characteristics of Social Justice Leadership**

The combined work of Theoharis (2008) and Stovall (2004) provide a comprehensive review of the characteristics that define social justice leadership. Theoharis’ work examines the social justice leadership praxis of school leaders serving in urban public schools with students from varied racial, socioeconomic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. He identifies several practices of resistance that school leaders use to raise student achievement, improve school structures, re-center and enhance staff capacity, and strengthen school culture and community.
The practices include (a) place significant value on the development of cultural knowledge by becoming intertwined with the life, community, and soul of the school, (b) use data, professional development and collaborative structures to address problems and see the data used for these processes through a lens of equity, (c) seek out other activist administrators who can and will sustain the work, and (d) demand that every child will be successful while collaboratively addressing the problems of how to ensure they achieve success. These practices align with those identified in the research on CRSL.

David Stovall (2004) offers a more radical prescription for SJL, centering his three suggestions in practices that recognize the contested nature of education and leadership for equity. They include: (a) a focus on race and professional development for faculty and staff that provides “effective strategies in understanding the dynamics of students of color in urban settings.” (p. 11), including engaging the tenets of cultural-relevance in literacy as defined by Ladson-Billings (1994), (b) engaging the community in order to develop a resource guide that will allow school personnel to leverage the “various services available in the neighborhood in which the school is housed” (p. 11), in order to avoid seeking services that may lead to additional inequities and social ills such as Child Protective Services, and (c) incorporating the use of the school as a central part of the community, including maintaining extended hours to provide “parents in the community a place to establish connection with the school as a safe space for all in the community.” (p. 11). While both theorists offer complex codifications of the characteristics of leadership for social justice, there remains a void in deeply examining the relationship of an espoused orientation towards social justice and whether or not this orientation manifests in a deliberate practice that improves teaching, learning, and life outcomes for students. Both scholars call for more research in this regard. This study engages that call
drawing on a synthesis of the defining characteristics of SJL codified by Stovall and Theoharis to shape the work, and further codifying what SJL looks like in action. The section that follows describes how it does so by explicating how the framework employed to guide this study moves SJL from theory to engaged action in real-time.

**Theory to Action: Moving From SJL to Applied Critical Leadership**

The theoretical and conceptual frameworks used to guide this study were employed with a goal to close the gap between SJL theory and SJL practice. To begin, the study is grounded in a theoretical framework and emergent leadership approach known as applied critical leadership (ACL) (Santamáría, 2013; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2013, 2015). As described in chapter one, ACL combines an eclectic mosaic of theories, including TRL, one of the educational leadership theories discussed in the literature review in this chapter and forms the foundation upon which CR-TML, the conceptual framework guiding this study was developed.

In review, ACL was conceptualized by Lori Santamaría, a self-identified Spanish-speaking, Choctaw descent, Black female scholar and educational leader theorizing the leadership of educational leaders of color (ELOC). As theory, it is premised on the belief that educational leaders who are members of historically marginalized and underserved identity groups practice leadership differently than their White counterparts (Santamaria, 2012, 2013; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2013, 2015). Refocusing later studies on women leaders of color, Santamaría (2013) employed case study methods, a phenomenological analytic process, and a CRT analytical lens to provide insight into “ways in which historically marginalized women leaders of color translate theory to practice in the face of educational inequities and change” (Santamaría, 2013, p. 3). ACL incorporates practices from TRL and authentically bridges it to CRT, multicultural education (ME), CME, and through CME, critical
pedagogy (CP). Figure 2.1 articulates the components of ACL, explicating how they come together as a leadership theory and approach. As presented in figure 2.1, ACL is engaged as leadership for social justice.

Figure 2.1. Applied Critical Leadership Theory.

Figure 2.1. Santamaria, L. J. (2013). Critical change for the greater good: Multicultural Perceptions in Educational Leadership toward social justice and equity. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, p. 1-45. Note: Illustrates the ACL, the conceptual framework used to develop this study.

Leaders who employ ACL exhibit critically conscious characteristics including employment of a critical race lens, practicing servant leadership, seeking participatory group action, maintaining an awareness of stereotype threat and working to debunk it, and willingly engaging in critical conversations about race, racism, and other hard-to-have taboo conversations (Santamaría, 2013). A later study employed by Santamaría and Jean-Marie (2014) validates the first two studies, updating the framework by grounding it in the literature on the characteristics of cross-cultural leaders and personal leadership theory and forming case studies based on the leadership
of two African American female school principals. Findings from their study indicate that the leadership of women leaders of color is consistent with ACL, especially BWEL, and that identity is a critical factor in shaping the leadership experience, as well as the practices that result. The characteristics and research findings revealed through validated studies conducted on ACL by Santamaria and her research team, embody a synthesis of evidence-based practices codified by TRL, CRSL, and SJL and form the perfect bridge to the conceptual framework in which this study is grounded.

**ACL to CR-TML: An Overview of the Conceptual Framework**

Building on ACL, CR-TML pushes educational leaders committed to advancing social justice from “thinking about leadership practice or qualities that result in educational equity” to reflecting on, discussing, refining, and most importantly engaging them through participatory, inquiry-based, leadership action in real-time. It acts as leadership paradigm, pedagogy and research process, integrating a similar collage of theories, and featuring the transformative, CRSL perspectives of women leaders of color who are able to situate the equity challenges they face in the complexities of their greater sociopolitical and sociohistorical realities (Santamaría, 2013). Developing the conceptual framework CR-TML, I built from and drew on the research explored through ACL as theory, bridging that to the evolution in the research on educational leadership theory to move from a focus on TRL leadership as originally conceptualized for ACL to leadership approaches situated in CRSL, namely SJL. CR-TML also connects SJL to the research and theories forming CRT, CME, and CP. CPD theory, an action-based component of CP allowed me to infuse the framework with an inquiry-based, participatory action orientation, employed as part of the methods in phase III of this study. SJL, CPD, and employing a BFT standpoint are all critical components of CR-TML absent from ACL, moving CR-TML from
theory used to reflect on action, to engaged action in real-time, enabling participating BWEL to explore, cultivate and refine their unique leadership praxis, even as it was being studied within this research. Adding SJL and CPD to the CR-TML conceptual framework also enabled participating educational leaders to engage in professional development and growth situated in real-life equity challenges occurring in their respective school communities and contexts, rendering the engagement of CR-TML as part of this research, a unique strand of liberatory ACL leadership and research praxis (Freire, 1972). A brief overview of the literature forming the collage of theories comprising CR-TML follows. I have included two figures and one table to compliment this discussion. Figure 2.2 explains the key concepts drawn from each of the theories informing CR-TML, illustrating how they build on ACL and each other to form the framework within which this study is situated. The idea is that ACL, infused with a BFT standpoint forms the foundation, BFT and CRT forms the lens through which the researcher views and situates the work and the greater world and school contexts within which the research sits (Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014) and nesting within are CME, SJL, and CP/CPD. Figure 2.3 demonstrates how CR-TML looks in action, illustrating how it pushes research in educational leadership from leadership theory to social justice oriented leadership action (Santamaría, 2013) waged through activist research (Stovall, 2004, 2006). The following overview draws on each visual to provide a brief summary of how CR-TML guides the study, amplifying research on women leaders from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented groups in the U.S. and expanding our knowledge of how their multicultural identities, subjectivities, and perspectives contribute to knowledge in the field, as well as their leadership practice and its potential to advance racial equity and social justice in P-12 schools.
Figure 2.2. Critically Responsive Transformative Multicultural Leadership.
CRT and BFT

I engaged a CRT and BFT lens to employ this study, situating it in ACEM. I do so for several reasons. First, there are few instances of CRT and BFT being considered in the study of educational leadership when it pertains to the multicultural experiences and perspectives of BWEL linking their racialized and often cultural and socially diverse stories to broader systemic inequities found in the contested school spaces in which they lead (Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014). As
BWEL we bring a multiple-consciousness to our leadership (Collins, 1986; Dubois, 2007; hooks, 1981; Matsuda, 1997). This unique consciousness is often experienced by us as a “sixth sense” or critical lens (McKay, 2010) and enables us to view educational leadership, ourselves as leaders, and our experiences within oppressive systems in ways that no other leaders are able to do (Aleman, 2009). This means we view our leadership experiences and the practices resulting, in terms of two or more perspectives at the same time, including that of the majority and that of our own (McKay, 2010). As a result, we have the wherewithal to address educational inequities in the normative order of the P-12 systems in which we lead, especially those situated in the intersecting oppressions of race and intersectional racism, and waged through colorblind policies emerging under a-historical imperatives of neoliberalism (Giroux, 2003), by employing unique leadership practices born outside of the dominant culture. Employing CRT lens and BFT standpoint enables full recognition of the educational contexts explored as part of this study, including the race-based inequities occurring within the school spaces (Ladson-Billings, 2006) of the BWEL this study engages. It also allows for the explication of strategies and practices BWEL employ to address the inequities they confront. Second, work on leadership for social justice put forth by David Stovall (2004) makes an argument for leadership that engages a CRT lens, affirming my decision and reason as offered prior to this. According to Stovall, leadership employing a CRT lens can be used to analyze the functions of race and racism in schools, particularly as connected to equity challenges present in school environments. He also affirms the value of employing a CRT lens to engage in leadership practices that develop schools that are anti-oppressive and anti-racist in the age of oppressive educational policy. This can be done by employing the tenets of CRT identified by Solorzano (1997): (a) remembering the centrality and intersectionality of racism, understanding that race, racism, and racialization are an integral part of U.S. society, powering its systems to protect white privilege and
power, and P-12 schools are no different; (b) willfully challenging dominant ideology in order to “deconstruct repressed memories, silenced consciousness, and cloaked histories” (McKay, 2010, p. 34) and co-develop new narratives of leadership centered in the silenced and oppressed; (c) engage a commitment to advancing social justice, and (d) privilege experiential knowledge, using an interdisciplinary perspective, all tenets congruent with a BFT standpoint. Combined with theories of critical multicultural education advocating the value of culturally relevant pedagogies, a CRT lens as situated in a BFT standpoint is used to foreground race and racism as intersected with other socially situated systemic oppressions (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2006; Yosso, 2005) to reflect on and analyze the impact of racialized and gendered social identity and the leadership context, including the policies employed, on the leadership experiences and the resulting leadership decisions of participating BWEL. It is also used to help participating BWEL make explicit the multi-consciousness they employ for the purpose of engaging their own development as a leader for social justice. CRT theory argues the import in creating space for those rendered invisible to use voice and story as a way to counter the master narrative about education, shining a light on discrimination and oppression instead. Using interpretive case storytelling meant to counter master narratives prevalent in educational leadership (Delgado, 1990), BWEL recover silenced consciousness and tap into “their ability to articulate what they do and think about in order to provide a foundation for autonomous action” (Fasheh, 1990, p. 26, as cited by McKay, 2010), shining a light on the contested spaces within which they work, and speaking truth to power through personal leadership stories (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Finally, I engaged a CRT lens and BFT standpoint to guide data analysis, particularly when making sense of the ways race, gender, and policy converge to shape leadership experiences and practices. Combining this lens and standpoint with theories in CME was essential to help examine and understand if and how the leadership
practices and decisions BWEL engage reflect a social justice orientation. It also helped shape the decision to situate this work in ACEM, a decision justified in detail in chapter three during the discussion of the research methodology undertaken.

**Bridging CRT to Educational Leadership and CME**

“Multicultural education is a perpetually dynamic process, not a single or static result.” (Clark, 2013, p. 1504) When viewed through the lens of CME, its goal is to operationalize a culturally sensitive, anti-racist, liberatory praxis (Freire, 1972; May & Sleeter, 2010) within P-12 schools so all students, regardless of race, gender, social-class, sexual orientation, ability, or any number of other socio-cultural complexities experience educational equality, success, and mobility (Banks, 1994, 2004; Bennett, 1986; Gay, 2004, McGee Banks & Banks, 1995; Nieto, 2004; Grant & Sleeter, 2011). CME also seeks to empower educators and students with a sense of agency to become critical change agents equipped with the knowledge, skills, and will to address social injustices within their communities and society at-large (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Freire, 1968; Nieto, 2004). While scholars may disagree on exactly how multicultural education promotes the achievement of this goal, there is consensus that the current trajectory of schools, schooling, educational institutions, and the educational leaders charged with guiding the teaching and learning process within them must change (Duncan Andrade, 2005; Grant, 2012). As those in the field assert, CME and thus critical multiculturalists, envision a society, and subsequently schools, based on the core values of equity and social justice, respect for human dignity and rights, and freedom to maintain one's language, socio-cultural knowledge and culture, as hegemonic practices are disrupted, dismantled, and transformed (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2004; Grant, 2012; Nieto, 2004). When the research in CME is bridged with the research on SJL effective leaders engage a belief that every child, teacher, and educational stakeholder brings to schools.
and schooling a wealth of cultural knowledge (Moll, Armanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), special talents and abilities, and the capacity to learn, achieve, lead, and tap into their power to enact change in the world (Yosso, 2005). Within this study, CME and SJL frameworks are used to help surface and examine the leadership practices and decisions we make as steeped in these beliefs and praxis, while also examining our commitment to critical approaches that intentionally help HMMS problematize and act on the structural and ideological challenges impacting their teaching and learning process, specifically as connected to classism, racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, ageism, linguicism, and any other –ism intersecting with discrimination, disempowerment, oppression and inequitable application of power (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Noguera, 2003). In order to engage this work, I loosely relied on the five dimensions of ME put forth by James Banks (1993). Figure 2.4 offer a description of each of the five dimensions. Specifically, I used the dimensions to inform, but not entirely define, the coding process providing a framework of understanding and knowledge upon which to anchor the analysis of leadership actions and decisions, as situated in the school and policy context, as well as the school transformation process many participating BWEL attempt to engage.
During this analysis, emphasis was placed on the dimension Equity Pedagogy (EP) (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995) with the understanding that EP intersects with the remaining four dimensions to form a comprehensive approach to dismantling inequitable systems in schools, and subsequently rebuilding and reshaping these systems to form equitable and just teaching and learning spaces.

**Defining Equity Pedagogy.** EP exists when educators modify their policies and practices in ways that facilitate the academic achievement of students [and development, growth, understanding, and cooperation of education stakeholders] from diverse and multi-cultural backgrounds. As connected to educational leadership, EP is a dynamic and complex process that employs the use of effective CRSL practices conducive to the context in which they are enacted. EP is explicitly defined as “teaching strategies [leadership practices] and classroom environments that help students [stakeholders] from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups
attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, and help create and perpetuate a just, humane, and democratic society” (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 152). Implicit within this definition is the application of EP to alter traditional roles of authority and power within schools, and gives voice to all stakeholders, especially HMMS. It promotes an educational environment of interrogation, knowledge construction, and social consciousness development and provides the conceptual framework required to dismantle inequities and oppression (Brown, 2006; May & Sleeter, 2010). When used in isolation, EP will not work because “…it cannot sufficiently deal with the problems embedded within the hidden curriculum” (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 154). In isolation, it becomes superficial action focused on the use of culture, instead of social action meant to agitate, dismantle and transform power structures (May and Sleeter, 2010). Yet, when critically aligned with the other four dimensions of Banks’ (1993) ME, and engaged through CR-TML, EP better equips educators with the ability to analyze, clarify, state, and most importantly, act on leadership for social justice. Used for the latter, EP moves beyond specific strategies, and becomes part of a broad pedagogical process that locates students, especially HMMS, at the center of schooling. When enacted effectively, it is also situated within SJL, and can serve to promote a praxis that aids educational leaders with deconstructing and dismantling inequitable, marginalizing, and unjust practices within U.S. P-12 schools. EP, within a broader theoretical framing of CME is employed in this study to help unpack how participating BWEL engage SJL.

**EP and CRSL Pedagogies.** Also worth noting is that sitting within EP, are culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010). When enacted within Banks’ (1993) five dimensions of multicultural education, CRP through EP makes the case that race, culture, and the systemic barriers that result from these variables have a profound effect on
teaching, learning, and educational outcomes (Gay, 2000) and call for the development of educational leaders that incorporate educational practices focused on race, culture, and the dismantling of systemic barriers (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In her book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching*, Geneva Gay (2000) writes

“race, culture, ethnicity, individuality, and intellectuality of students are not discrete attributes that can be neatly assigned to separate categories, some to be ignored while others are tended to. Instead, they are inseparably interrelated; all must be carefully understood, and the insights gleaned from this understanding should be the driving force for the redesign of education for cultural diversity” (p. 14).

In this passage, she affirms CME theory and implies that EP, through the use of CRP, can and should be studied and used by educators to address and break down the systemic barriers that frame teaching, learning, and leadership, and impede students from diverse backgrounds from achieving at high levels. EP supports Gay’s conjecture and posits that educators are better poised to develop strong conceptual knowledge of HMMS and then use this knowledge to design lessons, select appropriate instructional materials, and make informed decisions about when and how to use and incorporate culturally responsive practices focused on the intersecting and individual characteristics of students (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2004). This point is underscored in the following statement (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995): “The effective implementation of equity pedagogy requires teachers to understand the histories, modal characteristics, and intragroup differences of the major racial and ethnic groups.” (p. 157).

Building off this theory for teaching and applying it to leadership, EP and CRP, through CRSL pedagogies like SJL, outlines a pedagogical approach to educational leadership that develops a link between students' home cultures and the culture of the school by reframing the leadership
approach to include strategies and practices that align with the home cultures of students (Moll et al., 1992; Nieto, 2004). Both constructs propose that the academic achievement of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds would improve if educational leaders ensure that school climate and culture are responsive to student's cultures (Gay, 2000). Ladson-Billings (1995) also argues that CRP must meet three criteria: an ability to develop students academically, willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness. Each of these criteria is situated in the notions put forth by CME theory and requires educational leaders to avoid the minimization of change efforts required to disrupt and dismantle hegemonic practices within schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). Ladson-Billings’ (1995) CRP strengthens the Banks’ (1993) framework, and together they offer a theoretical conceptualization for how to approach leadership for equity in schools, specifically as tied to race, class, gender, and other socio-cultural dimensions, and towards a goal of combatting the growing disparity between the racial, ethnic, and cultural characteristics of teachers and students, along with the continued underdevelopment of HMMS (Gay, 2004).

Applying EP situated in CME and CRP and engaged through effective CRSCL also allows for research that takes a critical look at how educational leaders might systematically include race, gender, and culture in the day-to-day work focused on equity and social justice. CRSL will be used for that purpose. In recent works, Ladson-Billings (1998, 2006) expands upon her theories of CRP to look at equity-based school leadership practices and policies. In a presidential address for former American Education Research Association Presidents (Ladson-Billings, 2006), she articulated a theory of educational school reform and leadership that situates the educational debt in “the cumulative effect of poor education, poor housing, poor health care, and poor government services” (p. 10) and calls us to look at these systems as contributing to an
institution of schooling that oppresses and marginalizes. In this same speech, she states, that this issue is one of the most pressing of our time, and one in which we should be deeply concerned and involved in addressing, and calls upon us to deploy our knowledge, skills, and expertise to find solutions. In my own answer to this call, I conjecture that EP works hand-in-hand with CRP when seeking to examine, codify, and build upon culturally relevant, equity-centered leadership praxis within schools.

This study builds upon and expands the traditional discussion of classroom teachers and the students they serve that much of the research typically examines, and instead turn its focus towards a broader examination of the relationship of EP and CRP to the experiences and practices of educational leaders working towards social justice, but under the constraints of oppressive educational policies. This framework alone was not enough to execute such an approach so I integrated it with the other components of the theoretical framework to help identify the qualities and strategies BWEL bring to their respective educational communities to transform climate, pedagogy and practice towards equity and justice. I also added theories of critical pedagogy (CP) via critical professional development (CPD). This addition solidified the critical approach to the work, and provided a participatory growth and development orientation necessary to bridge social justice leadership theory to action, as well as intentional leadership for social justice to equity-based impact for all students, especially HMMS.

**CP and CPD**

CP, through CPD (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Kohli, Picower, Martinez, & Ortiz, 2015) forms the final component of the CR-TML framework. It was added to strengthen the humanizing effects of this study by opening up space for participating BWEL to reflect on, discuss, and refine their leadership practices, as well as share leadership stories, particularly
given their voices, experiences, and stories are often silenced and marginalized in the research and leadership process. Conceptualized by Kohli, et al. (2015) in response “to the unmet needs of justice-minded teachers” (p. 9), CPD considers how educators can be positioned as experts in their own social justice-oriented professional growth and employs elements of CP to collectively engage educators in critical dialogue and reflection on the educational leadership process. CPD was also employed in this study to provide liberatory space for participating BWEL to share leadership experiences, reflect on leadership decisions and consider the impact of both on themselves, as well as HMMS. Finally, it provided opportunity for practicing BWEL to develop professional networks equipped with the skill and will to support the exploration of alternative solutions to the equity challenges they were forced to confront in their respective educational settings, at the intersection of race, gender, and education policy.

CPD is critical to this study because much of the professional development provided for educational leaders within traditional school settings rarely provide space and time to address factors that lead to inequities in schools (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Kohli, et al., 2015; Stovall, 2004), even as they purport to seek equity and justice in those same spaces. Research situated in traditional methodologies rarely do so either. Likewise, research on SJL rarely, if at all, attends to the practical needs of its participants, as engaged in the field in an everyday context, in real-time, even as data is gleaned from this research-data benefitting those conducting the research but rarely the research participants. Within this study, the needs of participants are considered in real-time and the data gleaned is used with immediacy to address inequities in the everyday setting. This allows participants co-engaging the study with me to do so as critical and transformative change agents, making this study and its methods critically necessary (Freire, 1972) and radically different (Stovall, 2004). CPD allows for this to happen because it is a dialogic professional development process.
built on tenets of Freire’s (1972) CP and designed to “provoke cooperative dialogue, build unity, provide shared leadership, and meet the critical needs” (Kohli et al., 2015, p. 11) of those engaged. Through CPD, CR-TML engages participants in political analysis of real-time leadership action, making it theory to action or praxis. I drew on CPD theory to design Phase III of the study, as well as to move participating BWEL through phase three’s critical leadership action group, with the goal being to provide space for practicing BWEL to help us in the field of educational leadership better understand how leadership practice is operationalized in a particular school context, and towards a social justice agenda, while also using a radical research process to fill the gap in the scholarly leadership discourse surrounding educational leadership and school reform at the intersection of critical race theory and multicultural education.

**Filling the Gap**

Despite an emergent body of research validating the critical importance and added value of examining the unique leadership of ELOC advancing a social justice agenda in P-12 U.S. schools (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009; Kose, 2009; Santamaría, 2013; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014; Stovall, 2004), there remains a dearth of literature in the field. This study fills that void. To date, few, if any studies explicitly name as a goal examining the gendered and racialized experiences of BWEL committed to engaging SJL praxis from the lens of a BWEL engaging that same praxis, in spite of the robust body of literature speaking to the powerful impact Black educators have on teaching, learning, and education for social justice (Cherng & Haplin, 2016; Foster, 1997; Irvine, 1989). Even fewer do so through the collage of critical theories guiding this study. Those that do (Santamaría, 2012, 2013; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2013, 2015), validate the power of voice and story in helping us understand how women leaders of color rely on their
multicultural identities to engage a unique brand of applied critical leadership – a leadership with the power to dismantle and disrupt the complex inequities most P-12 leaders find insurmountable to face. By engaging this work as grounded in and modeled after those works, combined with the principles forming critical autoethnography, and centering it in the voices of eight participating BWEL (Santamaría, 2013; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014), nine including myself, this study builds on and amplifies previously validated works, filling the gap in the literature, while also helping us better understand how institutional oppressions experienced by BWEL and the HMMS they serve impact their ability to thrive and survive in P-12 teaching and learning spaces. This latter point is significant because as discussed in previous chapters, as well as peripherally as part of the literature review in this chapter, educational inequities are rooted in oppressions characterized by institutional racism, classism, sexism, ableism, linguicism, heterosexism, and various other intersecting -isms. The equity challenges all educational leaders are forced to confront and that HMMS face are manifestations of this oppression. By exploring the stories shared through this study, we are better positioned to engage educational leadership in ways that address and solve these challenges, because the stories shared shed light on how eight complexly diverse women do just that. Through their stories we also learn how these leaders engage resiliency and resistance up close and in their own words, including how they re-imagined, then enacted a unique, culturally-centered, identity-inspired but highly effective strand of applied critical leadership- one radically different than that we currently discuss and employ in the field of educational leadership and that administrative leaders from majoritarian backgrounds are quite possibly incapable of performing without their complexly diverse peers as allied co-collaborators in leadership. Finally, by bridging the discourse in educational leadership with the robust research in ME and CRT, and doing so from a BFT standpoint, this study does
what few, if any studies before it has. It re-imagines qualitative research by pushing back on hegemony in the form of policy and institutional practice in method, instead walking the talk of liberatory praxis, activist research, and authentic community based action in the study of educational leadership. It does so by engaging participating BWEL in critical dialogue, reflection and action to develop their consciousness, create space for collective problem-posing, co-construct new knowledges and collaboratively exercise the skill and will to push through in the midst of challenge, advancing racial equity and social justice in their respective schools in real-time to solve real-life equity challenges, even as they inquired about and studied the praxis and challenges they engaged. In that regard, through this study, and the works of each of the women who engaged it, we learn how to rise to the challenge that Ladson-Billings (2006) calls us to when she names the education debt as our greatest educational challenge to date. In her words, it is not the deficit-laden pathologies of the students we serve that pose the challenge, it is in fact the institutional systems and structures built to uphold power framed in colonialism, imperialism, and patriarchy, and designed to marginalize and oppress that pose the greatest challenge. History confirms we have refused to garner the will to name and confront white power, privilege, and oppression, and we also exercise policies and practices that re-construct these things over and over again (Gillborn, 2005). Through this study and the engagement of CR-TML eight BWEL share their stories, providing the field of educational leadership with a powerful tool to begin the deconstruction and reconstruction process so deeply needed as revealed by a dearth in the literature. Filling the gap provides relevance for educational leaders, professional developers, policy makers, those who prepare educational leaders, and anyone interested in educational leadership.
Chapter Summary

In summary, this study fills a gap in the literature for educational leadership by adding to and amplifying the emergent base of literature validating the knowledge and leadership strategies that women educational leaders of color engage as solutions to inequities in U.S. P-12 education and it centers those discussions in the leadership, stories, and voices of eight BWEL, themselves historically marginalized and minoritized women leaders, many of whom experienced those same inequities that HMMS face, when they were students, and who engage a unique formative perspective because of their oppressive experiences. The study is unique because it moves beyond theoretical knowledge, demonstrating the power of SJL in action by engaging SJL pedagogy through research in real time. In this way, this study becomes essential primary source knowledge for SJL development that can be applied and built upon both nationally and globally. Additionally, the approach to this study is liberatory praxis in action in that it provokes a collective and participatory conversation over the will to engage a research process that builds on the body of research aimed at creating schools that meet the needs of all students, especially HMMS. Without such liberatory praxis, there can be no real struggle (Freire, 1972). Engaging this study with the eight BWEL whose stories are contained within, I have chosen to join the collective struggle.

Chapter one provided the rational for the study. This chapter provided a review of the relevant literature guiding the research and shaping the conceptual framework used to engage the study. Also discussed in this chapter was how this study fills gaps found in the research on educational leadership. Chapter three will outline the approach I utilized to engage the study, chapters four, five, and six will illuminate findings and chapter seven will discuss implications.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

“One cannot impose method on phenomenon “since that would do a great injustice to the integrity of that phenomenon” (Holloway, 1997, p. 144).” Phenomena have something to say to us – this is common knowledge among poets and painters.” (Van Manen, 1997, p. 41)

~ Groenewald (2004)

Interrupting the status quo in educational leadership, rejecting research methodologies following prescriptions privileging the knowledges, scholarship, and voices of white male scholars (Delgado, 1990; Matsuda, 1997; Stovall, 2014), and situating the work in the wisdom of the opening quotes, I draw on African centered emancipatory research methodologies (ACEM) (Dillard, 2000; Kershaw, 1992; Slaughter-Defoe, 1995) to explore, examine, and describe how eight BWEL understand the impact and influence of race, gender, and school policies on their leadership experiences and practice. I engage this culturally relevant qualitative examination of the leadership of Black women educational leaders (BWEL) by employing a unique strand of applied critical leadership (ACL) (Santamaria, 2013) I call critically responsive transformative multicultural leadership (CR-TML). I employ this work as many poets would, by “bringing a little bit of heaven to humanity” (Stovall, 2015, p. 174), written in the rhythm of my own iambic octameter and sowed through seeds rooted in the radical tradition of engaged activist research. For this study, engaged activist research is defined as an inquiry that makes a conscious attempt “to challenge traditional research paradigms that are not sanguine to the needs of communities that are working towards just solutions to address their conditions” (Stovall, 2015, p. 173). Like
this study, activist research is engaged within the community in which the research solution is meant to serve. It is also anchored in acts of resilience and resistance.

Waged as activist research, this study is also anchored in my desire to collaborate with other BWEL as co-researchers problem-posing equity-based inquiries situated in their everyday practice leading within the contested spaces of U.S. P-12 schools rather than as objects of an inquiry appropriating their knowledges and experiences but failing to center their voices and leadership narratives. By honoring them as intellectuals fully capable of owning their agency to express themselves through this work (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1991), I share their leadership narratives through interpretive case storytelling (Dillard, 2000; Yosso, 2005) with an understanding that their stories have import for, and are critical to, the educational leadership discourse (Jean-Marie, Normore & Brooks, 2009; Santamaría, 2014; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2013; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2015; Skrla & Scheurich, 2003; Tooms & Boske, 2010). Narratives are also shared with hopes they provoke critical reflection and dialogue on the deeper meanings about the leadership embedded in the practices BWEL bring to the educational spaces in which they lead. This dialogue is relevant for educational leaders, those who prepare educational leaders, policy makers, and anyone interested in educational leadership, especially as a way to explore how to ensure educational equality for all students, especially historically marginalized and minoritized students (HMMS), teachers, and leaders learning, teaching, and leading within the contested spaces comprising U.S. P-12 schools.

These truths in mind, I utilize and build on methodologies and frameworks employed in previous research examining the leadership experiences of women educational leaders of color (Santamaría, 2014; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2015), but situated in African centered and Black U.S. epistemologies (Collins, 1986, 1990; Dillard 2000;
Hilliard, 2001; Kershaw, 1990, 1992). Grounded in a conceptual framework inspired by these works and the literature on ACEM, I employed a three-prong culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) qualitative approach, inclusive of a grassroots participatory orientation (Kohli, Picower, Ortiz, and Martinez, 2015), with the assumption that each participating BWEL’s leadership experience would reveal alternate and multiple interpretations about social justice leadership, particularly given the diversity in their identities, school contexts, leadership experiences, and multicultural leadership perspectives, in spite of the socially constructed commonalities they share in race, and gender. As is consistent with theories and research arguing the import of Black women using their place along the margins as a space for transformative learning (Johnson-Bailey, 2006; Sealey-Ruiz, 2007), I also did so with the intention to involve participating BWEL in problem posing the tenuous relationship between the way they experience leadership and how they navigate those experiences, including how they make leadership decisions, translate those decisions into leadership actions, and develop an understanding of the connection between the intent of their leadership actions and their impact on themselves, historically marginalized and minoritized students (HMMS), and the school communities they seek to serve (hooks, 1994). The remaining sections of this chapter describe my approach to this study. I begin with an overview of the research design, followed by a restatement of the research questions. I also describe the relevancy for situating the study in ACEM by grounding it in a culturally relevant qualitative approach, inclusive of a participatory orientation. A description of the body of works informing the research approach inclusive of a brief discussion and review of my research positionality, as well as the conceptual framework guiding the study follow. I close the chapter with a detailed explanation of the study’s
methodological protocols before providing a summary of what this chapter entailed, including sharing what is to come moving into the remaining chapters comprising this work.

**Research Design Overview**

The study took place over a seven month period beginning in March of 2017 and concluding in September of 2017. In order to conduct this study, I followed the research design and timeline outlined in table 3.1. I began recruiting participants in early March. Wanting to capture the stories of BWEL from across the U.S., and needing to cast a wide net to solicit the broadest amount of interest, I took advantage of digital media platforms, posting an informational flyer containing an embedded link to the recruitment survey on social media sites that catered to BWEL engaging leadership in U.S. P-12 schools. Private social media groups like Black School Administrators Rock, Women in Educational Leadership and RACE Mentoring – Scholarship, an academic Facebook group founded by BWEL and prominent scholar Donna Ford, proved helpful. I also relied on culturally efficacious sampling (Lopez & Parker, 2003; Tillman, 2002) sending recruitment emails to BWEL I shared previous professional connections with, and asking them to call-in our collective BWEL community by forwarding the information on to individuals they felt met the study criteria and who served as exemplary models of Black Woman leadership. This initial recruitment process embodied the call to community and village the literature on ACEM supports (Dillard, Daa’lyah Abdur-Rashid & Tyson, 2000; Tillman, 2002). It also served to jump started data collection. I supported data collection and analysis with interpretive case story writing and researcher reflections, engaged as Life Notes or as described by Black women scholars advocating African centered methodologies, culturally centered “personal narratives such as letters, stories, journal entries, reflections, poetry, music, and other artful forms.” (Bell-Scott, 1994 as cited in Dillard, 2002, p. 387). Life Notes
comprising my journal reflections were captured using two methods: (1) bi-monthly research journal entries used to make sense of the research process, the information being shared, and interactions I engaged with participating BWEL (Dillard, 2000, 2002; Dillard, Abdur-Rashid, & Tyson, 2000; Tillman, 2002), and (2) text annotations used to help analyze and make sense of public document data, as well as any data collected in text format. Several other data sources informed this study, they include: a leadership and recruitment survey, transcriptions of individual interviews conducted with each participant, observations from four critical inquiry action group sessions, including field notes, post-action group survey data, and data from member checking. I collected and analyzed data in an ongoing and recursive manner, over the course of the four phases of this study, and using a culturally sensitive analytic process (Tillman, 2002).

Data collection and analysis for phase I took place from March 2017 through April 2017. I distributed a survey to collect preliminary information about each BWEL’s understanding of their leadership experiences and practices within P-12 schools. Once case study participants were selected, data collection and analysis for phase II began. This phase took place from April 2017 through May 2017. During this time, I conducted semi-structured individual interviews used to consent case study participants for phase III’s critical inquiry action group, as well as to qualify information shared in the initial leadership and recruitment survey. I also used interviews to gather additional details about each leader’s perception of their leadership experiences. Phase II closed with a review of public document data used to learn more about each leader’s school and/or educational setting (if disclosed). This information was gleaned from public web sites (i.e. school website, newsletters to parents, state department of education, national education sites, etc.) and used to help contextualize and make sense of self-reported data.
from surveys and interviews. Given the ongoing nature of data analysis, opportunities for mid-course member checking was also included in phase II. Once individual interviews, public document data review, and member checking were completed, I moved into data collection and analysis for phase III of the study.

Phase III took place from the beginning of June through the end of July and was marked by engaging the critical inquiry action group, the participatory component of the study, and my manner of creating space for deep reflection, dialogue, problem-posing, sense making, and social justice leadership development. Data collection for this stage was comprised of field notes and meeting transcriptions recorded as a result of each critical inquiry action group session. Transcriptions and field notes were read, reviewed, and coded to qualify, confirm, and expand on initial themes from phases I and II. Journal notes, text annotations, and sister circle check-ins engaged like member checks supported ongoing analysis during phase III. Phase III was immediately followed by Phase IV which ran from August through late September with data collection consisting of a post-action group survey (in lieu of a second round of interviews due to time constraints) meant to capture more in-depth information about each BWEL’s leadership in a quick manner, including capturing any shift in participating BWEL perceptions and understanding of their leadership context, experiences, and actions as a result of participating in the critical inquiry action group sessions. Additional opportunities for sister circle check-ins were employed during this final phase. Information gleaned from all data collection methods were used to inform case study development and the reporting of findings in the final analysis explored more in chapters six and seven.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase and Stage</th>
<th>Steps and Data Source(s</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase I: Leadership Survey</td>
<td>Community and village call-in to distribute leadership recruitment surveys, collect preliminary data about BWEL leadership experiences and practices, and determine eligibility for action group participants for the Critical Inquiry Leadership Action Group engaged as a sister circle in Phase II</td>
<td>March 2017–April 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2: Case Study Selection</td>
<td>Purposeful sampling (and a randomizer if required due to more than 6-8 volunteers) to select up to 8 participants willing to serve as co-inquirers in a critical inquiry leadership action group/sister circle.</td>
<td>April 2017 – May 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Consenting and Interviews</td>
<td>One 1.5-hour semi-formal interview per case study participant using the Consenting Protocol and Interview Guide</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Document Data Review</td>
<td>Review publicly available written communications forwarded to and shared with school stakeholders, including school newsletters and school-based social media posts sent by leaders, as well as other relevant extant data (i.e. school demographic information, student-based achievement data, other school climate markers, social media posts made in public groups based on Black women leader membership)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sister Circle Check-ins</td>
<td>Informal conversations with interviewees to qualify information shared during interviews; before initial action group session; additional follow-up emails, video calls, and text-based conversations as needed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 3: CPD Inquiry Sessions</td>
<td>Hold 4 one-hour leadership inquiry action group sessions using the Zoom.us web based video meeting platform and following the Leadership Critical Inquiry Action Group Guide; field and video transcription notes collected</td>
<td>June 2017 – July 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase and Stage</td>
<td>Steps and Data Source(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sister Circle Check-ins</td>
<td>Informal conversations with leadership action group participants held as needed after individual sessions but before post-action group survey; additional follow-up emails, video calls, and text-based conversations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 4: Post-Action Group Survey</td>
<td>Each action group participant took the post-action group survey to reflect on participation in the action group, as well as qualify shifts in leadership identity/disposition/etc. as a result of the study.</td>
<td>August 2017 – September 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Circle Check-ins</td>
<td>Informal conversations with case study participants held after the action group and post-action group survey; additional follow-up emails, video calls, and text-based conversations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing Data Collection</td>
<td>Research Journal</td>
<td>Twice Monthly</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Life Notes</td>
<td>Throughout the study as needed and in conjunction with other data collection methods</td>
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Table 3.1 Research Design and Timeline. Guides the inquiry, includes dates and data sources.

**Restating Research Questions and Situating Them in a Culturally Relevant Qualitative Approach**

As shared in chapter one, this study is guided by one overarching inquiry and three equally important and descriptively connected secondary research questions. Questions guiding the inquiry, combined with researcher positionality, the racial, cultural, and social identity of those engaging the study alongside me, and the literature shaping the study’s conceptual
framework influenced my decision to employ a culturally relevant qualitative approach to the research, enabling the explication of the data described (Dillard, 2000; Tillman, 2002).

The overarching and primary inquiry guiding this study is *How do BWEL committed to advancing racial equity through the development of a social justice leadership praxis experience and engage educational leadership in U.S. P-12 schools?* Framed to unpack commonalities in the ways in which BWEL collectively experience leadership for social justice, while affirming and honoring the unique truths and value their individual stories of leadership hold, and wanting to explicate and retell those stories and narratives as shared through their viewpoints and voices, I chose to employ ACEM inclusive of culturally relevant interpretive case storytelling (Dillard, 2000; Tillman, 2002) in combination with a culturally sensitive inductive analysis (Charmaz, 2006, 2008a; Tillman, 2002) and a participatory orientation (Kohli, Picower, Martinez, & Ortiz, 2015). Situating the study’s three-prong qualitative methodology in Tillman’s (2002) codification of culturally-sensitive research enabled me to examine, explore, honor, and advance the leadership of Black women in a historical and cultural context, rather than one privileging the voice and unequal power relationships indicative of the present majoritarian colonial context (Dubois, 1973; Cooper, 1892, 1988; Woodson, 1933, 1977 as cited in Tillman, 2002). This was critically important given the study’s objective to employ research grounded in and respectful of the organically cultivated knowledges, thinking, and ways of being indigenous to Black peoples, and more specifically, Black women in the U.S. Particularly so given Black racial, ethnic, and social culture is unique and different from majoritarian and other forms of culture (Hilliard, 2001). It embodies individual and collective values, orientations, language patterns, and worldviews based on shared historical and political experiences and understandings (King, 1995 as cited in Tillman, 2002), making it important to capture the multi-dimensional, yet shared
perspectives of BWEL by elevating their voices, experiences, and narratives, and doing so employing an approach sensitive to, relevant for, and embodying the fullness of these difference (Banks, 1998; Dillard, 2000; Scheurich & Young, 1997). Situating the work in ACEM allowed me to accomplish that task making it relevant to and for the Black woman perspective this research seeks to entertain.

Nestled within ACEM, my decision to employ interpretive case storytelling (ICS), culturally sensitive inductive analysis, and a participatory orientation was rooted in the research on each of these things. Tillman (2002) describes ICS as a culturally sensitive research tool that allows for interpretive paradigms and processes that create space for alternative epistemologies co-constructed as a result of multiple realities and experiences. Such processes allow for knowledge sharing and creation with possibilities to improve educational opportunities for African Americans, or those othered along various, diverse, and inter-locking social identity dimensions. This description supports my desire to explore the phenomena comprising BWEL leadership in contested P-12 school spaces across the intersections of six districts, more than twenty schools, and multiple-identities, perspectives, and experiences. Utilizing ICS also allowed me to honor the voices and experiences of participating BWEL as we co-engaged an inquiry of their leadership experiences with a goal of mapping the complexities of each BWEL’s leadership context and conveying their multiple perspectives. Another benefit of using ICS was to provide a deep understanding of the social justice leadership of BWEL. Given the praxis orientation of social justice leadership, an approach like ICS was necessary to explore how each of the participating BWEL experienced and engaged leadership as informed, influenced, and/or impacted by race, gender, and educational policy (Kershaw, 1990; Tillman, 2002). Additional research supporting the selection of ICS in carrying out this study cite its viability for supporting
the development of the kind of relationships needed to authentically engage participants within their sociohistorical and political context (Collins, 1990) as well as its support of inductive analytical processes given to theory building and testing (Dillard, 2000; Charmaz, 2006, 2008a, 2008b; Tillman, 2002; Yosso, 2005). This litany of reasons, in combination with ICS’s allowance for creating space to develop an understanding of the complex leadership phenomena that was not immediately implicit on the surface of each leader’s initial sharing (Goulding, 2005), and doing so employing ACEM affirmed and shaped my decision to employ ICS as the selected a culturally relevant qualitative approach.

I also employed a culturally sensitive inductive analytic process to deepen understanding of the phenomena explored and data collected (Dillard, 2000; Charmaz, 2006, 2008a, 2008b; Tillman, 2002; Yosso, 2005). This approach was selected primarily because of its use in previous research on the leadership of women leaders of color (Santamaría, 2013; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014), with hopes of further validating, building on, and amplifying findings these works represent. A culturally sensitive inductive analysis relies on participant’s lived experiences as the canvas of study, and their perspectives and viewpoints as a way to reveal through description the canvas’ true meanings. Given my aim to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon that is BWEL leadership, and to do so as historical and contemporary Black women African centered methodologist encourage, by capturing their stories and voice as authentically as possible (Collins, 1990; Cooper, 1892/1988 as originally cited in Tillman, 2002; Dillard, 2000, hooks, 1994, Tillman, 2002), each participating BWEL’s leadership formed a unique but unfinished canvas (or case) which we collectively studied; her leadership experiences and actions, and the perceptions and viewpoints shared about these things, formed the unfinished art work painted onto the canvas (or phenomena)which we retouched and refined through
liberatory leadership and activist research praxis, even as we came to understand, make meaning of, interpret, and synthesize these phenomena into rich descriptions and meaningful themes. It is through these rich descriptions and meaningful themes, explored and unpacked as a result of the chosen analytic process (Dillard, 2000; Charmaz, 2006, 2008a, 2008b; Tillman, 2002; Yosso, 2005) that I offer a co-constructed explanation of the social justice leadership of participating BWEL as a bounded collective, even as I understand that the exquisite work of art displayed on the unfinished canvases continue to comprise a dynamic work in progress, remaining unfinished still.

**Secondary Research Questions**

Like the overarching question, the three secondary questions guide and frame the research approach as well. They also helped me tease out answers to the overarching question. The first being *How do BWEL understand the impact and/or influence of race, gender, and policy on their leadership experiences?* This question uncovered perceptions of leadership identity, disposition, and context, including the impact of race, gender, and policy on leadership experiences and actions. Survey and interview questions employed during phases I and II of the study provided the mechanism through which perceptions were shared, collected, and analyzed. The remaining two questions include *How do BWEL navigate these understandings, particularly when making leadership decisions and engaging leadership action?* and *What leadership practices emerge as a result?* The critical inquiry action group (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Kohli et al., 2015) employed as a sister circle (Collins, 1998) during phase III provided a forum to qualify initial perceptions shared during earlier stages of the research, while also addressing the final two questions, providing more depth and detail to the initial data. Specifically, the critical inquiry action group opened up safe space for participating BWEL to engage in reflexive,
critically responsive, and transformative multicultural leadership in action, in order to share, problem-pose and solve relevant equity challenges situated in their respective school reform policy contexts (Kohli, et al., 2015), and bringing to the methodological approach, a participatory orientation. The final survey engaged during phase IV of the study, supported by the sister-check-in process and life notes (Scott, 1994 as cited in Dillard, 2002) helped qualify all information gathered and rounded out the study’s data collection and analysis process. Ultimately, the questions I posed, combined with the research methodology used, led to the explication of practices and strategies comprising CR-TML, the unique leadership approach employed by BWEL, informing what it means for them to engage a social justice leadership praxis and agenda in U.S. P-12 schools, and highlighting their leadership stories and voice—both critically important to help us best determine how to address inequities in P-12 education as well as sustain and retain the educational leaders best positioned to do so.

Revisiting Researcher Positionality

As shared in chapter one, I unapologetically engaged this study from a Black feminist standpoint and critical race lens as situated in my lived experiences growing up in Oakland, California in a prideful traditional Black family, steeped in a working class community, defined by low-to-middle income Black and Brown families thriving under the collective African, Native U.S. American, and Latinx/Chicanx/Mexican indigenous value that it takes a village to nurture and cultivate a child. I also brought my knowledges about educational leadership as a Black woman leader, and my curiosities about the experiences of other BWEL leading in U.S. P-12 schools with me. I did so by leaning into the development of the critical lens growing up in Oakland nurtured within me, including recognizing the absurdity of coopting my indigenous ways of knowing, situating them in the academy, (re)codifying them as white intelligentsia,
protecting them through cultural appropriation and the establishment of gatekeeping mechanisms enshrined in the language of the scholars and scholarship whose positions these mechanisms were meant to privilege, then forcing me to jump through the hoops of academia these scholars created and hold dear, to prove I know something I already knew before my arrival upon bursting through the locked and closed gates of the academy, fist raised high and fire burning a little bit too brightly, because these things were already a living part of my lived experiences and spirit as a child born in the ancestry, legacy, and knowledges of Julia Ana Cooper, W.E.B. DuBois, Sojourner Truth, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ida B. Wells, Angela Davis, Marva Collins, and bell hooks. In this regard, I, through this work, am “pushing back on what is perceived as ‘legitimate’ research in the academy, while at the same time advancing excellence within the academy by engaging research grounded in and informed by the excellence that is Black women leadership and scholarship. Employing ACEM, engaged through interpretive storytelling filtered through an intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991) CRT lens also forces the academy to consider the absurdity of its prescriptions for legitimate research situated in a master narrative rooted in whiteness and placing limitations on our ability to fully examine the complex nature of educational leadership within intricately multicultural socio-historical leadership contexts, providing a forum for others to push back on said limitations, broadening the discourse instead.

Also as shared in chapter one, these curiosities were born of an adverse discipline incident I experienced while serving as an assistant principal in a small suburban elementary school in Henderson, Nevada—a situation that resulted in a fourth grade Afro-Latinx girl being erroneously targeted, suspended, and chronically harassed by the school’s administrative team for an offense she did not commit, while ignoring the sexual and racialized harassment she was subjected to by her white fourth grade male counterparts. A matter of race, privilege, and power,
this incident also resulted in my being labeled combative, angry, a trouble-maker and disloyal administrator, subsequently pushed out of the school and ultimately the district. Applying a critical race lens (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) I am acutely aware that I was punished and pushed out for daring to speak up about race on the young girl’s behalf, especially given speaking up meant I was also choosing to openly engage an oppositional response to the racialized no tolerance policies (Alexander, 2011; Morris, 2016; Noguera, 2003; Winn, 2011) established in state law and being waged by the district, as well as my administrative team within the school. As a BWEL who values the unique knowledges (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that she brings to any school community, I refused to accept my unwillingness to employ policies that run oppositional to my commitment to engage a social justice leadership agenda as an indictment of my personhood, contributions and ability as an educational leader. Instead, I am clear that what occurred is situated in the racist tropes used against Black women to render them invisible and marginalized (Collins, 1986) within systems institutionalizing white supremacist ideologies, policies, and practices (Rodriguez & Villaverde, 2000; Gilborn, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006)– systems like my district and school decidedly engaging no tolerance discipline policies (Skiba, 2001), as well as racist viewpoints about the Black and Brown female bodies that show up in their school and district spaces (Crenshaw, Nenda, & Ocen, 2014; Morris, 2016; Winn, 2011). In response, and leaning on culturally situated resiliency (Collins, 1986; Franz & Stewart, 1994; Harris-Perry, 2011; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ware, 2006), I sought to understand how I, as well as other BWEL, experience this same phenomena, if at all, choosing instead to engage research as resistance by drawing on ACEM while highlighting our stories, experiences, and leadership approaches as a counter narrative to the deficit laden projections of our leadership most often promoted in the
contested spaces of U.S. P-12 education. Utilizing ACEM (Tilman, 2000) enables me as a Black woman researcher to draw on cultural intuition (Bernal, 1998) or my unique viewpoint as a Black woman to situate the research in methods congruent with shared Black woman culture, resisting dominance over culturally situated ways of thinking, knowing, and being, and allowing for culturally-sensitive data interpretation and theorizing. I do this work framed in several assumptions steeped in my Black Feminist standpoint enmeshed with the research and methods framing this study.

First, I assume that educational leaders of color, particularly BWEL, are best positioned to address current diversity challenges HMMS face in P-12 schools particularly given that we were once diverse students ourselves and are likely to have had similar experiences (Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Santamaría, 2014). Next, I assume that BWEL committed to equity and social justice obtain authentically critical background knowledge about culturally-centered leadership practices (Moll, et al., 1992; Yosso, 2005), and that we infuse these conceptual frameworks into our leadership to combat the equity challenges we confront while leading in P-12 schools, even if we don’t have the academic language and theoretical knowledge to name it as such (Biesto & Mirón, 2002; Dantley, M., & Tillman, L., 2006; Santamaría, 2013). Finally, I assume that BWEL face challenges similar to HMMS attending P-12 schools as educational leaders, particularly at the intersections of race, gender, and education policy, and one way to mitigate against potential negative outcomes such as push out, silencing, or marginalization is to open up brave and safe space for us to share our experiences, and once shared, to listen to the stories expressed in order to support the development, growth, acquisition, and refinement of the leadership we bring into the classrooms, schools, districts, and other educational spaces we lead within (Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014). In part, these
assumptions have already been validated by the growing body of research on women leaders of color engaging ACL to advance a social justice agenda (Santamaría, 2013; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2013, 2015). Seeking to further validate, build on, and amplify that body of research, this work was waged to provide a living example of the kind of restorative leadership practices required to develop educational leaders dedicated to continuing to lead within U.S. P-12 schools with equity and justice in mind, particularly if those calling for the development of educational leaders to lead in schools this way are serious about those calls (Duncan-Andrade, 2005, 2007; Santamaría, 2013; Stovall, 2004, 2005).

Research Approach

As shared at the onset of the chapter, I utilized a three-prong, culturally relevant qualitative approach to engage this study. The approach is inclusive of culturally sensitive interpretive case storytelling (ICS), culturally centered inductive analysis (CCIA) and a participatory orientation (PO). It is grounded in the literature for ACEM, primarily codified by Tillman’s (2002) definition for culturally centered research, allowing me to capture the richest descriptions possible of each of the participating BWELs’ leadership experience. The approach selected is also grounded in the literature forming CR-TML, the conceptual framework shaping this study, allowing for flexibility and fluidity required of the study’s method and praxis (Freire, 1972; hooks, 1994), especially to develop the trusting relationships necessary to gain an in-depth understanding of the leadership of BWEL within their respective school contexts (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2000, 2002; Tillman, 2002). I employed the PO to open up space for participating BWEL to work by my side to better understand our leadership experiences and actions, as well as develop and refine our social justice praxis in real-time. The PO also enabled us to directly address critical inquiries situated in the research questions, explicating information about how
the field might sustain and develop diverse educational leaders committed to advancing a social justice agenda (Kohli, et al., 2015). Finally, the CCIA allowed me to unpack, make sense of and synthesize the leadership journeys’ of eight diverse BWEL from across the country, including opening up critical space for me to position myself as subject (Collins, 1990; Dillard, Abdur-Rashid, Tyson, 2000), revealing the different, relevant, and often marginalized knowledges we as BWEL bring to the educational leadership landscape.

In this section of the chapter, I explicate the methodological approach taken, weaving in brief annotations from the literature supporting my decision to do so, including briefly reviewing the theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding the study by including illustrative figures and tables providing a description of how I moved from theory to conceptual framework to radical leadership and activist research praxis. I follow descriptions of the approach by moving into an explanation of the methods, including sharing information about the setting and participants, participant selection process, data collection, and the data analysis process.

**CR-TML: A Unique Brand of Applied Critical Leadership**

As described in more depth in chapter two, this study was employed utilizing a unique strand of ACL I call CR-TML. Figure 3.1 reviews the constructs and theories forming ACL. Characteristics comprising ACL can be found in the appendices (Appendix A).
Engaged as a descriptive and analytic conceptual framework, and built on the research theorizing ACL, CR-TML is comprised of similarly integrated theories; however, it expands on and rearticulates this leadership framework to align with the racialized culture-specific group in whose experiences this study is situated. CR-TML was also discussed in more detail in chapter two however figure 3.2 reifies the theoretical constructs shaping CR-TML, illustrating how it represents a unique strand of ACL. Figure 3.3 provides a review of the constructs forming CR-TML as utilized in this study, and a table contextualizing how I utilize CR-TML as a descriptive analytic tool to engage this research as paradigm, pedagogy, process, and research praxis can be found in the appendices (Appendix J). Each compliment explanations of the research approach.
provided in this chapter, as well as demonstrate how I used CR-TML to help inform interpretive descriptions of the phenomena comprising BWEL leadership. Finally, by employing CR-TML in this study, I build on and amplify the emergent body of work on ACL, expanding our knowledge about its application in the field, and engaging Santamaría’s (2013) call to conduct additional research on the leadership of women educational leaders of color (WELOC) focused on a specific and single racialized affinity group in order to provide a holistic picture of the core ways of leading that we share as WELOC, as well as the unique ways that BWELs approach leadership, including describing how our leadership “works for the good of every individual in the school system” (Santamaría, 2013), as well as society as a whole (Normore & Jean-Marie, 2008; Shields, 2004; Santamaría, 2013)

*Figure 3.2. ACL to CR-TML*
Blending Methods: A Culturally Relevant Qualitative Examination of BWEL

While the phenomenon examined in the current study is often difficult to measure, critical scholars assert its importance to our understanding of how to dismantle and disrupt inequities in P-12 education (Ah Nee-Benham & Cooper, 1998; Dantley & Tilman, 2006; Jean-Marie, 2010, Santamaría, 2013; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2015). In order to engage a thorough examination of said phenomenon in alignment with my researcher positionality, the research questions posed, and the conceptual framework employed, I engaged a three-pronged, strategically layered culturally relevant methodology, creating a radically different approach to qualitative research in educational leadership.

Tillman’s framework for culturally sensitive research is grounded in African ethnic, racial, and social culture, and advances a research methodology situated in a belief that “reality is known when based in the historical roots of Black feminist though, embodying a distinguishable difference in cultural standpoint located in intersection/overlap of the culturally constructed socializations of race, gender, and other identities and this historical contemporary contexts of oppressions and resistance of African-American women. (p. 662.)” (Tillman, 2002, p. 5).

Aligned with this belief, this study placed BWEL at the center of the work by employing a three-prong methodological approach that utilized culturally specific knowledge, thinking, and ways of being. It did so in four distinct ways. First, it used *culturally congruent research methods* to capture the holistic context impacting the leadership of BWEL. This included utilizing interpretive case storytelling to paint a picture of the social, political, economic, and educational factors that affect the everyday experiences of participating BWEL within their respective educational settings. Second, the study opened space for BWEL to share *culturally specific knowledge*. Specifically they were provided with opportunities to self-define and represent their experiences, in their own voice, maintaining cultural integrity over their leadership stories as engaged with other members of their respective school communities. Third, interpretive case storytelling was also used as a way to engage *cultural resistance to theoretical dominance* by “revealing, understanding, and responding to unequal power relations that may minimize, marginalize, subjugate, or exclude the multiple realities and knowledge bases” (Tillman, 2002, p. 6) of participating BWEL. This was specifically employed by questioning research privilege, rejecting claims of neutrality and objectivity, utilizing an African centered epistemological stance, centering the work in Black feminist standpoint affirming that those who experience social, political, economic, and educational consequences as a result of unequal power are best poised to assume truth-telling about those experiences (Collins, 1986; Dillard,
and finally by telling each individual BWEL’s story, even as I worked to capture the shared experience emerging across their collective narratives (Dillard, 2000, Charmaz, 2006, 2008a, 2008b; Tillman, 2002; Yosso, 2005). Fourth, and finally, I engaged a culturally sensitive data analysis and interpretation process by positioning BWEL knowledge as legitimate, appropriate, necessary, and enough for analyzing, understanding, and responding to data (Dillard, 2000, 2002; Tillman 2002).

**Interpretive Case Storytelling.** The first prong I employed was ICS (Tillman, 2002). As stated in brief within a previous section, I utilized ICS because of its inherent ability to absorb multiple methods, theories, and sources of data collection to enhance the credibility of this research. Specifically, ICS allows for the effective application of the collage of critical pedagogies and theories shaping CR-TML employed under the umbrella of ACEM. Applying an intersectional CRT lens (Crenshaw, 1991; Ladson-Billings; 1998, 2006) and relying on the descriptive frameworks of CME and SJL, ICS also enabled the development of meaningful, thick, and culturally rich descriptions to better understand participating BWELs leadership experiences, including allowing me to capture information about these experiences as influenced by race, gender, and the education policy context within which each BWEL led (Aleman, 2009; Harris, 1992). Interpretive storytelling is a constructivist (Dillard, 2000, 2002), liberatory (Yosso, 2005; hooks, 1994), and interpretive (Tillman, 2002) research paradigm rather than a simple methodology, recognizing that knowledge is socially constructed, dismissing the hegemony of pure objectivity, and making space for the subjective, organic, and humanizing creation of truth and meaning. In this way, ICS allows for the recognition of a multi-perspectival analysis, revealing multiple truths, and affirming my use of the theories shaping CR-TML, as grounded in ACL (Santamaria, 2013), as a way to consider not just the voice and
perspective of each BWEL I engaged, but also the construction of those voices and all of their subjectivities, as situated in a socio-historical, racial, cultural, and political context of surrounding voices, including my own (Parker & Villalpando, 2007). Likewise, employing ICS provided a way to explore and describe each leader’s social justice leadership practices within their respective schools, and using a variety of culturally relevant data sources (Tillman, 2002). In this regard, ICS was used to reveal many leadership lenses and journeys, even as it also revealed commonalities, particularly as situated in the dynamic and intersecting relationships of race, gender, school policy context and the leadership experiences and practices of each leader. Engaging ICS within the CR-TML framework, particularly its participatory orientation, also served to deepen the critical dimensions of the ICS research approach.

**Participatory Orientation.** A participatory orientation infused with ICS is the second prong of the research approach. It also forms the component rendering this qualitative study of educational leadership radically unique. Critical Pedagogy advocates for a liberatory praxis in which theory is applied through reflection, dialogue, and action (Freire, 1972), and the relationship between theory and action is made clear through a reflexive process that includes inquiry and consciousness development, application, evaluation, and critical reflection, towards a goal of social transformation (hooks, 1994). By providing space through the critical inquiry action group employed in phase III of the study to position myself as subject (Dillard, 2000; Dillard, Abdur-Rashid & Tyson, 2000; Tillman, 2002) and have participating BWEL work alongside me as co-inquirers, we were able to critically reflect on and examine the ways in which we navigate the intersections of race, gender, and our respective school policy contexts to enact leadership, while also reshaping those actions towards a more evolved social justice stance. In this way, both I and participating BWEL engaged leadership theory in action even as we
examined our leadership within the constructs of the study’s methodology. Engaging theory to action enabled us to use CR-TML as a paradigmatic, descriptive, and analytic lens, with this study becoming a radical form of activist and participatory qualitative research rooted in CPD as model (Kohli, et al., 2015). Though not participatory action research in its purest form, when combining the participatory prong of this study’s approach with the other two prongs, and adding CR-TML as conceptual framework, this work becomes radically different primarily because its focus is educational leadership in action and toward creating real-time social change in U.S. P-12 schools as centered in the voices of BWEL, a phenomena not yet explored within previous literary works focusing primarily on educational leadership and the education and development of educational leaders of color, particularly not within works operationalizing CPD within grassroots spaces. Additionally, this radically different approach to educational leadership research allowed eight BWEL and me, to engage a participatory orientation by engendering a sense of Black woman leadership empowerment indicative of works describing the use of sister circles as a culturally relevant counter space (Harley, 2002) and engaged towards an intent of leading toward social transformation (Collins, 1990) in real time. Since collaborative praxis, agency, and voice comprise the underlying traits of one who professes to enact social justice leadership, it was important that the research process and the methodological framework used to carry this work out mirror, model, and align with the research content being examined. In this way, the researched transcended the research and researcher, and assumed agency over story, voice, and theory through engaged activist research, a radical liberatory praxis.

**Culturally Centered Inductive Analysis.** CCIA comprises the final leg of the three-pronged approach. A CCIA was used to engage and analyze the data. Part of Tillman’s (2002) framework for culturally sensitive research approaches centered in ACEM, CCIA was engaged
as a critically reflective process meant to help make sense of and uncover meanings of the leadership experiences of eight BWEL, nine including myself, through a careful study of each participating BWEL’s leadership in their respective U.S. P-12 schools in relationship to the socio-historical school reform context in which these things now sit, and as impacted by race, gender, and education policy (Dillard, 2000; Charmaz, 2006, 2008a, 2008b; Tillman, 2002; Yosso, 2005). In that regard, CCIA proved particularly useful for this study because I was attempting to make sense of the collective leadership experiences of BWEL by examining each of the participating BWEL’s different and diverse experiences, in order to expand and build on the scholarship in several fields, including SJL, CRT, and ME. Using this information revealed information about BWELs as a historically marginalized and minoritized bounded group even as what was revealed was gleaned from individuals describing what they experience as part of their daily leadership practices. Scholars advocating the use of analytical processes like CCIA argue its import in privileging the close relationship between the researcher and participants while simultaneously enabling participants to authentically be themselves, sharing their unique stories (Collins, 1986, 1990; Dillard, 2000; Kershaw, 1990, 1992; Tillman, 2002). Engaging a participatory orientation and gleaning the culturally rich descriptions required of ICS requires close relationships. Likewise, CCIA was incorporated into the integrated theories that make up the CR-TML framework in that the descriptive lens applied through CR-TML requires the culturally centered inductive approach guiding the review and analysis of interview, life notes and transcription data, enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of this study. Finally, ICS allows for the critical interpretation of subjectivities, particularly as filtered through gender, race, and other socio-cultural factors, making the analytic process important because as the opening
quotes invoke and Dillard (2000) reminds having a conceptual framework situated in the sensibilities of Black women to engage research about and with Black women is necessary.

To articulate how reality is known when based in historical roots of Black feminist thought, embodying a distinguishable difference in cultural standpoint located in the intersection/overlap of the culturally constructed socializations of race, gender, and other identities and the historical and contemporary contexts of oppressions and resistance of African-American women. (p. 662)

In this way CCIA was helpful in that it was based on the literature and used as a guide to support the analysis process, including supporting the grounded revelations that emerged (Charmaz, 2006, 2008a, 2008b). Thus, employing CCIA, ICS and a participatory orientation, combined with the utilization of CR-TML as a conceptual framework and descriptive analytic tool, proved efficient to engage this study, as well as the methods described in detail in the sections that follow.

**Research Methods**

**Setting and Participants**

Each of the eight participating BWEL engaged leadership in U.S. P-12 schools characterized by attributes comprising the contested school spaces codified in chapter one, which binds the setting for the purpose of this study. I also chose to position myself as an engaged participant in this research, using a positioned subject approach, particularly during phase III of the study. Given this positioning, I reflected on my leadership to advance racial equity and social justice within the contested spaces of U.S. P-12 schools binding this study alongside this study’s co-inquirers. Specifically, I reflected on leadership experiences and practices engaged while serving as an assistant principal in the same large Southwest district within which Mary, Sojourner, and Fannie led. However, I chose not to include myself as a fully reported case within the methods of this chapter, or in the findings for chapters four and five. Instead, I chose
to share my leadership and research experiences as testimonials. Employing an African centered storytelling approach, the leadership testimonial was shared at the onset of this work in chapter one to situate the study and the research testimonial was shared during the closing chapter to bridge the beginning to the discussion of findings and implications in chapter seven. I made the decision in order to focus on and honor the stories shared by the other participating BWEL throughout this work, and because as I shared at the onset, I have an organic interest in the leadership experiences of other BWEL, even as I understand my own leadership has import for, and can contribute to the discourse this work engages.

The Participant Setting Chart (Appendix B) describe the five public school districts and one charter organization within which each participating BWEL’s school context is situated. These contexts codify the individualized settings participating leaders navigated while participating in this study. A modified description of the information provided in the chart can be found in table 3.2. This table lists each participant’s school setting, capturing characteristics that define each school. The table also provides a comparative analysis of each leader’s school as situated in the defining factors of U.S. P-12 schools undergoing reform efforts characterized by identified equity challenges. Cardinal directions are used for the U.S. geographic location column. An ‘X’ in a column indicates the school is experiencing the identified characteristic for that column. Additionally, table 3.2 is supported by table 3.3 which provides a summary of participant demographics. It is important to note that for this study, Angela and Sojourner are the only two leaders indicated on the table not leading within a single school. Instead, Angela and Sojourner’s leadership is engaged district-wide. Specifically, Angela served in a leadership capacity across several middle and high schools, and Sojourner led a state-wide literacy initiative
sponsored by the Governor’s office, though much of her reflection focused on her time as the school principal of a high school within her district.

In order to protect each participant’s right to full anonymity as assured during the consenting process, pseudonyms are used in lieu of their given names. Six of the eight participating BWEL self-selected a pseudonym symbolizing a woman educational leader with whom she strongly identifies. Four self-selected historical figures; one selected a living model of Black woman leadership from her family, and one selected a word embodying her leadership disposition. Two of the eight participants were assigned historical figures by me because they chose not to make personal selections, instead indicating they had no preference. I made these selections in direct relationship to my understanding of their leadership experiences as a result of my interpretive analysis. Thus, participant names listed in tables 3.2 and 3.3 and used throughout the remaining chapters of this study take on a figurative meaning characteristic of the double entendre embedded within the artistry of African-centered U.S. Black culture (i.e. gospel songs, the fabric of quilts, the musicality of drum beats, the sharing of oral stories, and the complexly layered messaging woven into contemporary hip hop lyrics and cyphers) and employed as an effective means of subversive communication during the U.S. enslavement process, as well as in popular Black culture during contemporary times. District and school names have also been intentionally redacted.

Table 3.2. Participant Setting Chart: Districts and Schools included in the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BWEL</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Level (grades)</th>
<th>U.S. Geo. Location</th>
<th>Majority HMMS</th>
<th>High Stakes Testing</th>
<th>No Tolerance Discipline</th>
<th>Program (Improve)</th>
<th>Access &amp; Opp. Gap</th>
<th>Racialize d T-S Gap</th>
<th>Racial Discipline Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ida</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>ES, K-5</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>ES, P-5</td>
<td>SW</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marva</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>MS, 6-8</td>
<td>Mid W</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Charter</td>
<td>K-8</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Leading on the West Coast. During the time of this study, three of the six participating BWEL led schools located in a large state on the U.S. west coast. Sojourner held the position of elementary school (ES) principal in a small coastal suburban district and was charged with serving a diverse population of K-5 students and families. Althea served as an ES principal in a
more urban setting. Her school served a majority Latinx student population in grades TK-8. TK stands for transitional kindergarten which intentionally prepares students for the Kindergarten experience, distinguishing it from pre-school due its decided focus on developing the academic literacy skills required of students before they enter formal schooling. It is typically designed to prepare students who miss the state’s age requirement for Kindergarten and gives them a jump start on the Kindergarten curriculum. Finally, Angela held a district-level instructional leader position within one of the largest school districts in the state. Located just north of Ida and Althea, Angela created, facilitated, and evaluated literacy and language based professional development for middle (MS) and high school (HS) administrators, licensed personnel, and families across her district. The five remaining BWEL participating in this study served in contested school spaces in districts and schools across the U.S. landscape. I briefly introduce these leaders in the section that follows.

**Leading From Across the Country.** In addition to the three districts on the west coast, case study settings comprised one charter school management, one small rural public school district in the Midwest, and one large public school district in the southwest. Joy engaged her leadership on the east. She was also the sole participant leading within a charter school. Joy served as an assistant principal at a district sponsored urban charter school run by a national charter management organization (CMO). Joy’s school is located within a large district in an east coast state in close proximity to the U.S. capital. Joy’s school served a majority African American student population in grades K-8, and her teaching and administrative team matched student demographics.

Further west of Joy in a more rural part of the country, Marva served as a MS principal, engaging a majority white student population in grades 6-8 within a small Midwestern state and
Though Marva’s school maintained a majority white student population and all white faculty and staff, students and families shared lived experiences commensurate with rural settings, including being challenged to grapple with lack of access to resources, both financial and physical. Marva was also challenged with helping her school community ensure an equal education for the small but rapidly growing population of racially, linguistically and culturally diverse students, even as she was the sole person in the building who shared their background and lived experience as an individual from a historically marginalized and minoritized background.

Finally, the remaining three participating BWEL served as leaders in the Southwest. They also served in the same large Southwest district. Mary served as an ES principal in a small suburban school with a majority Latinx student population in grades K-5, while Fannie was appointed as an assistant principal in a more urban ES setting across town from Mary. Fannie’s school, traditionally African American, grappled with a student population undergoing a rapid demographic shift, becoming majority Latinx both within the school and the surrounding community. Fannie’s school served students in grades P-5. Sojourner is the third and final participating BWEL serving in this district. At the time of the study, Sojourner had just been promoted from a position supervising district principals to one leading a state level literacy initiative under the guidance of the Governor’s office, though the great majority of her reflections focused on her time leading one of the district’s largest comprehensive high schools as the school’s principal.

Though spread throughout the country, the eight BWEL selected to participate in this study, led within schools and districts with characteristics indicative of the contested spaces described in this work, making them, their districts, and the school communities they served
compelling contexts within which to engage the collaborative inquiries posed as part of this research. Additionally, all eight BWEL claimed to work hard to confront the challenges faced while advancing a social justice agenda. I explain how they were recruited to participate in this study below.

**Participant Recruitment and Selection**

In alignment with the CR-TML framework, the eight women invited to participate in this study were chosen as a result of a recruitment process reliant on a process similar to convenience, snowball, and purposeful sampling, but centered in culturally relevant practices. As such, I engaged a calling-in to community by sending recruitment information to exemplars of the BWEL community with which I had a connection, asking the community to select additional exemplars who met the following criteria:

- self-identify as woman;
- self-identify as a BWEL currently practicing leadership within a U.S. P-12 school;
- served as a leader in a school with a diverse student population (racially, culturally, and socially);
- maintains an espoused vision of leading for social justice;
- willing to provide voluntary consent to participate in and complete all phases of the study

As a BWEL committed to leading for social justice, I have intentionally aligned myself with professional organizations, associations, and grass-roots groups with community-based BWEL who serve as exemplary models of Black Woman leadership and who are committed to advancing a social justice agenda. Leveraging these connections and affiliations, and honoring African centered epistemologies that hold the community, community connections, and the collective voice as central to engaging the collective community, I called-in the community and
village to help identify exemplary BWEL as a form of recruitment and sampling (Dillard, 2000; Kershaw, 1990, 1992; Tillman, 2002).

Specifically, I relied on cultural knowledge of exemplary Black woman leadership in combination with cultural and communal affiliations to forward an email message (Appendix C) and distribute digital flyer (Appendix D) sharing information about the study. Both contained a link to the recruitment survey participants (Appendix E) were asked to take as part of the recruitment process. The survey was used for two purposes: (1) to screen and verify potential participants in alignment with recruitment criteria; and (2) to provide the background information needed about the leadership experiences, dispositions, school contexts, and actions of participating BWEL. This approach to recruitment helped broaden the study’s scope of contact yielding fifty-four survey respondents, with forty-nine BWEL completing all survey questions, and fourteen indicating a willingness to participate as case study participants. After ensuring each respondent met all the required criteria, contact information was used to invite all fourteen respondents to participate in an individual interview. Given the study’s specific focus on examining the leadership experiences of BWEL and Tillman’s (2002) and Dillard’s (2000) acknowledgement that a culturally centered sampling approach is best used to engage the community in selecting community exemplars because they are best positioned to recognize participants, this was the most appropriate participant selection method. In order to capture a holistic and humanizing picture of the experiences of BWEL, including reaching saturation for descriptions (Creswell, 2009), I chose to invite all fourteen BWEL for an interview assuming not everyone would follow-through. This would account for those who might participate in interviews but not be available for the remaining phases of the study. The remaining phases of the study, especially the critical inquiry action group in phase III, relied on a minimum of six to
eight participants to ensure an empowering CPD oriented sister circle experience (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Kohli, et al, 2015), also ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the research. In the end, and working through calendar and time challenges, eight interviews were held. They included Ida, Althea, and Angela from the west coast; Marva from the Midwest; Joy from the eastern region of the country; and Mary, Sojourner and Fannie from the southwest.

Four interviews were held using the zoom.us meeting platform (Ida, Althea, Angela, and Marva) to accommodate proximity challenges given that these BWEL lived and led in different parts of the country. Zoom.us is a digital platform allowing participants to decide if they want to engage by video, audio, or text based messaging which provided participants with agency over how they engaged me during interviews, while also allowing me to capture the data needed for the analysis process. All four of the women interviewed using the Zoom.us platform selected video based participation. During follow-up emails to schedule interviews, Joy revealed she had plans to attend the AERA 2017 conference in San Antonio, TX, a conference I also planned to attend so we were able to meet up and conduct her interview while attending that conference. The interview was held in a public meeting space at the conference hotel site, but inconspicuous enough to protect anonymity and confidentiality. I held the final three interviews (Mary, Sojourner and Fannie) in-person, meeting Mary and Fannie at their respective school sites and Sojourner at a local Starbucks of her choosing. Interviews held in forums other than Zoom.us were also video and/or audio-recorded (with participant consent), which allowed me to capture and revisit audio/visual data, as well as transcribe each interview for text-based data analysis.

Each individual interview included a consenting process guided by the Informed Consent to Participate in Research form (Appendix F), approved as part of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process and resulting in each BWEL signing the form with me keeping a copy for my
records. They were also provided with a copy for their records. Engaged as an extra layer of protection, the consent process was held before each interview, and towards a goal of reviewing critical information about the study, including rights as participants, possible risks, possible benefits, and participant expectations. This is information participating BWEL may have missed when indicating voluntary consent after reading the required consenting information embedded within the recruitment survey (Appendix G). In order to ensure participants had ample time to review the critical information contained on the consenting form, all interviewees were provided with digital copies of the form via confirmation emails and asked to review the information prior to our interview time. This did not preclude me from engaging the full consenting process at the onset of each interview. Providing the information beforehand simply ensured full understanding before signatures were requested. Signed copies were returned to me, with those engaging the interview digitally returning signed copies as a scanned PDF via email following the consenting and interview session.

Interviews also included a one-hour semi-formal discussion guided by the interview protocol (Appendix H). Interview discussions were held to qualify survey responses, build on information collected about their leadership, and prepare consenting BWEL to participate in the remaining phases of the study, including the critical inquiry action group in phase III. I led with pre-determined questions from the interview protocol; however I used the protocol loosely, responding with additional questions as answers unfolded. In this way, I was able to continue with topics until they were exhausted and/or enough information gleaned for culturally rich descriptions to be built (Tillman, 2002). Of the eight BWEL participating in individual interviews, four continued on to complete all of the weekly sessions required of the critical inquiry action group in phase III. They include: Ida, Althea, Angela, and Mary. These same
four individuals also completed all required components of phase IV of the study. While Joy, Fannie, and Sojourner did not participate in every session of the critical inquiry action group in phase III, they did reconnect to complete all of the required components of phase IV. Marva participated in two of the four critical inquiry action group sessions and completed all required components of phase IV. Despite varied participation, I chose to build full interpretive cases for seven of the eight BWEL participating in the study. Sojourner’s case was modified. Though I felt all eight interviews provided me with culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and useful data in alignment with the research objectives, enabling me to build culturally centered information-rich cases for in-depth analysis (Charmaz 2006, 2008a, 2008b; Dillard, 2000; Tillman, 2002; Yosso, 2005), thereby strengthening the quality of the research, Sojourner’s participation in the sister-circle check-in process was limited due to difficulty in aligning schedules. Rather than misinterpret data gleaned from our conversations, I chose to modify her case instead. I also chose not to build a full case for myself; however, I did share my leadership story as a life note testimonial within chapters one and four. Additionally, as with the data collected from the other forty-one BWEL who participated in the survey in phase I of the study, data about our leadership experience was considered within the analysis to substantiate and/or disconfirm the patterns, coding families, and themes that emerged from participating BWEL narratives. In this regard, findings and conclusions shared in chapters four and five are made more credible and have greater transferability. Given this explanation, it is important to note that each participating BWEL’s story is as critical to the findings as are all other stories, including those I selected to build out and report on in full form in chapters four and five. Any choice I made to include (or not), and/or to report in full (or not) a BWEL narrative was made to
ensure the accuracy, credibility and trustworthiness of the work and not as a way to diminish the value of the participants with whom I engaged the work alongside and with.

**Data Sources and Collection Procedures**

As is characteristic of ICS, this study relied on multiple data sources: (1) a pre-study survey doubling as a recruitment and information gathering tool; (2) transcription notes from each participant’s semi-structured informal individual interview providing an opportunity to qualify and add on to information shared about the leadership experience as part of the survey; (3) researcher observations and field notes from the critical inquiry action group sessions opening up space for participating BWEL to engage theory to action as they problem-posed and helped each other work through critical equity challenges they confronted every day while leading in their respective school environments; (4) a follow-up post-action group survey to assess shifts in leadership disposition and provide a forum to reflect on the research experience; (5) life notes constructed in researcher journal reflections and text annotations as I processed through and analyzed my interactions with participating BWEL and the data provided to develop understandings and make sense of their experiences; (6) review of public and written documents (school newsletters, demographic data, historical documents, etc.); and (6) sister-circle check-ins engaged like member-checking.

**Survey Data.** All eight participating BWEL completed the recruitment survey which was designed to serve as a screener to purposefully select participants who would comprise cases, as well as to capture preliminary descriptive data about their leadership experiences. The survey was grounded in the research and theories comprising the conceptual framework. Developed by synthesizing the research grounding this study with that shaping the validated leadership practices inventory survey tool created by Posner and Kouzes (1988, 1993), the survey included
questions to solicit information about educational and professional background and experiences, particularly those that inform leadership disposition, goals, decisions, practices, actions, and style. It also included a brief introduction of myself as researcher, an explanation of the study, guidelines for administration, and space for participants to provide basic demographic information, as well as a brief questionnaire with multiple choice and Likert scaled questions reflecting a synthesis of the research for culturally relevant social justice consciousness and identity development (Banks, 1994; Bennett, 1986; Cross, Parham & Helms, 1991). Scaled questions were followed by open-ended questions providing space for leader’s to describe their leadership preparation, disposition, practices and context in relationship to scaled answers.

Interview, Public Document, and Life Note Data. Once participants were screened, preliminary eligibility determined, and case study participants selected, BWEL participated in one semi-structured, one- to two-hour interview. Interviews is one of the most common forms of data collection when conducting culturally relevant qualitative analysis, and the data collected as a result of individual interviews helped to qualify information provided in survey responses while also defining the areas of leadership this study sought to explore, examine, and describe (Tillman, 2002). Grounded in the research on culturally centered ACEM, the interview also positioned Black Women sharing experiential knowledge as “legitimate, appropriate, and necessary for analyzing, understanding, and reporting” (Tillman, 2002, p. 6) culturally sensitive data. As previously discussed, I met each leader at a school, at a mutually agreed upon public but private enough location, or using the digital video meeting platform zoom.us, primarily used for those located in a different state. Regardless of interview location, interviews were video-taped (with consent) to provide me with a way to revisit our conversations, attending to both verbal and non-verbal cues for meaning. It was important to attend to visual cues utilizing
cultural intuition (Bernal, 1998) to pick up on nuanced messages contextualizing what was shared verbally. Interviews also allowed me to tease out details impossible to reveal in the survey, providing deeper context for survey answers. I also transcribed interviews in order to support the interpretive process during data analysis. My general strategy for the interviews was to start off with broad questions and follow up on the interviewee’s responses, to capture meanings and to avoid imposing my meanings on the interviewee. Following the interviews, school and other public documentation such as newsletters sent to families, email correspondence, social media posts, and district literature was collected to help with data analysis and support my ability to answer the research questions holistically. Life notes, written using a memoing technique was often used when reviewing these documents, with me recording reflections on post-it notes or in the margins of documents to capture my initial thinking and relationships made to details shared during the interview process. When needed, sisterly check-ins engaged like member checking was employed to ensure accuracy in note-taking as well as to clarify initial understandings developed as a result of an ongoing and recursive interpretive process.

**Field Notes and Sister Check-Ins.** In addition to interviews, field notes were taken to record participant observations engaged during critical inquiry action group sessions. Four sessions were held weekly for one hour over a one-month period. Critical inquiry action groups comprise a bounded system of professional reflection, learning, and action (Duncan-Andrade, 2005). Action group sessions are similar to focus groups but with the incorporation of culturally responsive CPD (Kohli, et al., 2015) techniques. Inquiry sessions provided time for participants to share, reflect on, and critically dialog about leadership experiences as connected to problems of practice situated in the school context, with consideration for the school reform policies and
practices engaged. During inquiry sessions, BWEL also read and discussed a shared piece of pre-determined scholarly work/literature from the field (Duncan-Andrade, 2005), engaging a critical multicultural and CRT lens in order to build social justice leadership knowledge, as well as inform reflections on the ways gender, race, and school context impact leadership goals, disposition, decisions, and practices. A schedule for critical inquiry action group sessions outlining the curricular focus for each can be found in the appendices (Appendices I and J). Field notes were taken during sessions and analyzed, particularly as connected to shifts in leadership disposition, strategies and practices, and the perceived impact of practices on the development of teachers, as well as learning and achievement of the students served in their respective schools. There was no formal note-taking agenda for field notes, however I did develop and use a Research Note-taking Protocol Form (Appendix K). I was mindful of the theories and constructs shaping CR-TML while taking notes, however I also kept an open mind to allow a pure inductive process, including holding space for new understandings, patterns, and themes to emerge.

**Final Survey Data.** Following weekly critical action group sessions, each participant was asked to complete a post-action group survey designed to provoke reflection on the action group experience. Consistent with ACEM and the inductive analytical process, the survey (Appendix L) provided participants with a series of short answer reflection questions designed to provoke reflection on their participation in the research process as well as provide final thoughts about their daily leadership experiences. Like the initial survey, the follow-up survey was grounded in the literature used to shape the conceptual framework. The data obtained from the final survey offered me opportunities to clarify and affirm patterns and themes, including developing grounded understandings of the relationship between gender, race, leadership, and
policy as situated in each of the participating BWEL’s school context. It also led to deeper understandings of the leadership decisions each BWEL made, as well as the thinking framing those decisions.

Supported by the research grounding the methodological approach, I chose to employ surveys, interviewing, observations with field notes, the construction of Life Notes through journaling and memoing, and sister check-ins to collect data because they are appropriate methods when trying to make sense of Black people’s lived experiences and seeking to help them make sense of the meanings of the ways in which they engage the lived world (Dillard, 2000; Kershaw, 1990, 1992; Tillman, 2002). Engaging these data collection methods also allowed for data triangulation, and helped me to gather in-depth knowledge to make meaning of the culturally centered leadership experiences under examination (Tillman, 2002). Relying on multiple data sources also enhanced data credibility adding strength and trustworthiness to research findings. The entire culturally centered data collection process, particularly the critical inquiry action group, also allowed me to model and demonstrate CR-TML while employing it to undertake a thorough analysis of BWEL leadership as situated in the experiences of eight BWEL advancing a social justice agenda in U.S. P-12 schools.

As per the study’s IRB exemption requirements, all paper bound data was, and will continue to be kept confidential and safe (for the required number of years) by storing it in locked cabinets in a locked office at my university. Digital data was, and will continue to be kept confidential and safe by being stored in locked and password-protected storage drives, as well as on pass-code protected network servers. As stated previously, and in order to protect anonymity, personal identifiers were redacted and replaced with pseudonyms selected and supplied by participating BWEL (when not provided I chose the pseudonym used), and any
information reported, including in this document, has and will be shared using participant
selected pseudonyms or as aggregate reporting.

**Methods of Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The data collected from this study were coded and analyzed in four stages employed in
an on-going manner throughout the duration of the study. During the first stage a process known
as bracketing or phenomenological reduction was used to develop initial or first level codes.
Bracketing entailed reading through data collected during phases I-III of the study, including
open-ended survey responses, interview transcriptions, researcher field notes (from the critical
inquiry action group), my own journal reflections and life notes (Bell-Scott, 1994 as cited in
Dillard, 2002), and documents written by participating BWEL, in search of statements
significant to and/or answering research questions. I charted those found according to each of
the eight participating BWEL. In order to ensure clarity and accuracy as I engaged this process,
I read each data source multiple times and relied on sister-check-ins when questions arose. I also
revisited video footage as a way to confirm and cross-check interpretations made as a result of
reading transcriptions and field note data, relying on visual and non-verbal cues to make sense of
experiences, actions, and perceptions connected with emotion and internal-struggles, particularly
since this kind of information is culturally situated and might not otherwise show up within the
printed text. Table 3.4 provides an example of the charting process begun in this first stage of
analysis, and used to inform the development of interpretive cases built as a result of second
level analysis undertaken in stage two. Copies of full charts can be found in the appendices
(Appendix M).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader, Level, and Leader Identity</th>
<th>Strategies Indicative of the Critical Leadership Practices of ACL via CR-TML through Critical Multicultural Education (CME), Social Justice Leadership (SJL), Critical Race Theory (CRT) and use of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) and Critical Pedagogy (CP)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Ida (K-5 principal), Collaborative Leader** | • Led from a moral and emotional compass, centering students and families before all else  
• Views social justice as avenue for equitable access to equal education, including understanding differences and its relationship to inequality,  
• Engage a racial lens to question and critique district level policies and their impact on her leadership and school |
| **Mary (K-5 principal), Servant Leader** | • Led from a moral compass  
• Views education as a means to social mobility  
• Draws on spiritual, familial, and communal networks and socio-historical legacy for strength |
| **Angela (MS and HS, instructional facilitator), Servant Leader** | • Engages social justice to give students and families voice in the education process and to increase awareness of inequities amongst education personnel and public  
• Looks for strengths in teachers  
• Works hard to build trusting relationships in order to engage in coaching and mentoring to increase teacher capacity |
| **Althea Nelson (TK-8 principal), Servant Leader** | • Takes pride in work, engages it with knowledge that carry family and friends with them as they do – respected in community for work as teacher  
• Works hard to mitigate against stereotypes about Black Women being attributed to here leadership  
• Views self as a natural leader who is willing to take risk, including stepping out to do something different than what’s expected |

Second level analysis was engaged during stage two of the analytic process. This entailed coming to understand the meanings inherent in each BWEL’s narrative as captured in representative significant statements. I drew on these formulated meanings to construct cases revealed as interpretive storytelling (Tillman, 2002; Yosso, 2005). I engaged the writing of interpretive cases as a form of analysis (Charmaz, 2008a, 2008b; Dillard, 2000) with hopes of discovering emergent themes congruent with previous research on the leadership of women leaders of color, thereby amplifying these validated works, or revealing clusters of new themes.
and patterns unique to the BWEL leadership experience, thereby building on and expanding these works. Emergent themes and patterns were engaged during stage three.

During stage three of the analytic process, thematic patterns and clusters explicated from interpretive cases during stage two were organized into representative themes common across each BWEL’s depiction of her leadership experience. Themes were organized into matrices guided by characteristics and qualities forming ACL (through CR-TML), and incorporating the robust literature grounding this study. In this regard, matrices were developed headed by categories informed by SJL and BFT and data was placed under headings as appropriate (Appendix N). The same is true for matrices informed by ACL and CRT (Appendix O). Findings were then sorted to confirm evidence of CR-TML. Figure 3.4 and table 3.5 provide excerpted examples of the matrices discussed, illustrating the organizational process used. To ensure clarity, accuracy, credibility, and trustworthiness, constant comparative analysis was used to ensure characteristics defined as common were in fact so, while also revealing those qualities that may be unique to each individual leader. Where questions arose, re-visiting data through re-reads, review of video footage, and sister check-ins supported the process. Stage three gave way to the final step in the analytic process, inclusive of pulling all four stages together to reveal confirmatory research findings.
Figure 3.4. Sample Data Organization Matrix: Data forming examples of SJL situated in BFT Standpoint and corresponding with ACL through TRL leadership practice

| Social Justice Leadership Attributes (Stovall, 2004; Theoharis, 2008) | TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES (Kouzes & Posner, 2010) | 
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ethical and moral obligation to dismantle inequities | Challenge the process | Inspire shared vision | Model The Way | Enable others to act | Encourage the hearth |
| Value cultural knowledge by interacting with entire school community | “I believe and push for every child to see themselves in the content we teach. I ask my teachers to be intentional about this.” (Jai) |  |  | “Our kids are brilliant and sadly our society doesn’t really support our kids being brilliant; they just demonstrate it differently.” (Joy) |
| Use data to address problems through an equity lens |  | On high stakes testing and Push Out: “I interview the students and share them because I want people to hear the voice of the people and understand their...” |  | |

Table 3.5. ACL and CRT: Participant summary and examples of applied critical leadership (ACL) and critical race theory (CRT) found in BWEL stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participating BWEL</th>
<th>Examples of ACL</th>
<th>Examples of CRT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ida</td>
<td><strong>ACL Characteristic 5 – Academic Discourse:</strong> “In terms of your research that’s why it is so important especially in the context of education and especially now when you can look at television and see how white privilege really plays out when students can put on Instagram some type of racial or really demeaning representation of their classmates and their parents can get an attorney and say its freedom of speech. I just...”</td>
<td><strong>Critique of liberalism:</strong> “I have learned a lot from education and what I learned is that what we say we value and what we do are hugely different and that any question you have about why or how something works, people have already asked the same questions and the answers are out there.” “In [Name of City/District], they have this persona that they support, you know a ¼ of their city budget is for education and they are proud...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating BWEL</td>
<td>Examples of ACL</td>
<td>Examples of CRT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>think your research is really important. You have a lot of work to do girl.”</td>
<td>of that but they don’t believe in education if it’s not in their backyard; they don’t support for that little brown and black child, don’t be bringing them home or into our schools, if it’s not for them and theirs the story changes.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Althea Nelson</td>
<td><strong>ACL Characteristic 4 Stereotype Threat:</strong> “I work hard, harder than white people work…this causes a lack of confidence in some settings; second guessing myself; coming from a place what I have to do this right, I have to be perfect, I have to always be appropriate or be on my p’s and q’s – as AA people we always say she or he can do it (white people) but you know you can’t do it (cutting corners; mediocrity; making a poor choice; failing).”</td>
<td><strong>Storytelling is an important form for exploring race and racism:</strong> “I think what is often overlooked is my ability to have a broad sense of empathy because of challenges my people have come through and continue to go through…I am not sure this is understood or valued; they don’t understand that we have a empathy for all kinds of discrimination and a profound sense of empathy because of our experiences.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela Davis</td>
<td><strong>ACL Characteristic 6 Honoring Constituents:</strong> “My colleague goes Kathy you have a certain way of getting people to do things…part of it is knowing how to change my register for who I am taking with and meeting families where they are no matter who they are and finding some commonality to build a relationship where it’s for four years, ten years, or ten minutes, seeing them for who they are.”</td>
<td><strong>Emphasis on racial realism:</strong> “race plays a big part in what I do. I am the only African American coach on the team and so people look at me like what is this Black girl doing here and I think sometimes my students are taken aback by the fact that I’m African American and I’m the teacher… and I also know that some of the misunderstandings that teachers have of our students is because of racial differences.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final stage of the analytic process was employed in stage four. In stage four, all the previous steps were synthesized comprising an exhaustive depiction of the phenomena that is BWELs’ leadership. This phase of data analysis was supported by the CR-TML Four P Framework for Data Analysis (Appendix P), developed utilizing the research and theories grounding this study. In this way, stage four provided a comprehensive way to further develop
and refine interpretive cases shared in chapters four and five, while also demonstrating how the IRB approved (Appendix Q) examination of eight BWEL reveals how they leverage the best of their unique multicultural identities to advance a social justice agenda in U.S. P-12 schools thereby helping us understand the collective story of BWEL leadership and forming the findings shared as interpretive case storytelling in chapters four and five, and fully discussed in chapter six.

Summary

Chapter one provided an overview of the inquiry, including describing the study’s purpose, introducing CR-TML as the conceptual framework, and explaining its relevance. Chapter two provided a review of the literature in educational leadership, social justice leadership, and the collage of theories forming CR-TML, in order to provide theoretical context for the study, and questions posed. This chapter provided a rationale for the proposed research design by reviewing the conceptual and theoretical framework guiding the inquiry, as well as providing an outline for the planned methodological approach. This detailed overview included a description of how ICS, a participatory orientation, and a CCIA combined with CR-TML come together to form a culturally relevant qualitative research paradigm, process, pedagogy, praxis, and design through method. Chapters four and five include data results codified as ICS describing the leadership experiences of the eight participating BWEL. A discussion of findings is included in chapter six, and conclusions, implications, and next steps are shared in chapter seven. Appendices and references follow chapter seven.
CHAPTER 4

LEADERSHIP NARRATIVES I: HOLDING KNIVES BY THE SHARP EDGE

Musadazi u fara lufhanga ng ahu fhiraho

Women are forced to hold knives by their sharpest edge.

~ South African Saying (Phendla, 2004)

Each of the eight women engaging this culturally relevant qualitative examination of the leadership of Black women educational leaders (BWEL) alongside me employed a form of applied critical leadership (ACL) I call critically relevant transformative multicultural leadership (CR-TML). Scholar Maria Santamaria (2014) theorized ACL, arguing it comprises a unique leadership approach engaged by women educational leaders of color (WELOC) to advance social justice. Grounded in research and theories forming critical multicultural education (CME), critical race theory (CRT) and transformative leadership (TRL), Santamaria’s research makes an attempt to bridge theory to action to examine how WELOC leverage the positive aspects of their multicultural identities to engage leadership meant to disrupt and dismantle inequities experienced by historically marginalized and minoritized students (HMMS). Confirming, amplifying, and expanding on Santamaria’s research, findings from this study illustrate how eight BWEL employed CR-TML to advance racial equity and social justice within the contested spaces comprising U.S. P-12 schools. Consistent with Santamaria’s findings, revelations from this study reveal the leadership of BWEL is informed by complexly layered multicultural identities cultivated as a result of their lived experiences and giving birth to a culturally-specific social justice leadership approach situated in culturally-specific resiliency (Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2013, 2015). Building on and expanding this argument, this study’s findings also suggest BWEL lead employing a complexly layered and intersectional
CRT lens (Collins, 1986, 6987; Matsuda, 1989, 1992), informed by lived experiences situated at the extreme end of interlocking oppressions (Crenshaw, 1991) and rooted in a socio-historical context operationalizing white supremacy, privilege, and power. This lens is meant to resist anti-black epistemologies born of the social construction of whiteness as a property interest (Harris, 1995) white supremacist ideologies have been operationalized to uphold. When leveraged within the contested spaces of U.S. P-12 schools, BWEL engage a unique multiconsciousness causing them to experience, engage, and understand their leadership through theories and frameworks consistent with the research grounding CR-TML. The collective stories shaping the interpretive cases for the eight BWEL participating in this study help illuminate emergent themes characteristic of CR-TML, the leadership approach the BWEL participating in this study employed.

Narratives highlight the leadership approaches of BWEL advancing a social justice leadership agenda as a form of restorative liberatory praxis. Sharing narratives in this way allow participating BWEL to rebuke the silencing and marginalization of WELOC within the field of educational leadership, choosing to center our experiences, voices, and leadership perspectives instead. Doing so also bridges CRT, CME, and SJL, highlighting the import for re-imagining the development of P-12 school leaders with the knowledge, skill, and will to employ leadership for racial equity and social justice. Employing the research and the sharing of findings in this way also illustrate how BWEL engage the will to confront inequities in oppressive school contexts with an intention to disrupt and dismantle them until classrooms and schools have been transformed into educational spaces providing an equal education for all students, especially historically marginalized and minoritized students (HMMS).
In this regard, findings gleaned from the narratives comprising this study, coalesce to affirm and amplify Santamaria’s (2014) research on the leadership of women educational leaders of color (WELOC), revealing how employing CR-TML enabled participating BWEL to: (1) engage a CRT lens shaped by a culturally-situated multiconsciousness, (2) maintain simultaneity of purpose situated in the needs of historically marginalized and minoritized students and communities, (3) build complex reciprocal relationships, (4) engage in self-care through communal care; (5) operationalize leadership as an advocate, ally, and activist; and (6) engage in reflection, dialogue, and critical race praxis. Each is employed to advance racial equity and social justice within the contested spaces of U.S. P-12 schools. Characteristics comprising CR-TML are further highlighted in the BWEL leadership stories that follow.

The interpretive cases for Ida, Angela, Althea, and Joy are revealed in this chapter. The ‘story sharing’ is preceded by a brief reminder of the leadership context within which each participating BWEL leads. This description is necessary given the importance of understanding each leader’s leadership context, to understanding how she relies on leadership identity to navigate elements of her experience as situated in the power and oppression intersecting across social constructed lines of race, class, and gender, and embedded within the contested spaces known as U.S. P-12 education.

Leading In Contested School Spaces

Codified in chapter one and revisited in chapter two, contested school spaces (Stovall, 2004) are characterized by a hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1992) steeped in informal, unofficial, and unwritten lessons, values, and perspectives aligned with white supremacy, power, and privilege, and transmitted to students and other stakeholders through the enactment of colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). This intentional but subversive brand of racism is employed
through 21\textsuperscript{st} century, market-based school reform initiatives like high stakes testing (Au, 2015), no tolerance discipline policies (Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014), charter and voucher proliferation (Scott, 2009), and leadership accountability measures required of laws like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Though those supporting such policies often claim they do so as a means to transform schools into inclusive, diverse, and equitable learning spaces, their efforts have been proven to have the opposite effect instead, giving way to equity challenges causing an unequal education for HMMS and exacerbating the historical education debt owed them as a result of said inequities (Au, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Each of the eight BWEL participating in this study professed to work hard to engage a social justice leadership agenda within the respective contested spaces forming the schools within which they led. They included Ida, Angela, and Althea from the Westcoast, Joy from the East, Marva from the Midwest, and Sojourner, Mary and Fannie from the Southwest. To protect each leader’s anonymity, pseudonyms were used in place of actual names. They were selected or assigned to symbolize the historical, personal, or professional figure’s life works within which each BWEL finds inspiration. Consistent with ACEM, pseudonyms also take on a double-entendre meaning, representing the BWEL’s leadership approach, as situated in her personal and professional identity. Leadership narratives are loosely clustered by the region in which each BWEL engaged leadership at the time of the study, however no significant meaning is gleaned from such clustering. The leadership stories for Ida, Angela, Althea, and Joy follow.

\textbf{Sharpening Knives and Leading Through Pain}

\textbf{Ida}

The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them.
Education as expectation. Righting the wrongs is the mantra Ida has taken on as her guiding light to engage leadership within the contested school spaces that she occupies. A self-proclaimed social justice advocate with over twelve years of service in education, Ida comes wrapped in a five foot eight inch frame, draped in beautiful dark brown mocha skin, a dancer’s curves, short natural salt and pepper hair, a sometimes serious but always warm and upbeat demeanor, and an eclectic fusion of culturally-inspired Oaklandish fashions, foreshadowing her free spirit, easygoing attitude and performance arts turned educator roots. Growing up in a big family, with limited financial means, Ida learned to draw on and view wealth as situated in the love afforded her by a mother and godmother who taught her to believe in herself, despite the family’s financial condition, though she never dreamed of being a teacher, noting, “…if people had asked me in third and fourth grade what I wanted to be, I probably would have said work at the grocery store, and I am not saying that’s not good work, but it is hard to be what you can’t see and I went to the grocery store all of the time.” Despite Ida’s family’s limited financial means, their lessons impressed upon her the importance and value of education, including continuously stressing how important it was for Ida to succeed in school. This sparked a natural love for learning within her. Other lessons taught about the value of education made their way into Ida’s heart as well, also feeding her love for learning. For example, the culturally-centered messages she received about historical figures that fought so Blacks could have the right to succeed (i.e. Harriett Tubman, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ida B. Wells, etc.) powered Ida’s belief in the value of an equal education for all children, especially those who looked and grew up like her. Ida did not want other children who looked like her to experience school like she did—an experience rooted in schooling with limited exposure to the stories that would empower her.
imagination because they were only discussed during ‘Negro History Week’ which meant that is the only time she saw her own image reflected in the curriculum. These were the experiences and messages that inspired Ida’s drive towards social justice education; and though she never expected to become a teacher, these same lessons would later provide the inspiration she needed to shift her from a love of learning for self to a pathway into education to inspire others.

Ida’s entry into teaching came much later in her adult years, in the early nineties; in response to a desire to become the same inspiration for Black children she found when she was a child. As Ida tells it, while teaching a commercial acting class to children ages 3-6 years old, one of her Black female students said “I no special.” Ida was floored. Her first inclination was to proclaim, “Sweetheart, yes you are special, you got pretty bows in your hair” to which her student responded, “I no pretty.” Not understanding how this beautiful little Black girl could only be on the planet for three years and already not see value in herself, it was in that moment that Ida made the decision to teach. She recalls, “I went online, researched local teacher education programs, applied, was accepted, and went on to earn my multiple subject and Learning Handicapped (special education) teaching credential; that is what they were calling it back then.” Though Ida entered the profession late in life, she went on to serve in P-12 education for a little over twelve years, teaching first and fifth grades, as well as becoming a district level math coach, before moving into educational leadership. Shattering common narratives implying a lack of teachers with a desire to teach in the nation’s most underserved schools (Ingersoll & May, 2011), Ida made it her point to teach at diverse schools, in diverse settings, in communities codified as urban, including accepting her first position to teach in a non-public alternative program serving youth ages 13-18 and who resided in a residential treatment program. No matter the teaching context, Ida reports she favored a student-centered
teaching approach, made it her goal to develop trusting relationships with students, families, and caregivers, employed a curriculum situated in culturally responsive project-based learning, and always sought to improve her craft by accepting leadership roles that afforded her the opportunity to learn and grow in collaboration with her teaching peers and other school-based colleagues. A few examples include Ida’s work teaching in her district’s Gifted and Talented (GATE) Summer Program, an extended summer opportunity open to a small percentage of students from low performing schools as well as high performing students with GATE designations and situated in a thematic science based curriculum taught collaboratively by a team of cooperating teachers. She also involved her fifth and first grade students in community service work whereby they visited and interviewed elders at adult day care centers at least four times per year, and participated in a teacher-led action research project, sponsored by the National Writing Project (NWP), and focused on improving writing instruction for students’ school wide. These latter two efforts were self-inspired, teacher-led, non-school organized initiatives driven by Ida’s desire to improve her ability to meet the needs of the students she served. I first met Ida teaching in the GATE summer program mentioned, later working with her as a peer and colleague at the same elementary school for four years, including facilitating the NWP sponsored action research project she was a part of, and becoming founding members of a small, informal, non-school/district initiated teacher-led group called Teacher Talk. Through this group, we gathered in informal counter-spaces (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), outside of the school setting with four other peers, all Black women educators, to swap teaching stories, discuss relevant literature, help each other solve teaching problems, and serve as a network of care and support. Ida is reminded of our work together during her interview and names Teacher Talk and our fellowship within it as a source of inspiration and sustenance as she developed her teaching
craft. Ida also laments not having this kind of supportive network as her role shifted from teacher to educational leader, however she also made it a point to share, “Ida B. Wells has always been my mentor and guiding light, that’s who I have pictured on my wall, and she is who I think of when I struggle to find solutions within this profession.” I imagine it is in homage to the spirit of Ida B. Wells that Ida was also inspired to shift her work from classroom teacher to school leader.

Pathway to Leadership. When asked why she decided to pursue educational leadership, Ida explained that her pathway into leadership is wrapped up in her desire to become an expert of something, stating, “I pursued my doctorate because I wanted to know one thing really well.” However, this is only part of Ida’s leadership story. In addition to engaging a thirst for knowledge, Ida also reported a desire to take advantage of a university district partnership offering tuition assistance to those who pursued an administrative credential as the final push. In response to the push, Ida enrolled in a doctoral program at a small historic women’s university located in the middle of her urban district (it is no longer a women’s only institution and the school administration graduate program had always been a co-ed program) and felt it only made sense to also enter her district’s school administration credentialing program. Ida is sure that school leadership was never her primary plan when she enrolled in this program, sharing, “School leadership wasn’t my plan, however, when I did summer school as an administrator in [district name here], I thought that was the best thing in the world. I was later assigned to a school where there were challenges, but it was a great year.”

Ida’s first official leadership experience was as an elementary school (ES) principal within a large school located in a low-income community comprised of K-5 students from a non-majoritarian ethnic background. Ida shares, “My students were mostly Spanish speakers enrolled
in bilingual classes and a small percentage of African American students enrolled in the English only classes.” She describes her time serving as a principal within this school in her own words:

Though I now realize I still don’t know one thing really well, in all of the books and articles I read, people always talked about relationships. Relationships are important, and in my first year at [name of school] establishing relationships with families and teachers made my first year a great experience. There was support because I also met with my executive director and six other principals once a month. We had critical friends [trusted peer or colleague in the education setting who will answer the tough questions and serves as a professional coach and guide], there was a mentorship, and there was pretty much an agenda based on goals set that we were expected to accomplish. All of the supports were in place, so it was a good year. Yet, because the school had been in program improvement, let’s say for over five years, the district office decided to begin involuntarily transferring teachers to be in compliance with NCLB. They weren’t going to change me because I was new to the school but they were going to change the entire teaching staff. There were teachers who had no rights and they didn’t know what was going on, primarily the six new teachers I hired who also did not have tenure. They didn’t know what was going to happen with their futures and they felt alienated because they did not have seniority like the veteran teachers did. The atmosphere was really divisive, so when I got a call from a supervisor from a nearby district saying that Marcus (pseudonym), my executive director, had referred me to them, I took advantage of the opportunity and decided to leave. I decided to leave mostly because I knew I was going to lose the six teachers I had hired. I helped those teachers come along. We had made it to a point in the year when I could see that they were making growth and starting to get it.
Though I felt very connected to the students and families at my first school, I left because of the negative culture caused by program improvement and No Child Left Behind. I had given my newly hired teachers my word and they were being let go and I felt powerless. If nothing had changed, I would have stayed.

It is clear in this description of Ida’s first year as a school leader that she was committed to her leadership, enjoyed her time in leadership at a school within a community often viewed through a deficit lens, and had been situated in a supportive network meant to develop her leadership further while working there. Yet, the program improvement policies situated in 21st century school reform initiatives employed by her district, made it difficult for Ida to engage leadership for social justice in alignment with the commitments she made to the constituencies she had been charged with serving, so rather than compromise her sense of integrity and dignity shaped by these commitments as rooted in her life experiences, Ida leaned into her tenacious spirit, drawn from her historical mentor and figurative namesake Ida B. Wells, choosing to pursue leadership elsewhere instead. During her interview, Ida makes it clear that it was not the children, the faculty and staff, the parents or the community that caused her to leave, nor was her departure indicative of her pay, deplorable conditions, or a toxic school environment, at least not a toxic environment caused by the income level of her students and their families, to the contrary, the human beings within her building and the surrounding community, are the only reason she was able to make it through the year. Instead, she was pushed out by district level policies and practices beyond her control, rendering her leadership, voice, and Black female body marginal, invisible, and oppositional to both her district and her spirit as a social justice leader. When I asked Ida why she felt her executive director Marcus, an African American male, had recommended her to what would become her second district in two years of leadership, she
explained that he recognized her potential and bearing witness to her discontent, wanted her to lead in a setting where her talents, and she would be valued. When asked, Marcus agreed to provide the required recommendation at a time most crucial to her development as a school leader, and she was afforded a second opportunity to maintain her dignity, sustain a sense of integrity, and lead with professional ethics by advancing leadership for social justice in a new school and district.

Upon leaving her school and district after just one year of service in educational leadership, Ida moved on to lead a small K-5 ES located in a middle-class community, in a neighboring but smaller district, and serving a racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse student body. She remained in this setting for much longer, four years to be exact. Just like with her first school, Ida speaks of finding respite and joy when allowed to lead by cultivating and nurturing trusting relationships with the students, families, caregivers, and teachers she had been charged with serving. When obstacles and challenges prevented her from doing so, she was not afraid to re-evaluate her role in educational leadership and make changes to maintain her integrity as a student-centered leader with a goal of employing distributive leadership. Ida describes her shift from her second to third and final leadership position in this way:

When I went to [name of new district] there were seven ES and we met once a week but the difference was that I was the leader of the school that had the lowest achievement. Maybe there was one other. If you can imagine, I felt like a baby elephant trying to blend in the room where my school of low achievers did not belong. I kept wondering if that was why when I spoke up, I felt like an outcast. Being in these meetings were some of the worst times I spent in that district. Maybe it was the sixth year when I decided I wasn’t going to talk in meetings anymore. I got tired of expressing my perspectives as an
African American leader whose opinions and ideas were never acknowledged unless repeated or validated by one of my white peers. Previously, I used to wonder why the only other African American female leader never spoke up or joined the discussion. I used to think, “Why doesn’t she ever say anything?” and then I began to understand and I said, “Oh, because your contribution or your thoughts are not acknowledged or they are only acknowledged if somebody else repeats them in whatever way” I mean they can say those same words and then people go “Hmmm.” So, you know you don’t get the recognition, not that I need the applause but you don’t feel like you are part of the conversation because what you bring to the table is not valued. I began to feel comfortable with being invisible as a leader in this district, even though I had great relationships with my students, teachers, families, and communities. My parents were really active and we were making great strides, but those things weren’t valued and neither was I as a principal of a low performing school that I inherited.

Ida’s recognition of colorblind racism and its impact on her ability to engage agency and voice as a leader also describes the reason she moved from her second district and school, and no longer wanted to be a principal, so she took a position as a district coordinator instead. However, after a year of serving at the district level, Ida missed working with students and families and re-evaluated her options. This led to her third position as a principal, where she enjoyed two years of service. In this position, Ida proclaims that she followed the shining light left by her figurative namesake, Ida B. Wells, by focusing her leadership on the needs of the children and families she served, including committing herself to doing right by them which she defines as engaging the kind of leadership that allows her to be a
collaborative decision maker, seeking ways to build on teacher’s strengths, engage students in leadership and avenues for recognition, develop positive relationships with families by visiting communities and supporting family oriented assemblies centered in their ways of knowing, providing a focus on the cultural and linguistic backgrounds represented in the school, and providing professional development opportunities for staff to specifically incorporate contemporary and historical perspectives of the students being served.

**Engaging a Social Justice Agenda.** Working towards the social justice agenda she defines above, Ida reports that she always put the children at the center of every decision, considering their needs, hopes, and desires for their future above all else. She also professed that she takes special notice of the way Black children and their families are treated, especially Black boys, because as Ida shares,

Too often, when Black boys display the same negative behavior as white boys, the Black boys are accused of being deviant and pathological and will probably end up in jail. While the white boys are accused of making a mistake, a poor choice that can be rectified by reinforcing school rules.

Knowing and bearing witness to this differential treatment, Ida expresses a protective affinity for Black children and their families, sharing how she goes the extra mile to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to better recognize Black children in the classroom and ensuring they don’t become statistics pushed out of classrooms and into her office space on a regular basis. She reflects,

I shared how I got into education and seeing that little Black girl, along with stories and poems by adolescent boys I taught while working in a juvenile hall one summer, I just
feel that leadership is my moral purpose. It’s more so looking at how are you responsive to the people in front of you. When I want to have change come about or when I want educators to understand something I share student interviews, surveys, and their writing. I want educators to hear the voice of the students and the impact school is having on their lives.

For Ida, hearing the voice of the children includes hearing the voices of their families and their lived experiences. As illuminated in her statement, she often engages her moral stance to leadership by creating opportunities to build relationships with students, especially her Black students. Through these relationships she is able to cultivate the power within them by creating opportunities for them to share their voices and experiences with others, including their teachers. This sharing of voice and experience comes through video-taped interviews that Ida has conducted with students surrounding equity issues apparent on the school campus. Ida asks for student voice on how to solve the issues and is intent on including these ‘heart stories’ situated in her students’ experiences as part of the problem-posing narrative. She reflects,

I think I read something about when you want change, it’s often about what appeals to people emotionally. They don’t necessarily change because of the knowledge or because they are being more rational, they change because something appeals to the heart, so when I am in a leadership role, I am the person that tries to see who is in front of me and what is my role in not just helping them academically but also socio-emotionally and helping them with whatever strengths they have.

By tapping into student voice and sharing their experiences through counter narrative heart stories, Ida hopes to help teachers see their full humanity; she also hopes to tap into the humanity inherent in her teachers helping them to push the school’s moral arc towards justice as
well. Ida describes this strategy when discussing how she addresses Black students, especially Black boys being pushed out of the classroom, as well as other equity challenges, including test-taking. In her mind, helping teachers understand how students feel when they are pushed out of school or have to take high stakes tests many feel they are unprepared to take opens their eyes to multiple perspectives, shifting the ways in which students and their families are perceived and engaged within the school.

When asked directly how she engages a social justice agenda, Ida shares that she views social justice as an avenue for equitable access to education for all students and as such engages leadership to help students and the professional staff she works with understand the differences that show up in humanity by

acknowledging and using students’ diverse historical, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds to introduce them to factors that have traditionally denied equal access to human rights but also includes ways for students to question, research, and address inequities that affect their lives.

This belief is evident in the actions Ida takes to make a difference within her school community.

**Making a difference.** One way that Ida makes a difference is by working intentionally to eliminate barriers for the HMMS that she serves. As she states,

I am doing what I can to eliminate the barriers that many refuse to see but that we have a responsibility to look for as we care for the whole child. The barriers are a huge issue for me and I believe it comes from the era where we are in right now, you know, that same old philosophy about pulling yourself up from your bootstraps, and the more you try hard and become American, you have access.
She rolls her eyes when she completes the last part of her statement and it is apparent that Ida is offering a critique of the myth of meritocracy apparent in the language of pulling oneself up by the bootstraps. It is also apparent that Ida is engaging a critical race lens, critically aware of what Derek Bell (1991) terms racial realism and invoking an argument that posits the salience and import of race as operational in all segments of society, including in institutions like the U.S. P-12 schools that Ida leads, resulting in barriers and inequities that make it virtually impossible for the children and families she serves to ‘pull themselves up by the bootstraps’. In this regard, it is clear that Ida takes her words seriously when she says she works hard to eliminate barriers. Her work to tutor students who lack literacy skills after hours, on her personal time, and without monetary compensation, including during summer months provide one example of how Ida puts her words into action. Ida also works to ensure her parents, especially parents who speak languages other than English, thereby locked out of communication networks, receive honest and accurate information to make educated decisions about their child’s education. This includes serving on district and community based committees to remain aware of area and district politics and policy and to communicate these things to families through a weekly community newsletter that Ida spends countless hours on Sunday evenings preparing. She also makes every attempt to ensure the newsletter is translatable into her students’ first languages.

Ida feels it is also important for families and parents to have a place and voice at the table where important educational decisions are being made, which is why she makes a concerted effort to listen to what they have to say and speak their truth whenever put in the position to do so. As she puts it, “We have these ridiculous school site goals that talk about eliminating the barriers but if you speak about eliminating the barriers without talking to the families, students, teachers, and children, you are just recreating the system.” Throughout Ida’s leadership, it is
clear that voice and representation are important. Employing her critical race lens to ensure HMMS and their families have both are important to Ida in terms of making a difference. Yet, Ida’s most important way of making a difference is simply through the relationships that she builds with her students and families. This shows up in the little things, like making it a point to learn all 500+ of her students names and going above and beyond to not only recognize them but to also know something about them on sight, or showing up at non-school sponsored student events on the weekends and just because she cares, or taking time to create scrapbooks which she personally mails to families with photos and personalized captions describing students engaging in the learning process at school. These are the ways Ida leverages her unique subjectivities and multicultural perspectives to show care for her students, families, and communities, especially HMMS. It is a leadership that undoubtedly makes a difference in the lives of her students and one appreciated as is evident by the relationships Ida maintains with her students and their families long after they have completed formal school and transitioned into their adult lives.

**Continuing to Lead as Resilience and Resistance.** Today, Ida is no longer serving as a school principal. Once again engaging her agency to re-evaluate her options, Ida made the decision to retire from P-12 education and re-enter the field in higher education. She now works to develop teachers and aspiring school leaders. I imagine that she engages this work much like she engaged school leadership and if there were one phrase to describe why and how Ida is an educator who engages leadership as resilience and resistance it would be captured in this one simple phrase, *she leads for the children and she does so to right the wrongs by turning the light of truth upon them!*

**Angela**

We have to talk about liberating minds, as well as liberating society.
I am no longer accepting the things I can’t change; I am changing the things I can’t accept.

~ Angela Davis

**Education as Expectation.** If it is as political activist Angela Davis says and radical simply means grasping things at the root (Davis, 2000) then it is no wonder that grabbing things by their root and changing the things she can’t accept is exactly how Angela chooses to lead.

Showing up in the interview space personality on fire and figurative fist raised high was how I might describe Angela’s entry, and though I had known her long before this interview, seeing her through different eyes, I was almost compelled to raise my fist back and shout in that rhythmic call and response that you are sure to find in Angela’s Black Baptist church, “Let the church say amen!” While it may have been her bubbly personality, dimpled smile and friendly demeanor that immediately drew me in, it was soon apparent that she has a more serious critical side backed up by a determined spirit intent on acting as if it were impossible to radically transform the world (Davis, 1988) that hooked me. It is in this spirit, and drawing on the opening quotes profoundly shared by Angela’s chosen namesake and historical mentor, Dr. Angela Davis, that Angela engaged our interview. It was also the spirit within which we reflected on and talked about her unique brand of BWEL leadership in the interview space. As a result of our discussion, I learned why Angela leads as if failure is not an option as well as how she works to change the things she cannot accept.

Angela grew up just outside of the capital city in her large west coast state. She came of age within a quaint middle class suburb, filled with African American families, characterized by stay-at-home moms, and fathers who made a good living given the moderate education most received. Though Angela maintains a close relationship with each of the women in her family,
she cites her father as her strongest inspiration. She also attributes her serious fiery side to her Dad, admitting,

One of the most important people that shaped my personality was my Dad. He didn’t take no mess from nobody but he knew his stuff and he was still a kind person. Sometimes he couldn’t be nice but he was a kind person, so I think he shaped a lot of who I am now, including how I am. Even though he was only around for 18 of my years, even my aunt always says I am just like my dad. He was really reflective and he took advantage of a lot of opportunities that came his way as well as to better himself. So do I.

Angela’s father passed away just as she was coming into her womanhood but it is obvious each time she speaks of him that he indeed shaped her viewpoint of the world, including her determination to speak her truth in order to change it, and to do so without being deterred by or afraid of broaching subjects or situations that others might not feel comfortable exploring.

She reflects,

I grew up with people always saying be nice, be nice but he (her father) helped me to understand that I don’t have to be nice, but I do have to be kind. Being nice to somebody is denying who I am and my feelings and what I want to do, making me have to negotiate the way I want to do things and sometimes giving up parts of myself. However, when I am kind, I’m still going to be me and express my feelings and try to do so in a respectful way but I’m not going to deny who I am or my feelings or stop accomplishing what I want to do.

Like her father, being kind, never nice, is what Angela does. In fact, she is grateful for these lessons shared through her father’s life because as she puts it, they and he, encouraged and
inspired her to live life for a purpose beyond her own happiness, birthing her social justice orientation. According to Angela, it was also her father who fed her dream to attend college even as she would be the first in her family to do so. Thanks to his inspiration, Angela applied to, attended, and eventually graduated from The University of California at Davis (UCD). Not having much support in terms of understanding what it would take to successfully matriculate through college, Angela found her way to and through UCD anyway. Recognizing early on that she made it through college the hard way, learning what to do as she went, Angela committed herself to using the lessons she learned as inspiration to give back to the community that she feels gave so much to her. Today, this is exactly what Angela does as an educator. As such, she engages her life framed in the mantra– “Power to the people!” This mantra ignites a fire in her to engage her work as a leader with a goal to help the people in her home community see the power they have within. Angela’s journey into teaching in the city where she grew up was also inspired by this mantra and hope.

When asked how she entered teaching, with confident humility Angela shares that she never really wanted to be a teacher, she actually wanted to be a pediatrician or a child psychologist but because she struggled with science and math she finally found her way to education. Her entry, seemingly incidental, is now viewed as divine timing. She remembers it this way:

I went with this girl to the College of Education lab (at UCD) and it was nothing like I had ever seen. This was really project-based and interest-based learning for children and so I just fell in love with it. I actually became a work-study student there and it just kind of happened. I always say it was God who did it because it just kind of fell in my lap. As I started to substitute teach there, that turned into something more, then I worked there
for two years and one of the directors I worked for was opening an early childhood clinical facility for women and they thought I would be a perfect fit to work there with the children.

As described, Angela’s story is not unlike many of the other BWEL in this study in that her entry into teaching is perceived as a calling. For Angela, this divine timing experience, combined with the support of those around her who recognized her potential, including a woman leader of color (Latinx) who soon became her mentor and friend, served as more inspiration to pursue her formal credentials in education, eventually going on to enjoy a successful career teaching and leading in various P-12 spaces. She was also moved to take her leadership into higher education where she still teaches classes for local community college students preparing for a career in early education.

**Pathway to Leadership.** When asked how she moved from teaching to leadership, Angela leans into her fiery disposition, embracing the definition of leadership engaged in this study, and pushing back on the question, which implies teaching is not leadership. Rebuking such a notion, Angela confidently states,

I have been in education professionally since 1990, so 27 years, and I consider myself being an educational leader for all of those 27 years. I think I started out actually as an educational leader working at UCD. I was asked to be a head teacher, an emergency head teacher at the children’s center and usually it was reserved for people who are getting their master’s degree but I wasn’t getting my master’s degree at the time, I wound up working there for two years.

As Angela goes on to recount, due to her work ethic, connection with and care for children, and her fiery but kind personality, she was asked to take on a more formal teaching role
and eventually became the head teacher of the entire department allowing her to stay on well beyond her program of study. Given this was prior to current day regulations requiring certifications to perform such duties, Angela took on this position without a formal license. As she states,

"I think about it now and I think one of the big things they saw is that relationship piece that I had with students. I was working well with families and the children and I think that was the big piece as well as my knowledge base that I had from my early childhood education background."

Loving her work at the children’s center and recognizing that if she could do the job well without a master’s degree then she should probably go on and complete those studies, Angela eventually pursued her master’s and as shared previously, now engages the work of supporting the development of others pursuing work in early childhood as adjunct faculty in higher education. She feels she has always been supported through her work in leadership, primarily by ELOC in positions of power who were willing to open up leadership pathways for her as well. As Angela tells it, from the African-American male superintendent who encouraged her and pushed her into leadership positions, to the African American female principal who saw something in her and noted she needed to be moved into positions where she could play a bigger part, she was supported. She expresses gratitude for having these pivotal leaders throughout her career who recognized the diverse experiences she brought to her leadership as a BWEL and who were not afraid of her willingness to talk about race or to raise issues that needed to be discussed because they would result in actions that “are just right for everyone.” In her own words when asked why she felt she received such support from those around her, she answers,
I think people have seen something in me or thought that I would be good for that position and that what has happened is there have been opportunities that have been put in my path, or even me just thinking I want to challenge myself and not being afraid to do it. I think that's how I got into educational leadership. Even when I was at my second job in education, working with chemically dependent women and children, I was conducting parenting classes for the county, I was going into the jail, the Community Jail and I was helping with HIV and AIDS Outreach. Now that I think about it, a part of it was that I am a risk taker and I wanted to make things better. I think that's part of it too.

Given Angela’s ability to develop relationships within her community and her drive to make a difference in the lives of others, especially through educational outreach, as well as her willingness to take risk to do so, she received the support she needed to enter teaching as a BWEL, choosing to engage her leadership with a commitment to her mantra, ‘Power to the People’ and ultimately towards advancing a social justice agenda.

**Engaging a Social Justice Agenda.** In addition to her work in early education, Angela also has a special place in her heart for matters connected with literacy and language development, particularly as situated in ensuring that all students have equitable access to resources and services providing these things. An expressed servant leader able to see the big picture but who is not too high and mighty to get in the trenches when needed, Angela reconfirms her promise to make the hard decisions necessary to ensure that she opens up doors that were once opened to her when she was a child growing up in her community. For example, Angela fights tirelessly as a district level instructional leader to ensure that teachers and educators understand how to develop culturally responsive curriculum to deliver to students from
diverse linguistic backgrounds, even as she recognizes the disparities in the education afforded them in comparison to their white and dominant English speaking counterparts. Angela shares it best when she explains,

I think that one of the big things that I love doing is to empower students and families so they are better able to navigate the education system and life systems that they have to go through. For example, on Tuesday one of my students (college students) asked me after class what she could do for her son. So, I sat down with her for about fifteen or twenty minutes after class and I shared things I felt she needed to know and do given her situation. Based on my own experiences in schools, I told her questions she would need to ask and what to expect to hear when talking to teachers and administrators on her son’s behalf. I’ve always told my students they need to make sure that I am doing what I need to do for them to learn, because it is important for me to walk the talk of what I am teaching. I feel the same way about the teachers I work with, including the future early childhood teachers I help prepare and support as they develop. They need to prepare other people’s children with the skills they need to be successful and wherever they go they should be ready for parents to ask them the hard questions. This is why I help parents understand how to ask the hard questions. They don’t always know the questions they should be asking because of language barriers so I tell them so that they can get the answers that they should be getting and I want them to know that they can use this information if they move on from me and my class. I want to empower parents so that they get what they need for their child so their child is successful and can move on in spite of language barriers, and I want to prepare future teachers so they give students and parents what they need for the same reasons.
In advancing justice for parents, Angela also recognizes the discrepancies in treatment of students due to policies like high stakes testing, subjective grading, and no tolerance policies. Focusing on policies that push students of color out of classrooms within the school spaces she inhabits, she speaks of the need to prepare teachers to better manage classrooms in more inclusive ways and has committed herself to building culturally responsive practices into the professional development sessions she develops and facilitates, sometimes even without being asked. When asked about other ways such policies impact her leadership, Angela replied,

I cry. I really cry. I am strong but I cry sometimes. Then, I talk it out with my friends and I keep talking about it until I get things changed. Sometimes I ask hard questions or bring it up as reflective questions or I use the cognitive coaching training I had with people about the issues. When nothing is done with district leaders and they say they will get back to you on that, that’s frustrating so I just keep bringing it up until it gets changed.

Angela’s relentless efforts to engage the kind of leadership that refuses to accept that change cannot happen, making change happen instead, is also revealed in her discussion on how she makes a difference.

Making a Difference. Ever the ball of positive energy, Angela seeks to live out every inch of every word of her mantra, ‘Power to the People,’” evidenced by her grassroots like approach to leadership. For example: she volunteers at her children’s schools often serving as a critical friend to other parents of HMMS without the insider’s knowledge she has about how school’s work; she accompanies family friends to parent meetings making sure she asks the right questions to ensure their children receive the services to which they are entitled, she attends city council and neighborhood watch meetings making sure the community is safe for the children
who live there; she works tirelessly to shed light on inequities in school systems and speaks out loudly and boldly even when others are afraid to engage the conversation; she advocates for parents rights attending PTA meetings, takes the initiative to go to family engagement conferences to fill in gaps where her knowledge and skills are not where she’d hope they would be; and she trumpets her number one cause which is ensuring that early childhood educators and the educational services they provide are not overlooked when educational resources, programs, and services are being considered. In addition to these things, she serves on several committees in her church, volunteers for the PTA in each of her two biological children’s schools, engages advocacy work through her neighborhood watch, and trumpets the causes and products of entrepreneurial efforts engaged by local small business owners and community friends. And this is all in addition to her formal role as an instructional leader within her district. Finally, she consults as an early childhood literacy specialist for her state’s regional professional development center, virtually giving her three career pathways to engage her mantra professionally.

**Continuing to Lead as Resilience and Resistance.** Hoping to make a difference, Angela’s professional and personal record demonstrates she maintains the sense of urgency that she entered educational leadership with some 27 years ago. She is committed to continuing her fight for equity and justice in education, much like all of the other women in the study. When support is not readily available from her district, she relies on the steady support of her family, extended family of friends, and the mentoring offered her by women leaders of color who recognize her potential and passion when others mistake it for something else. As she notes, “I am not afraid to kick the pink elephant in the middle of the room and it is soon clear that she means every one of those words, emphasis on *‘Power to the People!’*”
Althea Nelson

She has given her best so that others may live more abundantly.

~ In honor of Mary McLeod Bethune

**Education as Expectation.** Standing at 5 foot 3 inches, wrapped in caramel colored skin, and dressed impeccably, Althea Nelson is stunning. She strikes just the right balance of warmth and serious intensity, making a conversation with her comforting, even as it is equally formative. At 49 years old, Althea came of age during the 90’s, growing up in one of the most diverse cities in the country and attending college at California State University Northridge. She grew up an only child under the guidance of a collection of strong Black women (her mother, grandmother, aunts, teachers, church leaders, etc.), who served as living role models of what it means to be a Black woman leader. They also taught her to value education.

Despite deficit laden narratives of urban communities full of homes with absent fathers and single mothers and depicting children who have grown up in these homes as deficient and in need of care and love, Althea reports that growing up in her family, with such strong Black women role models to love her, she always felt cared for and never felt that she wasn’t wanted or loved. To the contrary, she always knew she was loved, and through her watchful eyes and observatory nature, her family also taught her how to show love for and find love within others as well. As Althea remembers it, even when conflicts ensued and times were particularly tough, her mother and grandmother remained calm, never giving up, never passing judgement, and always avoiding the drama. Althea attributes her ability to lead through conflict, and to do so without losing her calm, to her time spent in the loving space of her grandmother’s home, the place where these lessons were first learned. She recalls her time spent in grandmother’s home with these words:
I spent a lot of time with my grandmother because my mother was a young mother and she had to work. We would watch Johnny Carson and her soaps [dramatic daytime television shows] and she would just show me through her actions how not to dwell on the negatives because there are bigger problems in the world. I saw how when she or my mother faced problems, they just never let it stop them. They remained calm and just dealt with it. They kept pushing and they just did what they had to do. In some ways I think that is why I am that way today. People always say how calm I am at school. They comment on how I never appeared to let things rattle me. I think it is because of my grandmother and my mother. They just did what they had to do. There was no time to dwell on the negativity or drama.

According to Althea, these first role models of Black womanhood also taught her to put God first, as well as to get a good education. Other lessons they taught included surrounding herself with good people, and to always aspire to be her best which for her translated into working hard, never giving up, always putting her best foot forward no matter the task, and being sure to do well with the life she was given. Accomplishing each of these things was never in question. They were expectations learned as a result of growing up within her family, and nurtured through lived experiences afforded her while attending diverse schools and learning how to navigate the urban terrain comprising her home city. She remembers this time:

I am an only child so when I was growing up I would characterize myself as pretty precocious. I was mature, so I didn’t succumb to peer pressure like most; I always found myself being willing to stand alone and take risk. For example, I joined the newspaper, or I surrounded myself with all kinds of students with different interests and from different backgrounds. My school was primarily made up of African American and
Latinx students, but we had other mixes as well. I guess in retrospect, I probably am a natural leader, in the sense of taking risk, stepping out, and just doing things differently.

Althea is proud of her ability to take risk and do things differently. It is why after graduating from college when she found herself with no job and unsure about what would come next, she relied on her calm nature and unshakable faith, jumped on a plane, returned home to her roots, and followed her mom’s advice to pursue the one profession she had forgotten she ever wanted to pursue. Though Althea tried denying her love for school and teaching, she reports she always wanted to be a teacher. In her words, “I guess like most kids, I played school as a child, but as I got older I sort of let that dream go.” She is unsure why or how her dream to teach ever got lost, but she is clear about where it all began and when she found it again. “I would go visit my aunt’s classroom in Texas and I would help her set up her classroom and I think that was a huge influence and I probably had a longing to be a teacher because of that.” This yearning to become a teacher eventually became Althea’s reality when she made the decision to follow her mother’s advice, reaching out to an Independent School located next door to the retirement facility she worked at during high school. One phone call and an interview later, Althea was hired. She recalls,

I was hired pretty much on the spot that day so I guess it’s just fate; I guess I was really lucky that I landed there without a lot of effort so I’d say things seemed to run smoothly and fell into place easily.

Some might call this divine timing, a calling so to speak. No matter the inspiration, Althea is certain that teaching was what she was purposed to do. Once she decided that teaching would be her life’s work, Althea did what she learned growing up, took a risk, and put forth the effort to enter a credentialing program at a local faith-based university. Soon after, she became a
licensed teacher assigned to teach kindergarten in a small urban school serving a majority African American student population. Though assigned to her own classroom, Althea admits she was working on a temporary license, primarily because she struggled to pass the required assessments to clear her credential. Even with her struggles, Althea was not deterred. She always believed in her ability to pass the required tests, despite narratives meant to convince her she couldn’t, so once again leaning on her faith, remembering the lessons she learned in her grandmother’s home, and engaging the work ethic she developed as a child because of it, she took a risk, opened herself up to the loving support she continued to receive from the same collection of Black women who supported her through her formative years, and worked even harder, doing what it took to get the job done. She passed the test. As she puts it, “I struggled to pass that assessment and my back was against the wall but in my mind I had invested so much time and money that I just persevered and finally met that requirement.” Althea worked for 9 years as a successful classroom teacher after passing the required tests and clearing her credential. At the end of her nine years, and supported by her village of strong Black women, she officially entered her district’s leadership pathway, and like with growing up, her journey as a teacher moving into leadership was undertaken with the calming resolve to give her best to the children she had been inspired to serve. Had she listened to the narratives propagated by hegemony, the ones teaching her that by virtue of where and how she grew up she shouldn’t be expected to succeed, it is likely that she would have missed the opportunities that nine years as a successful classroom teacher provided, so too would have the children, families, and communities she served, including those she served as she transitioned into her formal roles as an educational leader.
Pathway to Leadership. According to Althea, the village of strong Black women supporting her into leadership included: the same village that raised her, professional peers she entered the profession with; school and district leaders who saw her potential and offered mentoring to support her growth, colleagues on site with whom she collaborated, licensed professionals from other schools, and her own school leader who recognized her potential and created leadership opportunities to help develop her capacity. Of course others who were not Black women supported her efforts as well, but according to Althea, it was her school leader, a well-respected BWEL in the district within which she worked, who is most responsible for her entry into her district’s leadership pathway. Althea demonstrates a noticeable admiration for her previous school leader and mentor when she speaks of her, describing her as a hard-working leader who was highly visible, always professional, someone who kept her composure even when faced with challenges, and who maintained the confidentiality of everyone on staff only sharing what was needed to maintain a collaborative upbeat spirit within the school. These traits are recognizable in Althea’s approach to leadership as well. When asked how she moved from teaching to educational leadership, Althea remarks,

I’d say the opportunity found me. My principal at the time, she saw something in me. It was in about my seventh year of teaching and she suggested I apply for an administrator partnership program being offered through the district and a local university.

Althea’s principal provided the guidance and support to help her successfully navigate the program’s application process, including providing her with the recommendation she needed to be accepted into the leadership cohort. She was accepted and that began her pathway into educational leadership. Althea’s principal continued to support her throughout her journey, including serving as a critical friend during Althea’s 14 years in the work. Even after Althea’s
principal retired, they maintained a close friendship. As told by Althea, her former principal and other women leaders of color providing her support were pivotal to her success as an educational leader, and critical to her receiving the culturally responsive care and support she needed to sustain herself as she navigated her leadership career, which includes serving one year as a literacy coach, one year as an assistant principal, and twelve years as a principal of a U.S. P-12 ES.

**Engaging a Social Justice Agenda.** Though Althea was one of the least likely of the eight participating BWEL to explicitly discuss race and racism when reflecting on her work in educational leadership, preferring to remain cautiously thoughtful before critiquing institutional practices along racialized and gendered lines, it is clear that her leadership is rooted in a social justice agenda. Preferring the title servant leader, primarily because of her deep spiritual roots, Althea describes her leadership as “very caring and conscientious, situational probably.” When asked about issues of race, racism, and oppression directly, she marinates on her response before answering, demonstrating her reflective nature, as well as her propensity to remain calm and consider every angle and perspective before jumping to any one conclusion. As she puts it, “I think deeply about the implications of my words and decisions.” Part measured, always sincere, never calculating, Althea’s reflective nature and ability to think through a situation serves her well. Specifically, she relies on these things when grappling with issues she is most passionate about, like the site-based challenges that surface around teaching, learning, and black children. Specifically, Althea expresses concern with the differential treatment some black students receive, especially surrounding the discipline of Black boys. In her experience, she explains how “students from other races don’t get penalized for the same things that Black boys do.” She readily notes, “For Black students, their behaviors are more magnified, especially around
discipline and especially for Black boys.” Yet, instead of jumping to conclusions and accusing teachers of engaging racist practices when Black children show up in her office, Althea’s response refutes popular claims of BWEL as angry Black women ready to play the proverbial ‘race card’ each time a situation ensues, preferring instead to employ the observatory and reflective approach first. Leaning on her ability to consider multiple perspectives, she shares that she first began by checking her own biases. In her words,

Even when I was working through a problem with kids, checking my own biases was important. For example, I think I can be harsher with the boys or sometimes I was stricter with girls and more lenient with some of the boys. I had to remain aware of this. Race was definitely an issue for sure because I felt like people often had it out for Black kids and because they were the minority at my school and they’re such a small number I just always sort of looked from afar at how adults were responding to them. For example, I would ask myself: what reason are they being sent to my office; is this really about race at all; what was the child doing; and what caused it to happen. I would also consider what happened before and after a situation, trying to determine if this was a pattern. I really had to focus on helping the child rather than putting my finger on the adult, yet, based on my observations, I’d say on a scale of one to ten, with ten being of high concern, the race factor when dealing with Black kids was a ten. Sometimes people were able to keep things in check, but being reflective, I started to wonder if it was because I was Black that people were able to keep things in check.

Though hesitant to name race as a factor in her leadership, this statement makes it clear that Althea is aware of the prevalence of race in the everyday fabric of society (Bell, 1992), including how it showed up in her teachers and school. Observation and reflection wasn’t
Althea’s only approach to grappling with matters of race. Even with her reserved nature, she also took action. Sometimes action meant engaging difficult conversations with staff, sharing with them the critical importance of disproportionality in discipline matters, and reminding them of their moral responsibility to protect the civil rights of all kids. Other times, it meant modeling restorative practices for teachers, staff, and parents so they could see first-hand what she meant when she asked them to help students work through problems. Althea expressed being grateful for her district’s focus on restorative practices and embraced it and the services and resources that came with when grappling with racial disparities in discipline occurring in her school. Ultimately, Althea reports that she relied on the strength of the trusting relationships she worked to build with her faculty and staff in order to make her school a safe place to tackle the tough issues, including those rooted in disproportionality, civil rights, and race. Though Althea committed herself to this work, she did not go so far as to explicitly name it as racism and social justice, instead stating,

I guess I heard my pastor say the word racial fatigue and talk about how he was tired of educating people on these issues and I can see how being in higher education can be difficult and make one tired of having to help people understand, I don’t have quite those experiences.

This statement represented the many ways Althea distanced herself from a direct conversation surrounding race in our interviews, making it clear she was not willing to sit mired in victim-based discourse, even as she recognized the racialized nature of the experiences she and her students, especially HMMS were forced to confront. Additionally, even as she claimed not having to grapple with matters connected to race and social justice, Althea also continued to speak up about the inequities situated in these things. Her commitment to confronting these
problems before they became obstacles for her Black students is evidence of her ability to engage a critical race lens, willingness to engage a social justice agenda, and foreshadows the ways in which she performs leadership to make a difference.

**Making a Difference.** Wrapped in a desire to make a difference in the lives of children, and remembering the lessons she learned as a young girl growing up, Althea worked hard to develop a school environment that everyone could be proud of. For example, when the leadership situations she grappled with were challenging and controversial, including those situated in race and racism, she employed ACL (Santamaria, 2014). She did so by developing relationships built on trust, including getting to know her students, teachers, families, and professional staff intimately, and valuing all that they brought to the school, in spite of their differences, to engage them in reflection and dialogue about the issues that arose. Althea recognized that this was not a typical approach to leadership, noting,

> I think what is often overlooked is my ability to have a broad sense of empathy because of challenges that Black people have come through and continue to go through. If I sense overt racism, even if coming from another person of color, I can identify with that because of the similarities in experiencing that in my own life, and me not being white. I am not sure that this is understood or valued, even sometimes from people of color – they don’t understand that we (BWEL) have empathy for all kinds of discrimination and that this profound sense of empathy is because of our experiences.”

In response to this realization, Althea reports that as a woman of color in leadership, she often carries the load of not being valued and works really hard to overcompensate for what others miss seeing in her. Though steeped in stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995), a term Althea never brings up, she attributes this knowledge to more lessons she learned while growing

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up, especially the one that taught her she had to be ten times better than her white counterparts to get ahead. She remarks,

As a woman of color I carry this extra need to work so hard and so I do. I work so hard, and so much, and I don’t feel that white people really have to work as hard as I do and I am not sure where this comes from.

As expressed in this statement, as well as throughout the data collection for this study, Althea does work hard. She may not explicitly situate her hard work in the theoretical construct known as stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995), codified by a fear of confirming negative stereotypes about one’s group, in Althea’s case Black people, resulting in a need to overcompensate through action to ensure the stereotype is not actualized, in Althea’s case working harder to avoid being called inadequate or lazy, but her statement reveals that she is absolutely aware of the extra tax she lives with, simply as a result of living within her Black female body. She also expressed an understanding that her hard work is about more than fear of being viewed as lazy, it is also about the pride she takes in being excellent at what she does, a sentiment situated in self-pride and the pride that she has represented her family and those relying on her to carry the legacy of family and community forward well. In her mind, this purpose goes beyond race and racism and is more about leading with integrity and for a cause greater than herself. Due to this knowledge, and because she is committed to social justice, Althea’s hard work showed up in efforts to show care for the kids and their families she serves, including making sure she asked about and supported them as human beings. It also presents in the ways she engages her professional staff, making a point to reach out to them on a daily basis so they understood how important they were to her, as well as to the school environment. Althea’s hard work showed up in a myriad of other ways, including remaining attentive to
Creating pathways of leadership for her teachers and staff so they were better able to develop to their full potential, thereby serving students better, personalizing the support she gave to those she supervised, making her interactions with them situational and steeping it in culturally responsive care (Roberts, 2010) and remembering to have consideration for those who supervised her, working hard to refrain from asking her own supervisors for help until she had exhausted all avenues of support on her own first, because in Althea’s mind, support was only required when one couldn’t complete a task on their own, no matter how complex or difficult. Though also a form of stereotype threat, Althea’s work ethic was a source of pride, allowing her to engage leadership in ways that made a difference for the community she was charged with serving, while helping her to temper her own biases to ensure that she multi-tasked in ways that everyone’s needs were met. In this way, Althea feels she created a space for students to be themselves so they would learn to question and push back on policies and practices that weren’t right or equitable for them, and because she did so, Althea engaged leadership to make a difference.

**Continuing to Lead as Resilience and Resistance.** While Althea shares that her last 7 years as a school leader proved particularly challenging, she also hopes that she continues to have really positive educators and mentors around her – mom, family, aunt, and many people professionally and plans to continue her charge to lead. This past year Althea made the difficult decision to leave her role as school leader. Yet, not giving up on her commitment to advance social justice within the contested spaces of U.S. P-12 education, and wanting to do so by having meaningful impact on policies and practices impacting Black children, as well as those least served by the current educational climate, she now serves as a BWEL in a neighboring district. She now serves as a district coordinator and is charged with developing and managing programs
for the district’s student support services division, including coaching and mentoring school-based leaders to ensure they develop equitable teaching and learning spaces for all students. She reports that she loves her new position and will draw on the support she has enjoyed over her career as an educational leader. She also shares she will need this support to help buffer the challenging experiences she is sure to have, and that she will continue to learn from these experiences so she can grow and become a better leader. She closes our exchange together in reflection, calmly sharing, “I hope that the people I served and will serve in the future feel they are valued and appreciated.” I imagine she leaves me with these words because ultimately, Althea engaged her work in leadership to make an impact and create change towards a better education and world for all students, especially HMMS, and she has done so by giving her best so that others may live more abundantly.

Joy

Joy is portable, bring it with you.

~Unknown

Education as Expectation. From the moment Joy entered the space at the San Antonio Convention Center during the AERA conference in April of 2017, I knew she was someone I would love getting to know. At 5’6”, with a mocha brown complexion, stunning smile, and jubilant disposition, talking with Joy came easy. In fact, it almost felt like we had been friends forever, and yet, we had only just met. Perhaps it was her positive outlook, or maybe it was her engaging demeanor that hooked me, but whatever the case, I felt right at home, and so we dived into critical reflection and dialogue with each of us learning so much more about each other, including what it means for Joy to lead advancing a social justice agenda.

During our time together I learned that Joy’s journey into teaching and educational leadership is also attributed to divine intervention. Like Ida, Althea and Angela, continuing her
education was never a question. As she tells it, she was always expected to succeed in school and a college education was a critical part of that success. These were expectations established for her by her family early in life, giving birth to a love of learning. This love of learning also birthed Joy’s dream of becoming a teacher. Though Joy’s aspiration to teach was ignited as early as nine years old, that flame was soon extinguished when high school teachers strongly discouraged her from entering the field. So when it came time to go to college, Joy decided to forgo aspirations of becoming a teacher, pursuing a career in publishing instead. Fortunately, the universe held Joy’s dream to teach close, and eventually presented her with an opportunity to work with a Washington Post program called Newspapers in Education (NIE). Interfacing with students on a daily basis through her work with NIE, Joy’s desire to teach was reignited and she soon joined an alternative teaching program (ATP) geared towards mid-career changers, placing her in a teaching residency in the eastern region of the U.S., and jump starting her career in education. Her first teaching position was in a public elementary school where she was charged with teaching fourth grade students, many of whom required differentiated support due to identified learning disabilities. Though Joy admits the program may not have equipped her with all the tools, skills, resources, and support necessary to provide her students with what they needed, she relied on her resilience and tenacity to give them all she had, and never gave up, even as the challenge to do so became difficult. When directly asked if the ATP was helpful in supporting her through this time, she describes the experience this way,

I think for me it was helpful but when I look at the program overall I don’t know if it was adequate for everybody. I think I was placed at a school where there were very strong supportive teachers who were willing to help. That was not the case for everyone, so everyone’s experience was different; not everybody had a positive experience like me.
Joy’s response to my question is notable in that she easily recognized the deficits in the alternative teacher program in terms of providing her with all she needed to succeed in her work as a teacher, and rather than settling for less, she engaged a growth mindset, including opening herself up to accepting the critically necessary support from her colleagues willing to offer her that support in spite of her residency status. Joy attributes this critical acumen to recognize the gaps in her ATP to her experiences from the business world which she explains helped her navigate systems to determine how best to be more proficient. Joy attributes her ability to make it through that critical first year of teaching to the support she received from three BWEL, peers providing the assistance she speaks of, and who were equally strong teachers at their various grade levels within her school. These women eventually became Joy’s mentors and would go on to form the support network she welcomed, supporting her for the duration of the year. As Joy shares,

These women saw something in me and they just adopted me and took me under their wing, rallying around me and helping me to fill in the gaps, you know, they helped with lesson plans and bulletin boards and prepared me for evaluations, and all of that.

Joy also points to her ability to recognize her own areas of deficit and willingness to fill-in the gaps as critical to her first year’s success. Reflecting on how she took the initiative to continue her learning beyond her ATP and on her own time, the actions she took and describes included: shadowing other teachers who had strengths where she did not, reading on her own, asking questions, and not being afraid to reach out and find resources when they weren’t readily available. As Joy shares, “I did not take a passive role, I was very active in my own learning so I could be proficient.” Joy also shares that she wanted to be the best she could be for the students she served and she was willing to go above and beyond to make sure she was, even if that meant
doing so on her own time and in addition to her courses within the ATP. Ultimately and like with her other BWEL peers, Joy engaged her practice with hopes of ensuring she met the needs of the children she served, especially HMMS and she soon recognized that she would have to create opportunities to do so when none existed, including pursuing a pathway to educational leadership.

**Pathway to Leadership.** It is in the spirit of creating opportunities that Joy entered the leadership track. After working in the classroom in school settings that served primarily all African American children or African American and Latino children, particularly those with challenging home lives, and seeing the missteps and some successes that other leaders made, Joy made it her goal to fill-in her own gaps in order to better meet the needs of the students she served. She shares how she had to develop her leadership without the support of formal programs due to her observations of the racialized and gendered ways in which such support was offered. When asked how her leadership was cultivated and if her ATP was supportive in providing guidance through a pathway of leadership beyond the licensing and residency, Joy explains,

It was not. The hopes and goals of that program was for people to stay in the school system, so very different from Teach for America (TFA) where people had to commit for two years and most of the time they don’t stay. My program was geared to have people stay, so we did have visits from the University supervisors for two years but beyond that we didn’t have leadership, at least not with Black females. I would hear of those conversations taking place with white females and African American men but not Black females. When I would go to the university, I would hear of people being approached to take on leadership roles in their first and second year, and just based on what I observed,
I knew I was working harder to do certain things but those conversations were not given to me.

In spite of Joy being locked out of conversations and supportive leadership development networks, she continued to work hard to fill her own gaps and cultivate her own leadership, often relying on networks outside of educational spaces and providing mentoring and coaching from other BWEL who recognized her talents. This work eventually led to a leadership position as an assistant principal where she has successfully served for 5 years, working tirelessly to support and mentor other teachers like she once was, and engaging a social justice and equity lens by forging trusting relationships with students, teachers, families, and communities in order to disrupt and dismantle the inequities HMMS face in the schools in which she serves. When asked directly how she views herself as a leader, Joy responds, “I am a transformational servant leader because I tend to lead by example. As a leader I am constantly seeking ways to improve the people and teams I manage and support,” and when asked how she views leadership within this definition and where her views of leadership come from she confidently states,

In the school sense, I think leadership is multi-dimensional. There is the instructional leadership aspect of school leadership, and there is the people management side of leadership which is basically the management of systems and people and things of that nature. However, I think what makes educational leadership different from being a manager anywhere else is the knowledge base required to impact practice amongst teachers and performance in students.

Though the language Joy uses to describe her leadership comes wrapped in her business background, Joy attributes her understanding of leadership as transformational and servant oriented to her time working with and observing the leadership of an African American male
leader who she describes as ‘having a heart to reach people and meet the needs of people’ and who modeled servant based transformational leadership action within their school community. As she tells it,

My ideals about leadership come from seeing other leaders in action…I’ve seen school leadership in schools done at very high levels and I saw shifts in culture based on the person’s actions and improvements in teacher practice and it was me seeing those actions actually lead to outcomes and yield results that led to how I model some of my own practice. For example, a principal that I am thinking of who had the most impact was there early every morning, no one beat him there, right, and he was often out in the community doing work with families. He participated in their outside school activities, he did home visits, so that helped get buy-in from the community. I was in [name of city] at the time and that was a very tough community to get to because people had a lot of trust issues around schools, many parents had negative experiences themselves, but we went. As a team of people, we went door to door in the community as far as when new students came to our school and when school started. This instructional leader modeled good practice for teachers, found resources for people, provided opportunities, and utilized distributive leadership strategies to grow and groom other teacher leaders. I also saw that his focus was always on academics and content. You teach people not content right, so there was a big emphasis on owning your craft, knowing your content area, utilizing appropriate instructional strategies. I also think that without really knowing or speaking about culturally relevant pedagogy those were the expectations. So we worked with a 99.5% African American community and 96% free and reduced school lunch, and we were title one, yet without really using the term culturally relevant practices those
were the strategies and mindsets that he operated from. That made his leadership relevant; the things we were doing were relevant and meaningful. We brought in a lot of community partnerships to fill in the gaps as well.

Having the opportunity to observe servant-oriented transformational leadership in action, combined with her own self reflections on various teaching and leadership experiences, enabled Joy to develop and hone her own brand of culturally responsive leadership pedagogy which she now engages as an Assistant Principal within her charter school setting. Today, this work manifest in many ways, including with a desire to improve the people and teams she manages and supports.

**Engaging a Social Justice Agenda.** A desire to improve the people and teams she manages and supports is not the only thing that empowers Joy to engage the kind of servant leadership that transforms classrooms and schools. She is also empowered by an innate sense of determination that won’t allow her to fail. As she tells it, during her first year of teaching, her students, many of whom experienced a variety of learning disabilities, tried to poison her, put pencil led and staples in her coffee, and one young man even brought a knife to school and tried stabbing another student in the middle of one of her teaching evaluations being conducted by her university supervisor, and still, drawing on her ability to capitalize on every experience as an opportunity to learn and develop so she is able to perform at a more productive level in each of her leadership roles, she prevailed. Though many are shocked by her resilience, with one university supervisor remarking, “If you can survive this, you can rule the world,” Joy continues to persevere, and rule the world she just may do.

One way that Joy perseveres is by capitalizing on the knowledge she gleaned in those formative years of her career to advance a social justice agenda in support of students with
special needs as a school leader. Recognizing the inequities in the instruction, support, and resources special needs students receive, Joy makes it a point to fill the gaps. This includes supporting teachers in developing the knowledge and skills required to succeed with all students, but especially those with special needs from historically marginalized and minoritized backgrounds, as well as stepping in to provide services herself when they are absent within the school setting. Joy recounts,

As an administrator, who right now has a special educator out on leave, I am doing testing accommodations and providing services and accommodating assignments because that’s what children need so just because my position doesn’t call for that; that’s a need in this school and I am going to make it happen because that is what leadership is!

In this recounting, Joy reminds that for her, servant leadership for social justice is about getting in the trenches with your people to make it work. It’s also about modeling that which you hope to cultivate in others and being willing to walk the talk of transformation even as you seek to facilitate the process alongside others. Ultimately, for Joy, like many of the other women engaging this study, her leadership is about centering the needs of students and doing so in ways that ensure equity and justice through access and opportunity to those things they need to succeed in school and in life. Ultimately, it is about making a difference, and through her leadership, Joy has hopes that she is making a difference in the lives of the teachers, students, and communities that she serves and support.

**Making a Difference.** Through her work as an educational leader, Joy sees how she is making a difference. In her reflections she reveals she is making a difference in many ways, including: the culturally responsive care she provides to African American children pushed out of the classroom spaces, sponsoring information nights and special assemblies to honor and
support the parent community, engaging community walks and home visits to bridge the school-community divide, creating opportunities for families to share their knowledge and wealth with the school, making phone calls to families and caregivers to share something positive about their children, just because, and working side-by-side with teachers and her administrative team to develop the capacity of all stakeholders to improve the culture and climate of the school. Sometimes this work takes place during school hours and sometimes Joy finds herself working well beyond school hours. No matter the hour, Joy engages the work with an intense sense of urgency to make the world a little better and brighter for the students she serves.

**Continuing to Lead as Resilience and Resistance.** In addition to engaging her work to make the world a little better and brighter than she found it, Joy also continues to engage her work in leadership at her current East coast charter school, with an understanding that her joy and passion for the work is tethered to the relationships she has forged within her school community and the possibility that these relationships hold for realizing educational equity and justice for the children least served by the schools she first entered as a teacher almost 14 years ago.

**Chapter Summary**

The unique leadership narratives (Dillard, 2000; Tillman, 2002; Yosso, 2005) for Ida, Angela, Althea, and Joy were shared in this chapter. The ‘story sharing’ continues into the next chapter. I present interpretive cases for Marva, Sojourner, Mary, and Fannie. A final discussion of findings for this qualitative examination of the culturally-situated leadership of BWEL is contained in chapter six. Concluding thoughts and implications are explored in chapter seven.
CHAPTER 5
LEADERSHIP NARRATIVES II: DISMANTLING MASTER’S HOUSE

You can’t dismantle the master’s house with the master’s tools.

~ Audre Lorde

Grounded in the body of research informing this study, I shared interpretive cases for Ida, Angela, Althea, and Joy in chapter four. I present cases for Marva, Sojourner, Mary, and Fannie in this chapter. Much like with chapter four, the four narratives shared here are formed around emergent themes grounded in the theories and questions shaping this study, employ rich descriptions with some analysis woven in, and make every attempt to capture each leader’s story exactly as it was shared with me, doing so through each woman’s voice and using her own words when possible. In this regard, the interpretive cases for eight complexly diverse BWEL, combined with two testimonials describing my leadership and research experience, provide revelations to answer the overarching inquiry How do BWEL committed to advancing racial equity through the development of a social justice leadership praxis experience and engage educational leadership in U.S. P-12 schools? Pulled together, they also demonstrate how the leadership of BWEL is tantamount to holding a knife by its sharpest edge, and doing so with the figurative meaning of the opening quote in mind.

The leadership stories for Marva, Sojourner, Mary, Fannie, and Marva follow. As a reminder, pseudonyms were selected to protect each leader’s anonymity. They symbolize the historical, personal, or professional figure’s life works within which each BWEL finds inspiration. Situated in African centered emancipatory methodologies (Dillard, 2000, Kershaw, 1990, 1992; Tillman, 2002), pseudonyms also take on a double-entendre meaning, representing the BWEL’s leadership approach, as situated in her personal and professional identity. The order of each interpretive case is loosely aligned with the region of leadership within which each
BWEL led at the time of this study, though no significance is derived from this clustering. In this chapter, Marva led a middle school in the rural Midwest and Sojourner, Mary, and Fannie led within P-12 schools in the Southwest.

Refusing to Crack Master’s Whip

Marva

Don’t try to fix the students, fix ourselves first. The good teacher [educational leader] makes the poor student [teacher/staff] good and the good student [teacher/staff] superior.

When our students [teachers] fail, we as teachers [educational leaders] too have failed.

~ Marva Collins

Education as Expectation. Five feet, nine inches tall, smooth complexion, rich brown skin, beautiful smile, lovely heart, and open mind, Marva is one of the youngest of the eight women engaging this study. At age forty one, she, like Mary, Joy, Angela, and Althea, is technically a generation Xer, which may explain personality traits rooted in a strong-sense of independence, a robust work ethic, a disdain for being micro-managed, comfort with and preference for diversity, and a value for the freedom to be, even as one is still becoming), with the latter being rooted in the sentiment of the opening words. Though this definition of a GenXer is situated in hegemonic codifications of a complexly diverse group of human beings who just happen to share the same band of birth years, many of these traits ring true about Marva, at least as she describes herself and her leadership experiences.

As Marva tells it, she came of age in a suburb just outside of Chicago. Though she remembers her community as diverse, otherwise rarely mentioning ethnicity or race to describe her lived experiences growing up within it, when probed, it appears that she is describing a segregated working class African American community, filled with families able to cultivate a
middle-class lifestyle, primarily due to employment with a local chemical factory. A factory her
own father was employed with. As described, Marva’s community was also filled with families
headed by Black professionals who served as living role models for the children within the
community, giving them something to aspire to and imagine as they dreamed a future for
themselves. In her words,

The community I grew up in had a lot of Black people and most of our teachers were
Black and lived in the neighborhood. They knew my family and my mother and aunts
went to school with them. They were all connected, especially the teachers in my
elementary school (ES). Everyone lived there.

Typical for this time period, Marva’s words illustrate that families in her close knit
African American community maintained close connections, primarily due to having lived there
across generations. Marva also remembers the robust work ethic modeled by many in the
community. Watching them leave home each morning, dressed in their professional garb for
work, and return at the days end, tired but ready to engage with family and each other, implicitly
left impressions about what adults do to care for their families, including how sharing space in
one community keeps families engaged and resolute in their care for each other. Her memory is
most vivid in this regard when asked directly about the messages she received about education.
Though her answer is in stark contrast to the manner in which the experiences of the other seven
women engaging this study was delivered, citing education as not something her family
discussed, and on the surface, might be interpreted negatively, especially by those engaging a
lens that views Black communities like Marva’s in pathological ways, embedded beneath the
surface of her childhood memories is a telling testament to the deep love and commitment that
Black men and Black women have for their children, families, and communities, even as they are
no longer in relationship, struggle financially, and are challenged by a myriad of socio-cultural and historical oppressions situated in race, gender, and class. In her remembering, Marva shares,

I really didn’t get any messages about school at all from my parents. They didn’t tell me it was important, and they didn’t tell me it was unimportant. My parents were much older, and my Dad only had an 8th grade education. I didn’t know it at the time but my mother didn’t finish high school either. My parents did not live together, but my Dad always worked in the chemical factory. My mother received assistance, because they were not together. Sometimes our lights would get cut off or we would have to move. I think my mother didn’t know how to make smart choices with money, and she liked to have fun and party at times. My Dad was more traditional and he would always work hard and when the lights got cut off, and he found out, he would get them turned back on. He would bring money home to my mother and even when she didn’t spend it smartly he kept bringing it. She had him wrapped around her finger I guess. He never learned his lesson.

Though Marva herself, as viewed through her memories of childhood, invokes some of the stereotypes propagated about Black women living through this time period and locked out of societies economic infrastructure due to access and opportunity pathways that lead to government assistance rather than employment and financial independence, underneath the surface of her answer is revelation of the strong sense of love and responsibility Black fathers have for and to their children and families, even while living apart from them and no longer in relationship with their mothers. The complex relationship between Marva’s mother and father, as remembered through Marva’s storytelling, also reveals how Black men and Black women fight to co-parent, even in the midst of financial strain and family strife. In this way, Marva
received the love she needed to understand her importance and value in the world, and as she explains, while her parents did not have the wherewithal to push her towards education in the traditional sense, the love they provided and implicitly modeled, centered her in a strong sense of self-worth. Combined with the other models she saw in her neighborhood and racialized cultural community, including her friends’ parents who talked about college and the importance of school when she visited their homes, and the media images she saw while watching television shows like The Cosby Show produced by Black Entertainers, and trumpeting the value of attending a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), Marva says she knew she wanted to go to college, even if she had no idea what that meant.

In addition to her friends’ parents and the encouraging college banter delivered through her television by fictitious characters, Cliff and Claire Huxtable, the parents from The Cosby Show, Marva also remembers having a lot of books in the home and being afforded various Black teachers who supported her. Both of these things also contributed to her desire to attend college, eventually pushing her in that direction. She shares

There were lots of reading materials in our house; I think my mother used to read them. We had “Reader’s Digest” and the Britannica Encyclopedia too, so I loved learning, enjoyed reading, and did well in school. Ms. Sutton created competition like learning multiplication facts and I was the first girl who learned all of my facts and I got an award. She was also the first teacher that identified me as having abilities – and I was placed in a group. I don’t know what it was but I think it might have been something like Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) because we left the room and did different stuff.

Through the retelling of this childhood memory, it is clear that having access to strong models of Black intelligentsia influenced and shaped Marva’s impression of school, learning,
and education, and powered her desire to attend college, even if she doesn’t discuss her memories in quite this way. Being recognized and valued for her abilities and having reading materials in the home, materials she remembers her mother reading, ignited Marva’s love of learning, as well as her desire to go to college. However, it was the hard work and culturally responsive care (Roberts, 2010) of a village of educators who recognized her potential and made sure she was provided with access to an opportunity that ensured she went. She remembers it this way:

When I entered 8th grade I was asked what I wanted to do and I said college. We could pick college, job, or military and they put you on the track for whatever you picked and I was on the college track. That’s how I got into the Black College Tour. Our school went to tour HBCUs and we had to fundraise and I know I fell short, so I thought I wasn’t going to be able to go, but Mr. Richardson [African-American male teacher] and Ms. Lowe [African American female teacher] called my house and talked to my mother, telling them to pack my bags because I was going to be able to go on the trip. They got together and paid my way and told my parents I just needed to bring a little spending money. After that trip, I wanted to go to Fisk, Spelman, or Tennessee State but I did not have money for the application so I couldn’t apply. My counselor (White male) reached out to me and told me if I sat in on the session for Illinois State, a local university that was visiting our school, I could apply for free so I did. I applied and I was accepted and that’s where I went. My parents didn’t help with the application and some of my family didn’t understand why I was going to college. Some even tried to deter me because my parents were older and they felt I should stay close to home but I went. Eventually the chemical factory closed and a lot of people in our community lost their jobs, including
some of the elder members of my family so they shifted their views about college and started to encourage my younger cousins to attend, but I was really the first one to go.

Marva’s story about her pathway into college is an inspirational one. Like many of the other participating BWEL, she was the first in her family to attend. She also did so in spite of a family suggesting she do otherwise. Marva is aware that it wasn’t that her family didn’t want her to be successful. It also wasn’t that they didn’t value education. They simply didn’t know to encourage her to pursue a college pathway because they themselves had never had the opportunity to pursue those experiences. For them, work at the factory afforded them a successful life and that was the vision they had for her. Yet, thanks to a village of educators who recognized her potential in spite of being the daughter of two non-traditionally educated parents, Marva was able to attend college, matriculate through successfully and succeed. Her story reveals the power of the village and having those who believe in you, even when traditional knowledge says otherwise. This is also true of Marva’s story about finishing college, becoming a P-12 educator, and eventually entering an educational leadership pathway.

**Pathway into Leadership.** Marva’s college experience was marked by lots of uncertainty, yet thanks to the patient support of her academic advisor, as well as her tenacious will to finish what she started, in spite of the odds before her, she persevered. She recounts her six year experience at Illinois State using these words:

I thought I wanted to be an engineer because I had an exceptional math teacher, Mr. Geonetti. I took some math classes but they were boring. Then, I helped deliver my niece and I said I was going to be a doctor, but I didn’t like sciences. After that, I figured I would transition to something medical related but I didn’t like blood and needles and all of that stuff. By the time I knew I wanted to major in education I was moving into my
senior year and I had changed my major four times. Finally, the summer after my junior year, I got a job at my old high school working with special needs kids and I loved it! So I went back to college and told my academic advisor that I wanted to be a teacher, and that was it, teaching was what I wanted to do. Of course he thought I was being insensible. I should have known that I wanted to be a teacher anyway because I loved to play school when I was growing up. My advisor helped me look at my transcripts, guiding my decision to choose a focus in my new education major. He told me I was going to have to add additional years but I didn’t care and I haven’t looked back since. It took me six years to graduate. My parents were low key about it all just saying “okay it’s time for you to go back to school” and they always took me back. When I graduated it was no fanfare, they were just there.

Marva’s story getting through college and finding her way to P-12 education is one of determination, tenacity, perseverance, and patient support. Situated in the patient love and support of parents who gave her space to become whoever it was she imagined herself becoming, without judgement, and allowing her to learn from her missteps along the way, enabled her to realize her dreams while also developing her ability to show others the same kind of patient and loving support to do the same. Marva’s patient and loving support wasn’t only modeled by her parents. As is consistent with many of the other BWEL engaging this study, Marva’s patient support came in the form of two BWEL, one a friend and mentor who she met in Bible Study and one a principal she worked under while teaching. Both recognized her potential and opened up opportunities for her to hone her skills as a teacher and emergent educational leader, preparing her to move into her district’s leadership pathway when the opportunity presented. In
recounting her experience with her first mentor, met during a chance meeting at Bible Study, Marva recalls,

I think she became my mentor because I just showed up in Bible Study, and here I am this 27 year old girl coming in with all of these older women and desiring to learn and when she found out I was in education and she went to school with my mom (she told me my mom and her little sisters were a hot mess), she just took to me. I am assuming it was favor [spiritual reference] and I impressed her without even realizing it. That first summer we met, I wasn’t working because I was fresh out of college and she put her neck out by telling me to go to this school and ask for [name of principal] and tell her I sent you, and I was hired that summer to be her substitute teacher. She just took me under her wings and mentored me.

This mentored relationship included supporting Marva through her first years of teaching, all of which weren’t always supported by others she encountered. For example, though Marva taught in a district and school where African American leaders and teachers were the majority and a large percentage of students were Black as well, she reports experiencing the stress and strain of a politicized climate and culture, with the primary factors as she remembers it being situated in age and gender. For her, navigating these experiences left a bad taste in her mouth, and she admits she has trust issues because of it today. She especially remembers the tenuous relationship she shared with one of her first principals, an African American woman. She recalls her experience like this:

My first principal was [Name of Principal], an African American female and she gave me hell. I was about to quit, but the Black teachers around me told me no you are not quitting and they rallied around me and supported me. The superintendent, who was a white
woman, told me “you are not quitting, let me send you somewhere else and then if it
doesn’t work you can quit. ” She sent me to the second school with a White male
principal, who had been there for 30 years and he told me, “If you manage your class and
teach the kids, I won’t bother you,” and he did not.

Marva doesn’t elaborate on the reasons she feels her Principal gave her a tough time so it
is difficult to discern whether or not what she expresses is rooted in internalized racism with her
projecting negative stereotypes of the leadership of BWEL onto their relationship. It is also
unclear if her white male principal, one she describes affectionately, demonstrated true care for
Marva’s professional development or the achievement of the students in her classroom,
particularly since as she describes it, he merely expected her to manage the students and leave
him alone, promising that if she accomplished these things, she too would be left alone. Finally,
her first principal, the BWEL she describes in negative ways, might be said to have exhibited
warm demander pedagogy (Ware, 2006) attributed to Black women with a firm, authoritative,
and demanding but caring demeanor proven to have a positive impact on the growth and
development of students and faculty, especially HMMS, but often viewed as mean, abrasive, and
situated in authoritative leadership styles. If this were the case, Marva’s lack of appreciation for
such a style might be situated in her being the daughter of older parents who as she describes
took a more laid back approach to parenting. Since it is unclear if any of these conjectures are
true, as revealed in Marva’s descriptions, what we know for sure is her experience working with
this BWEL, had a negative impact on her, squelching her desire to work with a second BWEL.
She is now aware these feelings were situated in her own biased perceptions about BWEL, even
as she herself is a BWEL. Fortunately, what played out counteracted Marva’s internalized
racism, perceived and described by Marva as biases, and she was able to cultivate a mentored
relationship with her new principal, one that eventually enabled her to move into a leadership pathway when the opportunity presented. She remembers that time this way,

   My principal retired and an African American female principal named [Name of Principal] came and I was anxious and thought she would be all over me. It turned out to be the exact opposite. She was supportive. Me and another teacher were free thinkers and creative and we clicked and we came up with crazy ideas and she would let us do those things. Once I told her that I was pursuing my type 75 [administrative license] she started opening up opportunities for me to lead and take on leadership roles. She supported us.

   This was an important experience in Marva’s leadership trajectory, particularly in relationship to the sentiments in the opening words. It was this experience that taught Marva why she needed to be open to checking her own biases before projecting them onto others, and it also taught her to see the biases that others bring to the teaching and learning space as a result of their lived experiences. As she shares when asked what her greatest obstacles in leadership are,

   One of my biggest obstacles is not letting my past experience inform my present. I have had some negative experiences as a principal that creep up and inform how I do things, even how I interact with my board members has been compromised. I am working on being more open.

   The irony in her sharing is that Marva herself seemingly harbored the same stereotypes about her soon to be BWEL that she later shares her teachers demonstrate about her. Yet, because she had that experience before moving to her current rural district, she was better able to see her own internalized racism and has made it her goal to work on herself, even as she is also better positioned to see how racist thoughts show up in others. In short, her experience taught
her how to fix self, before fixing others, but more importantly, it would later become the armor
she needed to move through leadership challenges, especially those connected to race, racism,
and institutional oppressions leading to internalized racism, all things she would experience
firsthand as a leader of a small middle school in the rural Midwest.

According to Marva, despite earning her administrative license and having the
opportunity to cultivate her leadership under the guidance and support of her mentor, the BWEL
she initially was afraid to engage, it took quite some time, a lot of perseverance, and a lot of
initiative to move into a leadership track. She was up for the challenge. When she was ready to
move into administration she pursued leadership positions within and outside of her community,
including pursuing districts others believed would never hire Black women like herself. Though
many attempted to discourage her, she believed in her ability to be successful and continued her
pursuits. She remembers her application process this way:

I applied where there weren’t many administrators of color. In addition to sending in the
regular application, I was trying something new and I took the time to send information
directly to superintendents. But it took me a long time to find a position. Based on
feedback from a colleague who heard about one of my interviews, they thought I was too
young. At least that’s what they told me. I was getting the interviews so my strategy was
working but I wasn’t getting hired, once interviewed. One of the districts I interviewed
with told me to apply again, and that time I was selected. It was a different district from
my old one, bigger.

Despite being turned down for a variety of reasons, many possibly attributable to factors
situated in oppression based on identity, Marva maintained a colorblind view of her process,
believing what she was told, relying on a strong sense of self-worth to improve where she could,
and continuing to tenaciously apply until she was hired. As a result, she went on to serve in leadership for a total of nine years. After a tumultuous start and a few leadership assignments, she has now settled into a principalship in a small, rural school district a few hours outside of a large urban Midwest town where she is the only face of color on faculty and staff, and serves a majority white, low-income student population. Though she admits this is an experience well outside of her comfort zone, she is grateful to have it, and has committed herself to the spirit of the opening words, realizing she has areas she must improve in if she is to become her absolute best self, and committing herself to do so as she works to advance equity and justice by first being willing to fix herself rather than fix her students.

**Engaging a Social Justice Agenda.** When asked what kind of leader she is, Marva replies that she is a servant leader. For her, this means doing what’s best for kids, teachers, and the community, regardless of their background. Situating her servant leadership in a desire to become her best self, including being willing to take responsibility for her limitations and fix them so that her faculty and students thrive, she describes her work advancing social justice as a leader in this way:

I realize there are still areas that I have to grow in that others tend to handle very well. I don’t know if that has to do with my upbringing, being the youngest and seeing things but not getting to speak out about them or not. I am learning to be more direct about difficult conversations because I am good at telling people all of the sweet stuff but not the bad things and I am learning to tell bad things too. With kids its easier for me to be direct, I have an easier time being direct and right on point with them. I don’t have problems with kids but it’s because I nurture relationships so I can be direct.
In this depiction of her leadership, Marva reflects on her discomfort with having courageous conversations. Though she does not bring up race or ethnicity in her reflections with me, situations she shared in other parts of the research process, including the critical inquiry action group space, implies that Marva may feel some discomfort with talking about leadership challenges that contain a racialized tenor and that part of why she may be having difficulty doing so is because even as she avoids racing herself, she is keenly aware that she is a BWEL attempting to lead in a space where she is not just the minority, but also the only adult of color and one of few Black persons in the school and rural town at all. The percentage of Black teachers and non-licensed staff is zero and the percentage of Black students (and thus families) that her school serves sits at 16.1%, so rather than focusing on race or employing a racialized lens when discussing leadership for social justice, Marva centers her work in students more broadly and the relationships she engaged with them more specifically. In doing so, she leans on her strength rather than her leadership identity challenges, sharing that she believes she has an ability to develop relationships with students no matter their background and this is what allows her to engage the servant leadership she describes. In her discussion of what this means for her leadership, she describes how she is able to model relationship building with students for her teachers, even those others describe as difficult, in order to create a climate and culture of equity. Marva takes pride in this ability, especially since she implies working within an environment where she is not always embraced by her white families, where white teachers question her presence and express discomfort with having her enter the teaching space, and students send implicit and sometimes explicit messages that their families may be unused to, and uncomfortable with engaging people of color, including sometimes openly embracing a white supremacist lifestyle. One example she shares in this regard includes her perceptions of a
relationship she nurtured with a student who recently returned to her school after being absent for an extended period of time:

We received news that a student who used to attend our school was coming back. I didn’t know him previously as he attended before I arrived, but I made it my point to get to know him, introduce myself to him, and learn what he loves. I made sure to develop a relationship with him, and cultivate it. I made it a point to get to know him intimately, so I know his story. Many of the other adults in the school do not. They would always talk about how difficult he was and how they wondered what his coming back would do to the school. They never took the time to develop the relationship required to understand him, and they didn’t know his story. I did, so when I see him, I make it a point to compliment him. I say things like “Michael I love that look on you [referring to his haircut]” and now he has connected with my assistant principal and another teacher and though we all know he has had a rough life, he is a totally different kid. They [her faculty and staff] made him seem like he is this horrible kid that is going to turn the school upside down. His story is he found his mom overdosed on heroine and that traumatized him but he sees the school as a safe place where people generally care about him, and not like they are trying to control him, but that we really care. Because of this, he has been responsive and is trying to do better. He hasn’t been in my office once. We [assistant principal who is a White male] took him beds because they didn’t have beds in the home and so we just did it. We care and now he knows it.

In this recounting of her experience developing relationships with students Marva amplifies the ways she engages leadership for social justice. Though not comfortable talking about race or other oppressions explicitly, she is keenly aware they exist. To avoid her
discomfort, especially given her context, she focuses on the needs of the student, and uses the power of voice and story, to draw these things out. By leveraging that power, she is able to develop a deeper understanding of why her student has been acting out in the school space and uses this knowledge to transform the environment so that he can engage in ways that lead to a better teaching and learning experience for him and others. She does so by situating her leadership in the tenets of ACL, including engaging a critical race lens to assume multiple perspectives and value counter storytelling, honor the voices of her constituents, even those from impoverished and challenging backgrounds, build trusting relationships with her mainstream partners in leadership, especially those like the assistant principal and teacher who she knows share her affinity towards educational equity for all students, and lead by example by demonstrating for faculty how to do each of the other things mentioned. In this way, Marva is leaning on her strengths, developed through lived experiences, to make a difference within her school community, even as she continues to fix those areas she must improve. Her goal: to become a better Marva, so that she is poised to ensure all of her teachers are better positioned to ensure that all of her students succeed.

Making a Difference. When asked how she feels she is making a difference, and to discuss these things in terms of successes and obstacles, for the first time in the interview space, Marva turns her reflections to ethnicity, race, and what she is beginning to recognize as racialized oppression. In fact, before this question, and as with much of her other storytelling, Marva rarely mentions the impact or presence of ethnic or racial background within her lived experience, not even to acknowledge its importance (or not) in becoming the woman she is today. This is a departure from each of the other seven women engaging this study. Instead, it is only when probed does she mention race or ethnicity, implying that she filters her experiences
through a colorblind view of the world. This is somewhat confirmed in her answer to the question *How do you identify racially or ethnically and why do you identify this way?* to which Marva replies, “I consider myself Black, but preferably I say human. I only choose Black because I live in America and it is so infatuated with race that we can’t just be human in America we have to break down into our respective groups.” Viewing the world through the colorblind lens (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2009, 2017) expressed in her desire to simply be human, and revealing additional parts of her internalized racism situated in a desire to distance herself from those parts of Blackness causing her trauma in the work space, Marva often views her experiences with racialized violence in the work place as normative, initially internalizing the narrative being communicated about her ability as an educational leader, accepting that she requires “fixing”. Yet, she also leverages this viewpoint as a positive and proactive stance, employing it to dismantle inequities within the school space through critical reflection and dialogue, as well as following her reflection up with engaged and proactive action. In part, this might be attributed to her experiences growing up in a household and community where love was expressed through Black cultural traditions, and she was provided with patient and sensible support, allowing her the time to work through problems independently, but with guidance from a community of folks who shared her positionality and experience. When Marva entered the problem-posing process in the critical action inquiry group space, she discussed engaging actions rooted in this experience by seeking out and finding support in educational counter spaces that provided her with time to think through problems from multiple perspectives, to practice by talking through how she might engage a conversation with an important stakeholder with attention to context, audience, and purpose, and to reflect on potential responses to her solutions so she could make the best choice for students by decentering herself and the politics of the problem. All this
before reacting. Observations revealed Marva engaged this patient, proactive, and reflective problem-posing with the other BWEL forming the critical inquiry action group comprising our study but also in an online community she started called Women Educational Leaders. It is in these spaces that Marva received the patient and sensible support to which she was accustomed. Coming situated in the restorative practices required to squelch racialized violence and remind Marva of her multiconsciousness, she was able to clearly see defects in the system within which she led (McKay, 2010) rather than in herself, equipping her with the resiliency needed to push through despite the challenges she faced. It is in the power of this story that Marva’s attempts to make a difference are found. As she shares,

One of my biggest challenges is with faculty coming with preconceived notions about who I am. They thought I was going to be very aggressive, the stereotypical angry Black woman. Though I know some of this is in trust issues due to previous administrations, they carried these views about me. My parents also have preconceived notions. Parents don’t interact with me, some not even speaking to me when I speak to them. They won’t say anything to me and will default to my assistant principal, and I notice that they are mainly the white parents. Not all of my white parents do that but when it happen the person is usually white. I don’t call it out I am just sure to be more brazen with my hello next time. I sense when they don’t want to talk to me, or they don’t want to shake my hand, and they would prefer to move on, but I just keep smiling and saying hello.

The sentiments about white supremacy and racialized oppression underlying Marva’s reflective statement reveal how she is leading to make a difference. As the words opening her counter story speak, she remains resilient, leans into the patient love and support of those around her, including the women engaging this study who she shared a transformative experience with.
when problem-posing through the leadership challenges resulting from the oppressions she is forced to confront, keeps an open-mind trying hard not to allow past experiences rooted in pain to shade and bias her leadership today, and most important to her of all, she continues to open herself up to learning, growing, and fixing herself, so she can become her best self, enabling her to dismantle the oppression she is now better positioned to recognize. In this way, Marva is making a difference.

**Continuing to Lead as Resilience and Resistance.** Marva is also making a difference in other ways. As attested to, she does so with the same culturally-situated resilience and resistance present in the stories of Ida, Angela, Althea, Joy, Sojourner, Mary, and Fannie before her. She also does so despite a barrage of educational policies she feels are meaningless and fail to support her work in support of students, faculty, and becoming the best leader she can be. In her words:

> We are just jumping through the hoops. So many hoops you have to jump through and paperwork, it seems like helping teachers grow and improving our environment is out of the door because we have something called [name of program] which is a school plan that seems like there are seventy five indicators. You have to have a plan for all seventy five of the indicators and you have to find ways to assess and give people feedback on each indicator as well. It’s just ridiculous. Another policy I don’t understand is we have a student information system that is linked to the state which means they can access all of the information we upload, and we still have to go in, print off a report, correct it by seeing if we have errors, and re-upload the documents with the corrected information onto the same database the state already has full access to and can pull the information off of, including determining if there are errors to begin with.
Yet, in spite of the hoops and the plans meant to take Marva off of her game, she promises she is resolved to continue to lead with equity for all students in mind, and as she puts it, the reason she continues to do so is not for the money, and certainly “not about status” or prestige for her. She says she continues to do this work because she is “passionate about helping kids learn and to make sure they are prepared to tackle anything put in front of them.” She is there for the kids, not to fix them, but to fix her so they can succeed. To accomplish anything else would have meant she will have failed!

**Sojourner**

Life is a hard battle anyway, if we laugh and sing a little as we fight the good fight of freedom, it makes it all go easier. I will not allow my life’s light to be determined by the darkness around me, [even as I fight the good fight].

~ Sojourner Truth

**Education as Expectation.** Education is in Sojourners blood. She reigns from a family of educators-her two parents were educators, her siblings were educators, and even her grandmother’s siblings were educators. Given this legacy of education, it would seem Sojourner’s destiny would be to become an educator as well, and today, that is exactly what Sojourner has become. As she states, “It was just kind of what we did and it was the most important thing.” One might argue she was also born to lead. Not only because of her background and the heavy emphasis Sojourner’s family placed on education but also because at five foot six, with a warm smile, serious eyes, and a striking presence, you can’t help but notice her, and when she talks, you can’t help but listen. When asked why education was her life choice, Sojourner replies,
It wasn’t something I did not want to do. It was all I knew intimately. I feel as if education is the gateway to all things. By engaging in school, quality school, you can engage with people who want to succeed. When you are in school you meet everybody, people who want to be doctors, lawyers, police, you meet everyone. It provides opportunities to grow and develop. You meet the community.

**Pathway to Leadership.** This is the attitude that underlies Sojourner’s work as an educational leader, a pathway she entered with the help of women leaders of color who recognized her love of kids, desire to improve her craft and willingness to get better and agreed to work with her mentoring her into her first leadership position. In this role, Sojourner took what she learned and carried this same spirit into her own leadership. As she states, “I had some amazing women who valued kids and rallied for kids in general. I got it. They got it.”

One of Sojourners beloved mentors, a woman of color teacher leader with a Latinx background, who Sojourner states “got it for Latinx kids,” inspired her to want something better for the African American kids she worked with. As Sojourner notes, “I wanted to get it for them.” So, leaning on the inspiration of her mentor, Sojourner was drawn into leadership and she worked collaboratively with her mentor to cultivate a school and climate for all kids. As she remembers, “I was always in the African American community and I could involve kids and parents in ways someone who wasn’t from the community or who didn’t get it couldn’t. I engaged them.”

**Engaging a Social Justice Agenda.** Today, Sojourner continues to engage a social justice agenda by ensuring that she creates space at the table for other women leaders of color, including BWEL. In her own words she affirms,
There were Black women who came before me who made sure I had a place at the table and who were around at the beginning of my career to tell me how to navigate the system and who could listen and create positions and make sure that I was doing what I needed to do, so that those who come behind me have a place at the table too; creating safe spaces to continue the work. These were networks built with intentionality and it is my responsibility to seek out and help those coming in.

**Making a Difference.** Today, Sojourner continues to create space at the table. After serving as an elementary and high school principal, she went on to supervise principals across her district, and though she now leads a state initiative sponsored by her state Governor, she is most proud of her work building relationships with the community and watching those relationships forged with students and families blossom into the kind of connections necessary to create nurturing and inclusive school climates that truly make a difference in the lives of the nation’s most underserved students.

**Continuing to Lead as Resilience and Resistance.** As the opening quote invokes, Sojourner makes a difference by not allowing her life’s light to be determined by the darkness around her. Instead, she reports she remains committed to her desire to engage leadership and education so that she demonstrates she gets it and she does so by fighting the good fight, and doing so with a smile, a song, and the students she wanted something better for in mind.

**Mary**

I do not know what will happen, but the one thing I can do is show up.

Faith is all about believing. You don’t know how it will happen, but you know it will.

~ Unknown
Education as Expectation. At first glance you notice a beautifully bright smile made brighter by an easy-going demeanor. Matched with her five foot seven, perfectly curvaceous, dark chocolate figure, confident stance, positive outlook, and stunning inner-beauty, it’s no wonder why she has become the beloved leader of her esteemed ES. Though as Mary tells it, the love she feels now, wasn’t always the case. When asked how she got there, to the place she now feels an enormous sense of love, the response given is situated in the essence of the words opening this narrative. As Mary describes it, her entry into educational leadership was not an easy journey, but each day, steeped in and driven by her unabashed faith in the power of God’s unwavering love, she was able to get up and show up with an unrelenting passion and kindness, and doing so, she gave it all she had, even when she had no idea what it was going to look like on the other side. By my observations, this strategy served her well, and as she explains, she continues to use it today.

Mary’s passion and love for a career in education wasn’t always her truth. In fact, as she tells it, she was supposed to be a lawyer. Growing up in a loving family with southern roots, planted in her southwest upbringing, Mary learned that education was not an option, it was an expectation. Thus, going to college and furthering her learning process was a given, as was doing well in school. Yet, when Mary sat at her school desk with dreams of her future floating through her head, thought bubbles filled with pencils, children, school bells, and yellow buses were not what she imagined. Instead, she dreamed of pursuing a career that saw her becoming the next President of the United States. According to Mary’s aspirational trajectory, the story of her future would not be marked by a life leading schools. Fortunately, the universe had other plans, and by virtue of divine timing, life unfolded somewhat differently than what Mary herself dreamed up. She remembers the beginning of her journey in P-12 education like this:
For me it was actually a weird story. So I was never supposed to be a teacher, I was going to be a lawyer. In high school, I did work with trial by peers. It’s this mock lawyer thing. Everybody in the high school knew I wanted to be a lawyer. I mean that was it, I even went to the White House on a scholarship, met the president, and told him I was going to be a lawyer and take his job [she chuckles, and so do I]. I mean I had all of these big plans. Then life happened and I went to [name of Mary’s university]. I was the first person in my family to finish college, and I really did not have enough resources, I thought I did, but I didn’t. I did not know what to do next, so when the law school was opening, I just said I am not going to go to school right now because I didn’t have the funds and I also didn’t know enough. Had I just pushed forward maybe I would be doing law. So instead, I get this job working for a trade show exposition and they are looking for an HR generalist, people they can cultivate, people right out of college that they can turn into a specialist. I get the job, I do well, and I am living life.

And living life Mary was, that is until the economy took a turn, she was laid off, her relationship faltered and she found herself back home in the southwest, and working in the corporate arena as a professional recruiter. Though her position with the company more than met her financial needs, something in Mary’s spirit just didn’t feel right. One evening after a chance dinner with co-workers, who shared their plans to leave the company to go into teaching, Mary began to re-evaluate her life’s work as well. She remembers this time in her life this way:

I go to dinner with two friends who worked with the same company and they are husband and wife and they share they are going to quit their job and become teachers. They tell me about the alternative program and I remember thinking hmm, why, and they said “It’s just not fulfilling, we don’t like what we are doing, we don’t feel like we are making
a difference” and secretly I had been feeling that way, and you know I had been questioning everything…what does it all mean Lord Jesus…so I asked more about it and they said “…yeah but with this program you have to be bilingual” and I asked about having a degree in education and they said “No, it’s an alternative program you just have to want to teach and like kids” and I said, hmm I think I will call on Monday because I think I am ready to make a change.

The following Monday, Mary made that call and though she wasn’t accepted into the bilingual program she initially discussed with her colleagues, given her sunny disposition, resilient spirit, resounding faith and willingness to take risks, Mary was later accepted into an alternative teaching program (ATP) where she took advantage of every opportunity afforded her, later becoming an exemplary first grade teacher in the same ES her younger siblings attended while growing up. Though Mary’s entry into teaching did not come without challenges and bumps, including being paid $20,000 less than she expected and forced to take a salary cut almost three times that she made in her position as a recruiter, she did not let these challenges deter her and instead found creative ways to make it work. As she describes it, the money wasn’t what inspired her into teaching, so it wouldn’t be money that kept her from pursuing it as her next career. That decided, she figured it out, showing up every day and engaging a passion she describes as God’s will. In fact, in speaking about her first days in the classroom, Mary shares, “I will never forget it. I was just like what was I doing with my life. I can’t believe that I thought this could never be my reality, so I never looked back,” and like she said, she never looked back. She went on to enjoy a successful career as a teacher leader, taking advantage of every opportunity to learn and grow. Mary served as a 1st, 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade teacher and used summer tracks (Mary taught at a year-round school) to gain experience substituting in
Kindergarten and art classes as well. Mary knew that her journey into education wasn’t going to stop in the classroom and she wanted to be prepared. For Mary, being prepared meant gaining as many diverse teaching experiences as she could, and that is exactly what she set out to do. She knew she had aspirations to make a difference in the lives of her students on a bigger scale, so she committed herself to spending her early years as a teacher preparing herself for the time when transitioning into leadership would become her destiny. This included staying late and volunteering her time on off-duty hours within the school, working on committees that would allow her to learn the business of running a school, being flexible and willing to change grades to support the vision of her administrative team, and cultivating a strong relationship with her Principal, an African American woman who saw potential in her ability to lead early on and encouraged her to learn all that she could, eventually becoming her mentor and coaching her into the district’s leadership pathway.

**Pathway to Leadership.** Describing herself as a collaborative leader who draws on the strengths of her relationships, Mary has an uncanny ability to communicate across cultural boundaries. After nine years of cultivating her leadership indirectly, Mary finally entered educational leadership formally. When asked how she transitioned from teaching into leadership, Mary recalls:

> I think what I did was I aligned myself with my current principal, because I was very clear, it was nice to see a Principal that looked like me. She pulled me by the elbow and said “I see something in you beyond the classroom and if this is what you want I will help you get there.” I have always been appreciative of that and as a result I look for that in others. You don’t have to look like me, I just think a good leader is always going to be pushing people. I had a great network of people, colleagues too, who started to see
something in me and would allow me to make mistakes in a forgiving space, so as a teacher I would have the confidence to say okay I tried this and I started to take on more leadership roles because of it.

As Mary’s story reveals, having a network of support was critical to her moving into the leadership pipeline. It was also critical to the development of her leadership identity. Unfortunately, Mary did not experience that same support in her first year as the school leader of her own ES. Despite going into her first official leadership experience with a sunny disposition and desire to cultivate the best in others so they would provide the best educational leadership for the students they served, all of them, she was not welcomed. As she tells it, she was never even provided with the opportunity to show who she was or demonstrate what she could do. At the point when Mary reflects on this initial leadership experience she has begun to describe, her eyes tear up and her voice begins to crack. Her story is an emotional one, coming wrapped in the realization that though she had earned respect and success as an educational leader in two school communities, and was ready to do the same in this one, by virtue of her Black skin and body, she was greeted by her first school community with a hatred and vitriol even she had difficulty recognizing and describing:

As a teacher I was really successful, loved by all the kids, going to their events, parents requesting me; it almost felt like there wasn’t a situation that through relationship and conversation I couldn’t fix. When you become an AP, you know there are going to be challenges because it’s a new job and a lot of times you get stuck doing the grunt work, but I was at a great school, with a great leader who let me be a great leader so I was well liked there too. In my transition to the Principal position, not only was it the most challenging job that I have ever done in my life, it was also the most painful because I
was met with a resistance that I have never experienced in all of my life. It made me question myself: was I even in the right field; have I been lied to all of this time; were those successes true; will it ever get better. You hear those stories by three years you really have your school, so I kept telling myself to push through, but I just couldn’t see it, I couldn’t see it, and my first thought was *what could it be*. I thought it’s got to be me. If you are self-reflective, you look inward first, but I had to learn for the first time that this wasn’t me and looking inward is not always where you find answers. Looking back I now know that my first experience I was met with full on racism. I was not prepared for that. I mean blatant in your face racism. I mean comments like “we don’t want to hear your ideas” just because of who you are, “you are not what this community wants,” and I didn’t have the experience to understand how to deal with that so it was challenging. With no AP, being the sole leader, you start to go maybe I was promoted too soon. I was doing so much work, yet, it wasn’t until higher ups were able to really see what I saw, and believe me that things changed. I was the last one that wanted to call it anything racial, because I am sitting here thinking…[she stops and shifts her reflection] I was just always taught that if you work hard and you are doing the right thing, that if you are doing the right thing, people will recognize that, and I had never experienced people who just didn’t like me for me, something I couldn’t change. I finally had to accept that I just wasn’t the flavor that they wanted and so it really hurt me to know that. It really felt like I was doing things in vain and it really became, instead of doing things for the kids, it became *we gotta’ get this Principal out because this isn’t what our community wants* so when I made the decision to go to my supervisor and say if I do not get a transfer this job is going to kill me, I meant the stress, the strain, the struggle, the being misunderstood.
Nothing about this position felt like it was ever going to get better so I had to make the decision to move…

Fortunately, at the initiation of her district supervisors, Mary was provided with the opportunity to move her leadership to another school setting, but unfortunately, her move was not coupled with the restorative work necessary to ensure Mary did not internalize the racism she experienced, assigning the problem to her leadership and her Black female body instead of the racism she experienced as a result of a community not willing to view her through a lens of equity and justice. In this regard, Mary reports it took her some time to learn that she was not the problem it was in fact the community and their thinking that was the problem. Moving her without addressing the issue as she experienced it also shielded this community and the district from ever having to address the racism, making them complicit in the racism, yet, Mary moved on, and despite the emotional, psychological, and spiritual challenges she faced during her transition, she once again leaned on her resiliency, strength, and unbreakable faith to start all over at her current school. And while the start at her current school wasn’t easy either, each day she drew on the spirit of the opening words to transform her school into one where as she describes, “all of our children matter.”

Engaging a Social Justice Agenda. Given her tumultuous pathway into leadership, Mary is keenly aware of the inequities that some students face, especially as centered in race. Yet, she doesn’t use this knowledge to criticize or point fingers; instead, she leans into her own multicultural subjectivities and leadership to model for her mainstream constituents how beautiful difference and diversity can be. As she shares,

I think there was a reason that I was placed at this school; divine intervention, God, whatever. I just think there was a reason that I was placed at this school in a community
that “looks” suburban. When I first got there, the teaching population did not represent the student population. There was very little diversity and if it was it was all in our support staff but not in our teaching staff. That’s big for me to take note of.

And take note she did. As she shares, she paid close attention to the comments that her young elementary students made and she made sure to respond with love but also with an intention to deliver a lesson about the kindness that a diverse humanity holds. For example, on one particular day, a student said to her, “I want to go home with you but I can’t because you are chocolate and I am vanilla.” As she recounts, this happened right on her school’s playground and in response, she replied, “That is okay, I have enough love in my heart that we can hug all day at school.” In her mind, any other person would have flipped out because we all know what that is, that’s just them making the distinction between the different races, but Mary’s response was to respond with love. She understands that for her students she may be the only chocolate individual (student’s depiction) that they have ever come across and for her that is okay, as long as she also takes note of what their comments are telling her about their families, the community, the teaching and learning space, and the work she has to do in her leadership to transform negative racialized impressions. Helping her young students navigate her novelty, even in their communicative missteps is one way Mary engages a social justice agenda. When her students comment on the simple things like the various ways she changes her hair or they say things like “well how is it short today and then long tomorrow” or “you smell like lotion” or “Can I touch your hair” or “You’re squishy” and “You sound this way…,” it is just the kids in them, and they only think on that level because they haven’t had any experience with someone like her. For her, modeling how to engage those sweetly uncomfortable conversations is critical. However, Mary
takes a slightly more direct approach for her students’ adult counterparts. She recalls a time she overheard a conversation between teachers while walking through the hallways:

I remember arriving at my prior school and a comment was made about a family as I am passing through the office. “Oh they are homeless and they live at the Budget Suites.” And I just kept walking, “so you know what that means.” And I stopped at that point and I said, “Oh what does that mean?” Well that means teachers believe students and their families don’t care kind of attitude, or that education is not important. When I hear a comment like, “Well they have a sibling in another class but they have two different last names” my thought is what does that matter, I thought we were here to educate kids, but I use that information to tell me what I am dealing with and what our kids are dealing with.

In describing this incident Mary reveals that she recognizes the subversive nature of colorblind racism. She also reveals that she is not willing to let it go and will challenge it by sharing how important it is for her to hold the adults in her building accountable to reflecting on how they talk about and engage with students and families, even if it means calling them out when they fail to engage in ways that are culturally responsive. For Mary, it is simple, all children and families matter and in their school they will communicate that through a collaborative spirit of kindness.

**Making a Difference.** It is through this same kindness that Mary musters the passion and strength to continue to make a difference for the children that she serves. She does so in many ways, including, being present and visible throughout the school so her constituents understand that she is available and that she cares, working just as hard as her hardest working faculty and staff so they know she is willing to get in the trenches with them, exercising patience when questions are asked so that new learning and growth can transpire, being a caring and supportive
critical friend when hard conversations arise so that the school’s climate and culture is safe and equitable for everyone, creating a safe space for teachers to take on leadership roles so they too can accomplish dreams and goals, and maintaining a careful eye on students with special needs, as well as students of color so that inequities are dismantled before they become part of the school’s culture and climate. Culture and climate are important for Mary and she leverages her kindness, faith, passion, and bountiful love for education to ensure her school’s culture and climate continues to communicate that all student’s matter, by making sure those student’s with difference and diversity experience the school space in equitable and just ways.

**Continuing to Lead as Resilience and Resistance.** A final and important way Mary makes a difference is by allowing everyone in the building, including her, the space to make mistakes so that failures will give rise to new and transformative ways to teach, lead, and learn. She does this rooted in the lessons she learned growing up, as well as leading, especially given her first leadership experience. Yet, if you were to ask Mary why this final way of making a difference is important to her, I am certain she would say, it is important so that everyone learns how to get back up from a misstep a little stronger, a little smarter, a bit more resilient, and wrapped in the uncompromising kindness, passion, and faith to show up for every child within the building every day, even if they are not quite sure about what is going to happen once they arrive.

**Fannie**

Never forget where we came from and always praise the bridges that carried you over.

~ Fannie Lou Hamer

**Education as Expectation.** Though Fannie always knew she would go to college, she didn’t expect to be a teacher. Growing up in Chicago, Illinois, in a strong Black family with humble beginnings, rooted her in a history and culture valuing education, so college was an
expectation and her studies at DePaul University inevitable. Fannie’s first love was math and science and though in college she had not yet decided what it was she wanted to do with her life, she voraciously pursued all of the math and science classes she could enroll in. Fannie reports that despite low expectations by others of her ability to succeed, she did well in each of her courses, feeling right at home with much of the content. She had taken chemistry and biology and a slew of math classes and in her mind she would likely settle into a career as a doctor. If not that, then surely something related. It wasn’t until Fannie landed in her second calculus class that things began to unravel. She couldn’t understand her instructor and though she tried hard to stay afloat, even reaching out to other students for support, things didn’t change. Since her peers were also struggling with the course, Fannie knew she needed to do something fast. Not wanting to fail, and feeling like the problem wasn’t her ability but rather the lack of understanding occurring between she and her instructor, Fannie decided to drop the course and pick up another calculus class at a later date. As she tells it,

I had always been good in math in high school so I take the first calculus class, no problem, but I get to the second calculus class and the professor was either Russian or German and he had a heavy accent so I could not understand anything.

Fannie took calculus again with another instructor who she could better understand, and she excelled. In addition to learning calculus, this experience taught her something else. She learned a valuable lesson about teaching and learning that ignited her interest in the profession, informing how she now chooses to engage her work within educational leadership today. As she recalls it,

That situation made me realize that it was the teacher. It wasn’t me, it wasn’t the material, it wasn’t the way I learn, I knew I was in a category of smart people, but if I
was not getting it, it wasn’t me. That is when I realized that the teacher makes the
difference in education and it made me want to be a teacher.

As simple as that, an experience not understanding what the teacher was attempting to
teach and the teacher not being able to convey the curriculum in a way that the students could
understand, taught Fannie the importance and value of the teacher to the teaching and learning
process. It also ignited her passion to educate by centering the needs, values, culture, and
humanity that is her students. Following that experience, Fannie went on to become a successful
teacher, eventually earning a Master’s from Nova Southeastern University and settling into a
career in P-12 education in her large Southwest district. As she tells it, she loved her work, and
was afforded many opportunities to engage leadership without having an official administrative
leadership designation. One role she especially enjoyed was her teacher leadership role as a
facilitator and transition specialist. In this position, Fannie was responsible for helping students
pushed out of traditional high schools due to disciplinary problems, transition back to the
comprehensive high school setting. Recognizing that most of her students were Black boys and
understanding the inequities in policies that pushed them into her school, Fannie found success
with using culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010) to get them back into the comprehensive
high school setting and took pride in this fact. Making it her goal to ensure they never made
their way back to her campus again, she became a critical figure for her alternative school and
her value was not lost on her school’s principal, a BWEL who provided Fannie with many
opportunities to get experience doing quasi administrative task with hopes of preparing her for a
leadership role in the future. Though Fannie recognized the support and mentorship her
principal was providing, she remained hesitant about formally making the transition into
leadership more formally. She shares,
I didn’t feel that any person not of color would have the same sense of urgency and drive I had in that position and it was hard for me to let that go and come into administration, but you finally get to a point when you say, you know you have to make that move but I was kind of reluctant. I wanted to secure my doctorate and administrative license so eventually I went ahead and did it.

Pathway to Leadership. Fannie attributes her entry into a formal leadership pathway to her principal. As she remembers the time, her former principal and expressed mentor saw leadership for her and took it upon herself to open up a pathway into leadership within the district before she herself was ready, even going so far as to refuse to hire an assistant principal (AP), allowing Fannie to gain valuable experience completing task traditionally taken on by an AP instead. As a result of her principal’s grooming, Fannie developed a collaborative leadership disposition, preferring to engage multiple stakeholders in the decision making process but also expecting them to be flexible, care about kids, and work as hard as she does to ensure the needs of students are centered when decisions are made. As Fannie puts it,

People that I have had as my supervisors were very flexible people, they cared about kids and that was the one thing that I always saw in leadership. As a result, I think I am a direct leader who is pretty clear about my expectations but flexible in the sense that I want to include all staff in whatever we do, whatever we champion at the school. I am going to stay student-centered and continue to ask what impact can we have on kids, what do we want to do and what are we willing to do so our students can make it in this world.

When the district finally forced Fannie’s principal to hire an AP, Fannie made the decision to shift her focus from her quasi administrative role as an instructional leader and transition specialist to a more formal role as an AP in her current school setting. Drawing on the
words she shared about her leadership, Fannie engaged her passion for education to ensure that all students, especially Black students, and more critically Black boys, receive an equal education. She also leads with a desire to pay it forward by remembering her roots and working hard to make sure she leaves the world a little better for the next generation. Fannie reports that she engages a collaborative leadership style that leads to “decisions that are of benefit to students and the entire school.” Though Fannie describes her leadership experiences as successful, she also admits her success has not come without challenges. Entering leadership with hopes of having a larger impact on the racialized inequities she observed in her role as a teacher, especially for Black students, Fannie advances a social justice leadership agenda.

**Engaging a Social Justice Agenda.** Fannie shares that her most critical challenge has been grappling with the attitudes about Black boys that present in the words and practices of the teachers she works with. She shares a story of one little boy who was constantly being pushed out of his classroom for discipline issues. Utilizing the strategies she honed as an instructional leader in her previous position, Fannie made it her goal to help her teachers understand how to work with Black boys being pushed out (and as she says Black students in general), while also helping Black boys engage more agency over expressions of frustration and anger. Specifically, Fannie shares,

> I target a lot of our African American boys that are angry and demonstrate behaviors that others view as disrespectful, and I turn them around. One of my kids this year just got an award for Reading and another award for citizenship. At the beginning of the school year, he was running through the school cursing people out, not doing what you say and just think, now, he just got an award.
In addition to being proud of this work, Fannie reported the importance of pairing this work with the professional development that she provides for teachers. Facilitating professional development focused on culturally responsive teaching to help teachers become more conscious about the perspectives they use as they work with all students, Fannie’s ultimate goal is to help improve her teachers’ craft in ways that shifts their practice from teacher-centered pedagogy to one focused more on the students they serve. She shares, “I did a presentation in our last staff meeting where we took a personality test and seeing everyone’s perspective and point of view was insightful because you could see where everyone fits in.” Fannie helped her teachers use this new knowledge by engaging them in reflection and dialogue on the outcomes of their personality tests with hopes of having positive impact on their teaching practices. Like her mentors before her, she also serves as a model and coach to her teachers providing them with time to develop a deeper understanding of their students, their students’ families, and the surrounding community they serve. It is her hope that teachers learn how to collaborate and find resources that benefit the students, as well as the whole school community. Fannie brings this point home when asked directly about how she helps teachers understand the importance of community and culture,

I tell teachers all the time, you have to look at people’s experiences and lives and their perspectives because if they come into the school and they have not graduated and then they see people who don’t look like them, they are not going to engage so there has to be people who are willing to view things from their perspective and who at least identify with their experiences.

In her efforts to make a difference, Fannie doesn’t just tell her teachers this, she lives it through her leadership every day.
Making a Difference. Fannie does many other things to make a difference in her school, with this work complimenting the work she engages addressing inequities Black boys experience. She explains it best in her own words,

I brought in some programs, we have Disney in School and pretty brown girls [an empowerment group for girls of color] and I want to do something like this next year specifically for boys too. I also have leaders and community members of color come into the school to talk with our students and last year we took a group of students to Washington D.C. on a leadership trip. I also am resourceful for kids; like we have a student store and I kind of use that money to work around the budget for things the kids need to help sustain their programs. I also work to get the things we want to accomplish for kids into the school’s budget.

Continuing to Lead as Resilience and Resistance. Fannie shared many more ways she has made a difference in her school community; however, the one message shining through all that she shared is her desire to lead in ways that never allows her to forget where she came from. The one way she never forgets, is by praising the bridges that carried her over, even as she creates new bridges to carry over those who come behind her, especially the children, and especially Black children!

Summarizing Findings: Using Our Own Tools

By my analysis, the interpretive cases shared within this chapter, as well as chapter four, demonstrate how BWEL lead while never forgetting the bridges over which they crossed. Narratives also illustrate how they do so employing their own leadership tools, rather than those prescribed, and towards a desire to dismantle inequities experienced by HMMS seeking to learn within the contested spaces of U.S. P-12 schools. Consistent with previous research and theories
within which this study is grounded, their narratives also converge around emergent themes. These themes reveal the culturally-centered ways that BWEL engage leadership within the contested spaces of the U.S. P-12 schools within which they are challenged to lead.

For starters, the eight complexly diverse leadership experiences of Ida, Angela, Althea, Sojourner, Mary, Fannie, Joy, and Marva, indicate BWEL seek to dismantle and disrupt inequities experienced by HMMS while simultaneously having to dismantle inequities experienced by themselves. The do so by employing nine ACL practices validated by previous research on WELOC (Santamaria, 2013), including engaging leadership action in alignment with critical multicultural education (CME) and transformative leadership (TRL), and doing so through the prism of an intersectional CRT lens (Crenshaw, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Yosso, 2005). The previously validated ACL practices illuminated in emerging themes for this study, captured the shared leadership behaviors and actions of participating BWEL, regardless of differences in social and cultural identity, lived experiences, and situated school context. Like with Santamaria’s research, findings from this study revealed BWEL engage some ACL practices more prevalently than others. Those engaged more prevalently are codified as primary or macro themes and include, (1) having a leadership identity situated in servant leadership (Sergiovanni, 2007) with the purpose for leading being to serve the greater good. In doing so BWEL (2) lead by example and (3) seek to honor the constituencies they serve by ensuring that all voices are heard. Additionally, BWEL operationalize an intersectional (4) CRT lens (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Yosso, 2005) as a critical leadership tool to help deconstruct inequities born of intersectional oppression, as well as to problem-posing through difficult leadership challenges situated in said oppression, oft developing constructive solutions inclusive of disrupting and dismantling inequities and altogether transforming the disposition, outlook, access, opportunities,
and experiences for self and constituents within the teaching, learning, and leadership space (Banks, 1997; Banks & Banks, 2009; Grant, 2012; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995; Nieto, 2004; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995; Stovall, 2004, Ladson-Billings, 2006). The latter is employed by being willing to engage in courageous or (5) critical conversations (Robinson & Dowson, 2011; Singleton & Linton, 2006) with constituents in order to address racial inequities and social injustices before they become part of the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1992) characterizing most U.S. P-12 schools.

In addition to previously validated macro structures, participating BWEL also employed other ACL practices identified in the research on WELOC (Santamaria, 2014), including creating and/or seeking out spaces to build (6) group consensus so that critical decisions could be made (Kohli, Picower, Martinez, & Ortiz, 2015), (7) building trust with mainstream partners in order to build a cohort of necessary allies, advocates, and sponsors positioned to help them secure access, opportunities, and resources for their school community (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Stovall, 2004), and the students served, including HMMS, and being conscious of (8) stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995), seeking to lead in ways that did not feed into stereotypes about Black women, but also that did not render them vulnerable to retribution based on negative stereotypes others held as a result of implicit and explicit bias. The final ACL practice that BWEL engage is (9) participating in academic discourse. However, this characteristic presented slightly different than the manner codified in Santamaria’s research. Though all eight of the participating BWEL were highly educated, with each of them having advanced degrees, including four BWEL having PhD’s, two BWEL earning more than one master’s degree, and the remaining BWEL having at least one master’s degree, rarely did the women engage in discourse about their leadership using traditional academic discourse or terminology, nor did they seek to
define their experiences in traditionally academic ways. However, when probed, all eight of the women expressed feeling as if the topic comprising this research was critically necessary and important, understood its importance in contributing to the empirical body of work in the field of educational leadership, and were drawn to and compelled to engage the work through the same activist research (Stovall, 2004, 2005) and truth telling (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) within which this study is situated. Additionally, each also frequently spoke of being inspired to continue their learning beyond the professional development offered by their schools and districts, often discussing books or articles (not always scholarly) they read as a way to make sense of their leadership experiences, including those causing them stress and trauma. Given these phenomena, BWEL demonstrate they understand the importance in engaging in academic, and explicitly choose to remain aware of and connected to the discourse being engaged in academic circles, especially in relationship to its import to help solve equity based challenges, even as they redefine and push on traditional definitions of academic discourse by seeking reflection and dialogue outside of traditional academic spaces as well.

Also consistent with findings from the research on WELOC (Santamaria, 2014; Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014), this study confirms BWEL experience educational leadership through stress and trauma related to their attempts to advance racial equity and social justice within the contested spaces of U.S. P-12 schools (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). As captured in interpretive cases, each of the women narrated these experiences as situated in school contexts shaped and informed by whiteness rooted in anti-black oppression levied through macro- and microaggressions situated in race, class, and gender (Gilborn, 2005), and oft operationalized by individuals, groups, and institutions enforcing school reform policies like high stakes testing (Au, 2010), increased accountability (Darling-Hammond, 2009), inequitable funding (Kozol,
1991, 2005), and more prominently spoken about than any other educational policy or practice no tolerance discipline (Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014; Morris, 2016). As a result, BWEL report perceiving policies and practices as one of the primary causes of the equity challenges unfolding within their schools. Narratives also illustrate how BWEL continue to lead using a culturally situated form of resilience and resistance in spite of experiencing stress and trauma, even as said trauma was experienced as a result of having to grapple with the duality of waging leadership as a battle against inequities and oppressions experienced by HMMS, as well as those levied against themselves as BWEL.

BWEL engage resilience when experiencing stress and trauma by leveraging positive aspects of their complexly diverse multicultural identities, perspectives, and subjectivities, rendering their leadership different (Santamaria, 2013; Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014), and enabling them to confront, address, and in some cases solve equity challenges leaders from other backgrounds fail to recognize, find insurmountable, and/or continue to grapple with (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Consistent with the literature on Black teachers, evidence suggest BWEL also engaged leadership as resistance with a keen interest and purpose to disrupt and dismantle inequities experienced within their schools by HMMS, and more specifically Black students. Findings also reveal that leadership through resistance serves to sharpen BWEL multiconsciousness making them acutely aware that they also have the simultaneous task of dismantling and disrupting inequities experienced by themselves.

In this regard, findings amplify and build on the current body of research exploring the leadership of WELOC by indicating the leadership of BWEL is consistent with findings for ACL. Though consistent with findings for ACL, revelations from this study also demonstrate BWEL employ previously validated ACL practices differently, with nuances in manner of
application resulting from their shared identity as Black Women (Collins, 1987), particularly as situated in an educational context promoting practices and policies informed by white supremacy, power, and privilege (Gillborn, 2005) and anti-black oppression. Differences were nuanced enough to re-codify the ACL practices BWEL employ around six common emergent characteristics comprising CR-TML. Expanding on previous ACL research (Santamaria, 2013; Santamaria and Jean-Marie, 2014), yet modeled after methodologies used to engage the study (Santamaria, 2013; Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2013, 2015), common characteristics and qualities for CR-TML were confirmed by coding data for frequency of occurrence with at least two occurrences indicating the characteristic was “common enough to suggest core or shared emergent themes” (Santamaria, 2013). Shared characteristics were further clarified during sister circle check-ins, engaged like member checks, with participating BWEL confirming a strong identification with and collective use of the six CR-TML practices emerging from this study. Emergent themes and common CR-TML practices were implicitly explicated during interpretive case storytelling. They include: (1) engage a CRT lens shaped by a culturally-situated multiconsciousness, (2) maintain simultaneity of purpose situated in the needs of historically marginalized and minoritized students and communities, (3) build complex reciprocal relationships, (4) engage in self-care through communal care; (5) operationalize leadership as an advocate, ally, and activist; and (6) engage in reflection, dialogue, and critical race praxis. I explore and define them explicitly in the next chapter.

Chapter Summary

I provided an overview of the study in chapter one, a review of the literature grounding the study in chapter two, and an explication of the methodology in chapter three. In chapter four I shared the unique leadership stories for Ida, Angela, Althea and Joy. Story sharing was
continued in this chapter providing narratives for Marva, Sojourner, Mary, and Fannie. Chapter six will expand on my discussion of findings by situating them in the secondary research questions guiding the study, and meant to tease out answers to the overarching inquiry. This discussion illuminates and describes dispositions, critical consciousness and leadership characteristics congruent with CR-TML. Concluding thoughts, implications and next steps are discussed in chapter seven. Appendices and references follow.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSING FINDINGS: WE CHOSE TO SPEAK

We realize the importance of our voices only when we are silenced. When the whole world is silent, even one voice becomes powerful. We were scared but our fear was not as strong as our courage. So we decided to tell our stories, not because they are unique, but because they are not. Our stories are the stories of many Black women educational leaders. We speak because we want to achieve the goal of empowering ourselves with the weapon of knowledge, shielding ourselves with unity and bringing us, all of us, together!

~ Inspired by Malala Yousafzai quotes

Grounded in the theories and research shaping this African centered, emancipatory, qualitative examination of the leadership experiences of Black women educational leaders (BWEL), this chapter will discuss the findings revealed in chapters four and five. Specifically, I will discuss emergent themes illuminated through interpretive case storytelling highlighting the leadership experiences of Ida, Angela, Althea, Joy, Marva, Sojourner, Mary, and Fannie, the eight complexly diverse BWEL engaging this study as co-inquirers alongside me. I situate my discussion in the study’s secondary questions, each selected to tease out answers to the overarching inquiry, *How do BWEL committed to advancing racial equity through the development of a social justice leadership praxis experience and engage educational leadership in U.S. P-12 schools?* Interpretive cases revealed how eight complexly diverse BWEL advance a social justice agenda within the contested school spaces comprising United States (U.S.) P-12 education. Taken collectively, individual stories converge around emergent themes to reveal how BWEL actualize socially just and equitable learning environments for those least served
within them, and especially at the intersections of race and gender. Themes also reveal how BWEL persist and sustain themselves when forced to grapple with systemic and structural barriers rooted in white supremacy, power, and anti-black oppression. This information proves formative for those challenged to efficaciously engage social justice leadership (SJL) within U.S. P-12 schools, as well as those developing such leaders to do so. Equally important, narratives also demonstrate the power of voice and story within the field of educational leadership by creating space within this study, as well as the literature it produced, for practicing women educational leaders of color (WELOC) to engage agency to employ both. As such, this study reveals answers to some of the most critical equity challenges the field of education leadership is forced to confront. It also has implications for the fields of critical multicultural education (CME) and critical race theory (CRT). Revelations follow. They are positioned to help further tease out answers to the study’s overarching inquiry.

**How do BWEL understand the impact and/or influence of race, gender, and policy on their leadership experiences?**

Interpretive case stories for Ida, Angela, Althea, Joy, Sojourner, Mary, Fannie, and Marva reveal BWEL understand and engage their leadership experiences through a critical race lens shaped by lived experiences informing multicultural identities (Pine, 2009; Santamaria, 2014), and employed to tap into, leverage and sharpen a unique multiconsciousness (Matsuda, 1997) formed at the intersection of their gendered and racialized identities as Black Women (Collins, 1987). As such, this lens powers BWEL’s social justice leadership epistemologies. It also enables BWEL to persist and resist when their social justice epistemologies are challenged.

**Leading Through Multicultural Identities: Family Faith and Fortitude**
Consistent with ACL, participating BWEL experience their leadership through racialized multicultural identities (Santamaria, 2013) shaped by lived experiences (Pine, 2009), especially memories of receiving culturally responsive care and support (Gay, 2010; Roberts, 2010) from diverse Black families and communities. As indicated in BWEL narratives, community is defined broadly to include the neighborhood community, as well as professional, personal, organizational, ethnic, and cultural communities, with each being defined and shaped by social identity constructs like race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, culture, and the overall and collective human and community experience (Santamaria, 2014; Pine, 2009). Countering hegemonic narratives that low pay and poor working conditions keep ELOC from entering education and educational leadership, BWEL express entering these fields despite such conditions (Achinstein, Ogawa, & Sexton, 2010; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). They cite family, community, and faith in one’s ability to improve conditions for the community as the inspiration into education and leadership, as well as the motivation to remain.

For example, Fannie shares entertaining a desire to enter education after learning how critical it is to have teachers who understand and are capable of communicating effectively with Black students (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Resolved to ensure that students from backgrounds like herself have teachers and leaders who understand their experience, she engages her leadership within schools through this lens, making it her goal to ensure that Black boys pushed into her alternative school from comprehensive high schools return with the disposition, knowledge, and skills to be successful. Ida’s story also holds an example of the connection between leadership, family, community, and multiple identities as a Black Woman. Inspired to enter education by one of her dance students, a young Black girl participating in the community-based dance classes she taught, Ida was shocked to find that her student failed to find value in
herself, even at the young age of three years old. Motivated by this interaction, Ida enters education to inspire young Black children to dream the impossible. As such, she is determined to serve as an important role model for Black children, refusing to see anything but their full potential and making every effort to communicate that potential to them as a leader, both during and after school hours. A third example can be found in Mary’s narrative when recounting how she left her work in corporate recruitment to teach because she needed her life’s work to have a greater purpose. Once her roots were firmly established in education, she taught to make a difference in the school her younger siblings once attended and honed her leadership craft with hopes of becoming a shining example of possibility for all students, but especially those whose lived experiences mirrored her own. There are other examples across each of the remaining narratives. However, Angela’s interpretive case provides the most potent example of the connection between the leadership of BWEL and their experiences growing up and the impact these experiences have on their multicultural identities.

For starters, Angela explicitly names her father as her inspiration into teaching. Reminded of his life lesson to be ‘kind, not nice’ she develops the will to engage courageous conversations (Singleton & Linton, 2006), entering forbidden dialogue when issues of oppression, including racialized oppression present. In describing how this lesson inspired her leadership, Angela reminds that she is not “afraid to kick the pink elephant in the room,” and does so often, especially when advocating for equitable access to resources and curriculum for students with English language development needs, as well as for the rights of Black children who are pushed out of classroom spaces due to poor classroom management and implicit biases held by their classroom teachers. Angela’s experiences with family and watching her father fight for a place in leadership in spite of the racialized barriers he faced, including not having a
formal education due to lack of access, also inspires her fortitude as a leader. Drawing on her father’s strength, Angela, persists even when leading within the contested spaces of U.S. P-12 schools becomes difficult. As she recounts, first “I cry, and I cry, then I keep talking about it until something is changed.” The fortitude she developed as a result of her experiences with family and community also developed her propensity towards servant leadership (Servioganni, 2000). This is evidenced by the various ways she engages leadership in service to her community. A final example of Angela’s fortitude and faith when leading to improve her community includes the advocacy and activism she exemplifies when preparing critical professional development (CPD) (Kohli, Picower, Martinez, and Ortiz, 2015) infused with culturally responsive pedagogical teachings (Gay, 2010). She does this without asking for permission, and without being asked, simply because she realizes asking for permission may create unnecessary barriers put up by the very systems created to keep her from doing so to begin with. Instead, and because of the social justice leadership disposition she developed as a member of her family and community, she is empowered to improve teachers’ ability to apply culturally relevant pedagogical practices (Ladson-Billings, 1998) to better serve their students. Grounded in Banks’ (1995) Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education framework, Angela speaks of facilitating professional development that incorporates an explicit focus on knowledge construction and prejudice reduction by inviting aspiring early childhood educators and classroom teachers within the schools she works to engage in critical conversations (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Kohli, 2013) requiring them to reflect on how bias shapes their interactions with students and families, especially HMMS, and how they might use reflection and dialogue (Kohli, et al, 2015) to transform biases also transforming the school’s climate and culture (May & Sleeter, 2010). Like her father, Angela leads by example. Specifically, she models what it
means to employ *equity pedagogy* (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995) as is evidenced by the myriad of ways she engages the will to lead for social justice within her community and schools. Angela’s story is mirrored in the other narratives as well, with an excerpt pulled from Althea’s words articulating why she believes Black women choose to lead. Althea’s words in response to a question asking what she feels others need to know about the leadership of BWEL, magnify the importance of family, community, faith and fortitude to their leadership. She states,

> They need to know that Black women are prideful about their work, that they feel they are in a role that is highly respected by their families and communities, especially if they are the leader of the school. Even as a teacher, or even working in the school, they are respected. Their work in the profession is respected by their families and friends, and these people are proud of them, and so they don’t want to let them down. They need to understand that Black women do this work with pride, in honor of their families, friends, and community, and for the children. They need to know that when Black women do this work, they need to feel affirmed in their workplace and their accomplishments celebrated, and people need to show care for them, asking them genuine questions, like *what’s keeping you up at night; how are you managing the installation of that new playground, how are you doing, how long are you staying at school and are you getting enough rest; how can I alleviate some of your work.* They need to know that Black women are working hard and they do it because they carry their families and community and their care for the children into schools with them. Black women are proud and they work hard, but they also need some balance. This is what they need to know. This is what I would tell them.
Althea’s statement affirms BWEL engage educational leadership for a cause greater than them, deriving great respect and pride as a result of that work, and situating their work in family, community, and the children they lead to serve. It is this understanding that provides them with a purpose to lead by example (Kouzes & Posner, 1987), powers a work ethic grounded in spiritual morality (hooks, 1994), and forms a leadership identity situated in a social justice orientation employed through servant leadership (Sergiovanni, 2007). As a result, it is also how they come to understand and engage their existence, experiences, and actions as Black Women engaging leadership within the contested spaces comprising U.S. P-12 schools. In short, BWEL leadership is shaped by lived experiences giving birth to multicultural identities and each of these phenomena forms the proverbial bridge between themselves, the ancestors and elders who built the bridge that they might cross, as well as the students whose interest they perceive themselves serving and who will undoubtedly walk across the bridge and maintain its structure long after their leadership is over.

Thus, BWEL leadership is situated in participating BWELs’ multicultural identities as Black women (Collins, 1987), informing the communal and moral interest they hold for themselves, the Black children they serve, their local, cultural, social, and ethnically multicultural Black communities, and the future of Black peoples in the U.S. It equips them with a culturally-specific resilience infused with a mission to maintain a simultaneous watchful eye over all of these persons and the groups they comprise, even as they also maintain a watchful eye over self and those who are “othered” within the spaces they lead. Codified in the literature on BFT (Collins, 1986, 1987) as cultural work, BWEL employ leadership within U.S. P-12 schools as other mothers (Ware, 2006) providing mother-like care for self, Black students, community,
and HMMS as well as others least served by the educational system, and it is through this prism that their CRT lens gets projected.

**CRT and Multicultural Identities: My Race is My Gender and My Gender is My Race**

Racism is endemic and prevalent throughout all aspects of society, including within its institutions (Bell, 1992; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004), and U.S. P-12 schools are no exception. Each of the BWEL engaging this study recounted stories enmeshed within the racism forming the contested spaces characterizing the U.S. P-12 schools within which they led. From Mary’s explicit encounter with a racist community who didn’t want her to serve as the school’s principal due to her being Black, to the prevalence of the racialized discipline gap (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010) in Fannie’s school, race and racism was a factor. Althea’s recollection of having discrimination charges levied against her by Latinx parents because they perceived expressions of culturally responsive care (Roberts, 2010) for the minority population of Black students attending her school to mean she cared more for Black students than Latinx students provides another example. Additionally, from Ida’s silencing as a BWEL to the more subtle microaggressions (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008) levied each day against all eight participating BWEL, the discussion of race and racism were salient throughout interpretive cases. Though Santamaria’s (2014) research affirms WELOC utilize a CRT lens to understand these experiences, arguing that the principals who participated in her study on ACL “surprisingly identified more with their race and class as a means to inspire their leadership practice, than their gender identities” (p.18), I nuance these claims. Instead, I understand the racialized experiences participating BWEL shared through an intersectional CRT lens (Crenshaw, 1991), rather than a more or less, either or lens. I understand it in this way because each of the women in this study spoke of race and gender as if both had an equal impact on their leadership experiences. They
did not speak of racialized stress and trauma, gender-based stress and trauma, and class-based stress and trauma separately. Instead, they spoke of racialized stress and trauma as situated in their identities as Black women from predominantly working class backgrounds, and as separate and different from the racialized oppression experienced by Black men and/or gender-based oppression experienced by white women. While only one of the eight BWEL used CRT and BFT terminology to describe their lens in this way, the narratives they shared incorporated descriptions of a leadership praxis consistent with the theoretical constructs characterizing the CRT lens and BFT standpoint the women engaged, including reflecting on experiences revealing their understanding of race and racism as a normal part of society (Bell, 1992), tethered to gender and class, and fully expecting these phenomena to be a factor within their leadership as well as the schooling experiences of their students, especially HMMS. Additionally, each of the participating BWEL engaged some form of intersectional analysis when employing their CRT lens to understand and interpret their leadership experiences, rooting said analysis in their raced and gendered experiences as Black women, even as they also foregrounded and named race more often than intentionally naming gender and class. Ultimately, their narratives indicate that situational, local, and national context served as a determinant for when, how, and why each of the identity traits got foregrounded or narrated, though it is clear that race, gender, and class are all components of the racialized stress and trauma of which BWEL speak.

For example, one way all eight women explored the intersectional nature of race and gender can be attributed to their discourse surrounding the stereotype of the “angry Black woman.” All eight women spoke about this stereotype with an understanding that it is one attached to their bodies because they are Black, women, and classed as low-income despite lived financial reality. During the interview discourse with Mary but not included in her narrative, she
shares a conversation she engaged with a group of white female teachers who repeatedly requested her attendance at parent conferences with Black students because they attributed the stereotyped portrayals of Black women they witnessed on reality television shows like “Love and Hip Hop” as sassy, combative, and intellectually simple, to the lived identities of their students’ Black mothers, most times before ever meeting them. Mary recalls,

…an angry mom was scheduled to come up to the school house for a parent meeting and they would say we need you to meet with the parent with us. My first thought is why. We get angry parents at school all of the time. Of course, the parent comes in, and it just so happens to be a Black woman. We [educators without a sense of consciousness about their implicit bias] need to stop that. Not every Black woman is angry. Not every Black woman is on welfare. Not every Black woman has baby daddies and isn’t married and has a bunch of kids. People may not be overt with their bias but they are covert with the messages and I am picking up on them loud and clear. If you’ll say or do that about students’ parents, I can only imagine how you are treating our kids; our minority kids. …If your only connection of Black women is that show, I am worried that’s what you think about all Black women.

Mary’s words echo the sentiments of her BWEL counterparts when discussing this racialized, gendered, and classed stereotype. Like the other women, she responds by engaging those in her school who employ it in courageous conversations (Singleton, 2014), forcing her teachers to reflect on why and how they have raced parent conferences, including problem-posing (Freire, 1972) why assigning stereotypes about Black women to the Black women they engage in the school setting, including the mothers’ of their students constitutes a racialized inequity. Mary also employs critically relevant equity pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1998; McGee
Banks & Banks, 1995), engaged through the stories she tells her teachers about growing up in families and communities with a background similar to the students and families her teachers disparage, yet becoming the Black woman she is today (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) to help teachers determine how best to counteract the deficit perceptions they project onto their students. She does so to help teachers transform biased perceptions and hopeless prescriptions into proactive and positive possibilities for students (Collins, 1987; Kohli et al, 2015). A critical turning point in Mary’s work with her teachers is captured in a reminder she shares with them as she states, “what you see is not what you see!” In this way, Mary shares with her teachers what all eight of the women shared in their narratives:

I don’t want to hear about Black women being called angry ever again, and I don’t even know if it’s just for education, just being angry, that Black women are angry. I see it like we’re passionate, and assertive, but anytime the Black woman’s decibel level goes over a certain level people think calm down. No one else gets told that. No other woman is told to calm down like us. What do you mean calm down?

Contrary to accepting the stereotype of the angry Black woman, and consistent with BFT theory (Collins, 1986, 1991), Mary and the seven other BWEL embrace their fiery assertive leadership natures. Instead of accepting the stereotype about angry Black women woven into each of their narratives, they re-codify deficit laden perceptions turning language like sassy, aggressive, and angry, into desirable leadership traits (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015), like outgoing, a people-person, and assertive instead. Yet, the irony in Mary’s and the other BWEL narratives is that given their lived experiences with interlocking oppression, BWEL should absolutely be angry, and yet, as they all shared, by virtue of being
Black, woman, and classed as lower status, even that property interest afforded those sitting closer to whiteness is stripped away.

There are other examples of the overlapping nature of gender and race in the leadership experiences of participating BWEL, affirming their use of an intersectional CRT lens to understand leadership experiences. Given this phenomenon, narratives and other research data reveal BWEL clearly understand the interlocking nature of anti-black oppression along raced, gendered, and classed lines (Collins, 1986, 1987; Crenshaw, 1991). Thus, when examining their stories, I too chose not to separate race, gender and class because it was difficult to determine where one began and/or ended, if at all. Like with the women, when speaking about race and racism, I too am applying an intersectional lens, speaking about these things at the intersection of gender and class, even when I don’t explicitly name them as constructs within my analysis.

Rac(e)ing Multiple Identities and Sharpening Multiconsciousness. Each of the BWEL engaging this study grew up and came of age in predominately Black, working class neighborhoods expressing the racial, ethnic, and cultural norms that come with, and informing the racialized, classed, and gendered identities they each cultivated. Because participating BWEL also held multiple college degrees, and were knowledgeable about and educated in the racialized and cultural norms of a dominant U.S. middle class, each engaged a complexly multi-layered, CRT lens informed by these entire phenomenon. Given this phenomenon, participating BWEL experienced leadership through the prism of oppressor and oppressed (Dubois, 1984) or what Collins (1986) terms the outsider within. Codified as having the ability to recognize inequities situated in white supremacy, privilege, and power, through a lens of interlocking and co-dependent oppressions (Matsuda, 1997), each BWEL employed their CRT lens to recognize and address inequities in the prevailing order of their schools that those without their
multicultural subjectivities may not have been able to detect (McKay, 2010). Though leveraged to different degrees, each also used their CRT lens as a leadership tool to better understand and make sense of the leadership phenomena comprising their work. Thus, their lens helped them make sense of how the children they served were experiencing their education, how others perceived and engaged them as Black female leaders, how they were positioned within and supported to navigate their leadership space as a result of these perceptions, and how each of these things impacted their ability to make and enact decisions meant to engage leadership that eliminates all kinds of oppression. When employed intentionally, their lens also enabled work consistent with the equity pedagogy that McGee Banks and Banks (1995) describe, including building culturally responsive teaching and learning spaces capable of supporting teachers to educate students equitably, working towards prejudice reduction in stakeholders through the building of such spaces, and co-constructing new knowledges not situated in deficit projections of those who show up in the space differently. Likewise, their CRT lens, also comprised an act of resilience and resistance, particularly when participating BWEL recalled employing it to counteract deficit narratives about themselves as Black women, while simultaneously engaging action meant to disrupt and dismantle inequitable and unjust actions levied against HMMS in the educational space, especially Black students, and specifically Black boys.

One narrative that magnifies these phenomena can be found in Ida’s story when she confesses how she pushed through adversity when rendered invisible and silent during administrative meetings meant to provide principals in her district with safe space to workshop school-based problems. For Ida, these meetings became a space where her colleagues refused to listen to, accept, and or respond to the ideas she offered until they were shared again by her administrative counterparts, all of whom were white females. Believing her silencing to be a
result of her racialized and gendered identity, perceived by her peers as needing to be seen, not heard, Ida’s response to this attempt to appropriate the intellectual capital she brought to the leadership space, was to go silent. On the surface her response may appear to be an act of acceptance of her invisibility as a Black woman. However, underneath the surface of her silence, Ida leveraged her BFT standpoint to resist exploitation of her intellectual capital, reaffirming self-dominance over her voice (Baldwin, 1980; Collins, 1987; Yosso, 2005). This enabled Ida to re-define her value and worth in that space and exercise full agency over how the intellectual capital she brought to contribute to the space would be shared (Collins, 1987). Additionally, by demonstrating an uncanny ability to listen and observe rather than speak, Ida is able to develop a critical understanding of why the other BWEL in her group also remained silent. This exercise of self-silencing for the purpose of introspective reflection revealed Ida’s biased judgements projected onto her BWEL colleague as a result of not viewing her silence within the full context of the climate and culture established by her district. During the sister check-in process, Ida shared that by choosing to self-silence, listening for understanding instead, she was able to clearly see the subversive nature of race and racism playing out within her leadership meetings and district. This was a phenomenon she hadn’t captured before, believing she was operating in an educational space that valued all children instead. Using this experience with interlocking oppressions, and drawing on the new learnings her experience revealed, Ida was able to re-shape and sharpen her lens, refining her multiconsiousness, and better positioning her to advocate with a stronger sense of strategic urgency when transitioning to a school and district within a political environment less progressive than that she inhabited at the time. Thus, armed with new knowledge and her multiconsiousness reclaimed (McKay, 2010), Ida now had the armor she needed to better recognize racialized inequities in the leadership spaces she traversed (and would
come to traverse in the future). Ida’s story demonstrates how BWEL draw on multicultural sensibilities grounded in identity to counteract the double jeopardy of racialized and gendered violence. Sensibilities that enable them to persevere and continue to lead with integrity while advancing a social justice agenda. While Ida does not explicitly name her oppression as situated in an intersection of gender and race oppression, the literature and narrative confirm that it is. Her story is not alone.

Joy’s story also reveals the double jeopardy (Beale, 1970) of being marginalized and silenced at the intersection of multiple oppressions, leading to perceptions that she lacked the intellectual capital and skill to contribute to the leadership space. For example, she recalls being passed over for leadership opportunities even as her white female and Black male counterparts were offered access. She situates her understanding of these phenomena in her identity as a middle-aged Black woman, rendering gender and race, and to some degree age, intricately connected. In her description of her experience, Joy is clear that she is locked out based on being a Black woman, not solely because she is a woman, and not solely because she is Black. Joy also recognizes that embedded within the double jeopardy of living life in multiple oppressions means she has to work harder to overcome stereotypes about her ability or simply to be seen. As is true with each of the other BWEL, Joy describes working smarter, perceived by most as harder, as a tool of resilience and resistance. This strategy is employed to ensure BWEL are provided with the opportunities that come easily to others because of their privileges, and in Joy’s case included developing public and private relationships with those who had the power to open up access to opportunities in alignment with her goals, being receptive to critique and feedback from trusted peers in order to improve in areas where skill gaps existed, engaging community and families in culturally responsive ways to develop important and critical
community allies, and most critical of all, seeking out information and new knowledge not offered her by those with access and power to share it well before she would need it in her professional role. This last strategy rendered her presence necessary and often enabled her to remain one-step ahead of her colleagues and peers. Often dismissed as stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995), BWEL’s inclination to work smarter is not always connected to this construct for Black women. They are not misguided in understanding that their marginalization and subsequent invisibility is a real thing. As bearers of multiple oppressions, and absent the privileges and powers afforded those with identities that allow them to push out of the area of Crenshaw’s (1991) oppression matrix near the most extreme degrees of Blackness, womanhood, and low or limited financial class, BWEL are forced to hold the knife at its sharpest edge, figuratively and sometimes seemingly literally, and continue to fight to exist (Phendla, 2004). As a result, the lessons participating BWEL learned from families who taught them to work smarter, including sometimes working harder than most to get far less, gave birth to a work ethic enmeshed in their lived experiences as Black women. It also became a coping skill required to achieve excellence in a world narrating their failure at every turn. As a result, there is danger in solely codifying their work ethic as situated in stereotype threat in that it serves as an important tool of culturally-specific resistance and resilience, especially in the midst of an educational climate mired in colorblind racism fueled by language appeasement that requests Black bodies to project the appearance of diversity but that relies on mediocrity to brand those bodies as incapable of meeting ever-changing metrics, thereby maintaining gatekeeping mechanisms to lock them out of positions able to make real and transformative change. Given the prevalence and persistence of the colonial education project, this hiding of the tools, closing of the gate, and locking ELOC like BWEL out is no doubt intentional.
Hoping not to glorify or essentialize the rigorous work ethic many BWEL are forced to operationalize within the contested spaces of education, understanding that to have to work harder than anyone else is in fact a byproduct of the colonial project and absolutely situated in a racist system meant to dehumanize the Black female body, transferring any right she has to humanity to the Black male and the white woman thereby maintaining her status at the bottom rung of the oppression matrix, it is still important to point out and fully recognize the import of their work ethic as a valuable leadership tool. In doing so, my analysis is meant to provoke dialogue in terms of how we ensure BWEL and other marginalized and minoritized peoples are not made more vulnerable to further exploitation as ELOC when the work ethic is minimized, dismissed, or misunderstood. This is particularly important due to history’s tendency to erase or marginalize Black woman, their culture, and the tools of resiliency they possess. It is especially important that we consider the salience of the socio-historical context of race and racism as an institutional tool for exploitation and oppression when considering this phenomena, and especially within a 21st century colorblind context where the tools developed by peoples of color, including Black women, during times when racism was more overt, are essential and possibly more necessary today to disrupt and dismantle an oppressive system that appropriates, subjugates, and hides the tools BWEL and other ELOC require to begin with (McKay, 2010).

Joy’s critique surrounding the active recruitment and hiring of Black men to fill leadership roles within educational leadership, particularly as a way to meet diversity quotas, and often before they have been provided the support to be successful in these positions speaks power into this discussion of hiding the tools. During the interview and member checking process, Joy recalls having to support a young Black male who has been appointed as the principal of her school over two fully capable BWEL, including herself. She expresses concern
that her new supervisor is not fully prepared to take on the responsibility of the position, leaving she and her BWEL counterpart to pick up the slack. Her statements have resonance, especially when she uses imagery to make her point by stating that behind every young Black male is a middle-aged Black woman pushing a boulder up the hill. She provokes,

In our desire to have Black Male presence, we often don’t put them in position to do the work; so they are in charge of something, and the head of something, but they are doing a piss poor job of it, and not because it is all their fault. They may be prematurely put into positions that they have not been prepared to hold but in the background, holding up everything, pushing the boulder up the doggone mountain is some middle-aged Black woman who has done the work. It is tiring but it is happening everywhere.

Also relevant and resonating in Joy’s words are the tensions interlocking oppressions meant to divide and conquer, cause for Black women with racialized affinities to Blackness and gendered affinities to womanhood but not being able to separate one from the other, or draw privilege from them either. Joy’s story also critique’s the field’s manner of addressing calls for equity and diversity by placing Black and Brown bodies in positions of power but not affording them the agency, support, space, critical knowledge, humanity, or ironically, power, to thrive and succeed once positions are filled. This reveals the hypocrisy of such solutions, suggesting they are not solutions at all, but rather inaction masquerading as social action, but really meant to maintain the status quo. Finally, the example drawn from Joy’s story exemplifies Collins’ theory of the “simultaneity of oppression” (Collins, 1986, p. S19), by illustrating how Joy leverages her multiconsciousness employed as CRT lens to recognize systemic oppression, privilege, and power within her leadership experiences. Specifically, instead of situating the problem in the young Black male elevated to school Principal over she and the other BWEL serving as a co-
assistant principal, she situates the problem in the policies and practices that oppress Black males even when it seems they are receiving privileges based on their male identities. Joy simultaneously notes how those same systems oppress her as a Black woman, intersected with class and age, in equally dehumanizing ways. Ultimately, Joy’s story demonstrates how narrative can be employed to reveal the ways BWEL leverage multiconsciousness to remain sensitive and critically responsive to how oppressive systems affect multiple others, in this case Black men, even as they also understand how systems impact them. This is true across each of the narratives shared.

This phenomenon also illustrates how BWEL hold space to demonstrate culturally responsive care (Roberts, 2010) for a myriad of others, including other ELOC, women regardless of racial or ethnic background, HMMS, especially Black children, and most notably Black boys, even as they also hold space to combat the inequities they too face. A final statement coupled with two previous examples from Joy’s story amplify the essence of the discussion about the influence and impact of race, gender and other interlocking oppressions on the BWEL leadership experience. She shares,

You know, I am a Black woman. My perspective is we are not valued as much as some of our counterparts, yet, in my observation as a classroom teacher and even as an administrator, there is something that we bring that I don’t know if anyone else could.

Here, Joy’s words capture perfectly the sentiments all eight of the women expressed when provided with the opportunity to discuss the impact and influence of race and gender on their leadership experiences. Survey, interview, critical inquiry action group, and member-checking data also reveal that all eight women in this study narrate their racialized leadership experiences as situated in interlocking oppressions codified by gender, race, and class. This has
import for shaping and helping them to understand their personhood, leadership, and leadership experiences as situated in their intersecting and multicultural identities. Thus, I advance an argument that race was not more important than gender or class to the leadership experiences of BWEL, instead they refused to bifurcate or compartmentalize the discourse of race and racism in this way. Though they often engaged a discussion of oppression foregrounding race and racism without mentioning gender and class, narratives and other data points reveal critical components of BWEL identity were leveraged intersectionally making all three equally important. They also leveraged intersectional identities complexly with consideration for cultural and socio-historical context, and as a way to develop relationships with students, families, and community, as well as to view the landscapes of their leadership contexts from the bottom up, top down, inside out, and outside in. Likewise, unlike many other women of color who may be able to claim colorline and/or other privileges closer to whiteness, their positionality at the most oppressive range of Crenshaw’s (1991) oppression matrix, including the denial of their humanity as a property right (Bell, 1992; Harris, 1997), equips them with a unique multi-consciousness (Dubois, 1984) situated in a lived experience enmeshed in anti-blackness but powerful enough to see and root out whiteness in ways those who experience its multiple privileges are unable to (Matsuda, 1996). Mary’s words on this topic punctuate the points made by Joy and the other women when she discusses her desire to be seen and affirmed as a BWEL conceding that if all folks see when they look at her are the stereotypes about her Black womanhood, she wishes they would simply turn their deficit laden projections of those stereotypes into the positive attributes she and the other BWEL leverage on a daily basis when advancing leadership for racial equity and social justice. Mary pleads,
If it is historic that Black women have been mammy figured then we [the field of educational leadership] should take the good qualities from that stereotype and apply them. If we are intent on viewing Black women as nurturing *mammies*, then okay if that’s what it’s going to be, let’s take all of those characteristics of that mammy, and see them as positives. You see us as a mammy, if that’s what it is, if it’s what you see, especially for someone of a darker complexion like me, then fine, let’s take those positives of that negative and understand that those individuals, those figures, those mammy’s you see, we were the ones that cultivated and nurtured not just our own, but everybody else’s children too. That’s what we do. Let’s hold on to that.

Though the statement internalizes and to some degree projects a celebratory tenor onto a negative stereotype experienced traumatically by many, Mary’s passion and sentiments are not lost. Considered in context, and along the same line of Mary’s thinking, I might argue as Joy says, “We are not angry we are passionate, we are not conceited, we are confident, we are not mean we are assertive, we can work together, we are collaborative and I don’t want to ever hear people say that we can’t lead our children and our schools again.” With these final statements both women capture what comes across in each narrative. Gender, class, and race are co-dependent and equally important to the leadership of BWEL, including the racialized stress and trauma they experience as well as the multiconsciousness they leverage to lead through resilience and resistance as a result (Ransby, 2000).

**Leading Through Multiconsciousness: Race, Resilience, and Resistance**

Engaging a multiconsciousness equipped them with the ability to hold and consider interlocking, multi-layered oppressions can have the effect of making it seem as if one is waging a never-ending war. Waging this war results in *racial battle fatigue*. Smith (2004, 2011)
describes racial battle fatigue as the heavy psychological, emotional, and spiritual burden felt when a barrage of racialized microaggressions are experienced in the work place causing people of color to internalize racism and triggering an unconscious acceptance of the racialized hierarchy, often leading to severe bouts of despair and apathy. Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) define racialized microaggressions as small, subtle verbal, nonverbal, visual, or tangibly physical insults, often projected onto people of color. Consistent with this research, each of the eight participating BWEL expressed feeling like they were in a constant battle as a result of experiencing a constant barrage of racialized microaggressions. The battle BWEL spoke of waging on behalf of self, the diasporic racialized communities to which they each held an intersectional affinity, and the students, families, and school communities they served, especially those from historically marginalized and minoritized backgrounds, was multilayered. It was not merely a physical battle; it was also an emotional, psychological, cultural, social, and spiritual battle (Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000). These battles required frequent self-work, even while engaging leadership for others, to avoid the spirit murdering of which scholar Betina Love (2016) speaks. This spirit murdering is a kind of racialized nihilism (West, 2001) resulting from daily, systemic, institutionalized, anti-Black, state-sanctioned violence” (p. 22), that kills the soul in ways that it must be recaptured and restored (McKay, 2010) by speaking daily affirmation into it, an affirmation that reminds oneself of their own self-value and worth (Collins, 1987), and that is fueled by one’s concern for both self and others (West, 2001). As described by each of the eight participating BWEL, fighting this battle occurred over the course of their leadership. It resulted in racialized stress and trauma.

For example, survey data revealed that though all eight BWEL reported being confident in their abilities to lead, strongly agreed that their ideas about education and educational leadership
are important, expressed feeling positive that the knowledge and practices they bring can make changes at their school site towards a goal of equity and social justice, and felt the contributions they have to make to the profession are valuable, they each also expressed feeling isolated in their profession in their commitment to equity and justice, strongly agreed that the mistreatment of students of color has a negative impact on them, felt as if they were solely responsible for the well-being of HMMS, especially Black students, and reported being treated with less respect than their peers at least once annually. Seven of the eight explicitly expressed experiencing racial discrimination throughout their leadership career with five BWEL reporting experiences occurring at least once a year and two citing weekly occurrences. Though only seven of the eight women identified race and racism as the explicit cause of their racialized leadership experiences, all eight other leadership stories validate the negative impact of these experiences on their leadership, particularly at the intersection of race and gender, making it a contributing factor in their stress and trauma (Lewis, Mendenhall, & Harwood, 2013; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Initially, Marva was the sole BWEL who reported never experiencing racial discrimination and felt race and racism were not a factor in her experiences as a leader. This initial determination was tempered by lived experiences leading to internalized racism and projected in deficit perceptions of self. Specifically, Marva grew up in a community just outside of a large Midwest City. Learning to view race through a colorblind lens and distancing herself from her Blackness as a result, Marva considers herself human rather than Black but believes she is Black because she lives in America and as a country it is so infatuated with race. It is through this lens that Marva narrates her coming of age story, ultimately shaping her leadership as well.
For example, Marva describes her father as being a hard worker and provider of the family, evidenced by him bringing his paycheck home to her mother to assist with household bills. He did so despite not living in the household with her, or her mother and other siblings. Situated in white, middle-class patriarchal heteronormative cultural norms, Marva’s memory of her father is consistent with the view that males are hard-working care takers of stay at home moms and the children they stay home to care for. On the other hand, despite Marva’s mother being a stay-at-home mom, she describes her mother as being on public assistance and having poor money management skills. She also describes her mother as being a little irresponsible because there were times when the family’s electricity was turned off due to missed bills and she believes her mother’s love of partying may have been the reason the family had to go without lights from time to time. The irony in Marva’s narration of her mother’s story is while her mother also subscribes to societal views of majoritarian standards for womanhood by staying at home to take care of her children, she is not afforded access to this narrative. Instead, due to her Blackness and low-income status, she is narrated as the irresponsible welfare mother, a stereotype reserved for poor Black women who take advantage of the federal system meant to sustain families in need; a stereotype Marva has absorbed and internalized despite being Black and female herself. It does not dawn on Marva that these are public resources that her family was entitled to in the same way that white families received federal subsidies for home loans, food, and employment. When describing her mother, Marva also ignores her family’s reality of being trapped in a community with limited access to opportunities beyond low wage jobs that do not meet their financial needs locking them in a generational cycle tethered to the very public assistance they are vilified for accepting. Marva’s narration of her story also ignored other potential counter narratives, including the possibility that her mother is a single Black mother.
living in a community without access to resources others are afforded, and locked out of an economic system, forced to believe her only opportunity is finding a good, hard working man who will enable her to stay at home to take care of her children but being shamed when she does exactly that. Likewise, instead of that system providing her with support to overcome barriers and obstacles, it held her hostage to it, rendering her co-dependent and unemployable. Yet, she persists, attending to the needs of her children, including making a sincere attempt to co-parent her children with their father with whom she is no longer wedded but who is equally concerned with meeting the needs of his family. Situated at the site of multiple-oppressions, these narratives are ignored, and therefore go unseen and viewed through a deficit lens by Marva. Even Marva’s mother’s attempts to create space for self-care by enjoying time with friends is viewed through a deficit lens, ignoring the possibility that this is her way of re-energizing in order to survive and thrive the difficult circumstance that comes with being tethered to public assistance in communities where resources and opportunities to sustain one’s family are limited. Unfortunately, these are the stereotypes that Marva’s lived experiences afforded her, shaping her limited and oft deficit-laden multiconsciousness at the intersection of race, class, and gender. It was this consciousness that presented in Marva’s counter narrative, making her the sole educational leader who engaged deficit laden perceptions of Black womanhood,

Despite not understanding the counter narratives masked behind pathologizing narratives situated in whiteness as a property interest, Marva’s experiences remain formative and critical to her development as a self-reliant and confident Black woman. It was this resolve, situated in her expressed lived experiences that shaped her multicultural subjectivities, enabling her to confront anti-blackness oppression in the leadership space. Though the multi-consciousness and CRT
lens employed by the remaining seven BWEL show up differently than Marva’s and present as slightly more sharpened, primarily due to lived experiences with families able to shield them from internalizing deficit laden perceptions about self, what is clear across all of their experiences is that the interlocking nature of race, gender, and class on their lives inform and shape the CRT lens they employ as leaders. Ultimately, Marva’s initial understandings were modified, especially during the interview process when forced to reflect on student, teacher, and parent response to her appointment as the leader of her rural Midwest school in a community with limited diversity across race, gender, and class lines. It was also re-shaped and sharpened during the critical action inquiry group employed in phase III of the study, when attempting to work through a series of equity challenges rooted in racial microaggressions (Donvan, Galban, Grace, Bennett, & Felicie, 2012) and shaped by spaces situated in a hidden curriculum defined by colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). This lens is continually sharpened as a result of ongoing leadership experiences engaged and undertood at the intersection of race, class, and gender oppression (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), and sometimes other socially constructed identity factors. This re-shaping and sharpening renders the CRT lens BWEL employ complexly multi-layered, intersectional, and dynamic, and enables them to tap into a unique Black female multiconsciousness (Matsuda, 1997) to persist and resist when experiencing racialized stress and trauma as a result of the policies and practices they are forced to confront within the spaces in which they lead.

**Leadership as Resilience and Resistance: Policy and Practice.** An additional factor leading to the trauma and stress BWEL experienced included those influenced as a result of having to implement school reform policies and practices running oppositional to social justice and servant leadership epistemologies. Specifically, two of the eight women named high stakes
testing as a concern for their leadership, one spoke about accountability measures, two named challenges with funding, and all eight named school discipline policies and the treatment of Black students, especially Black boys as having a negative impact on their ability to lead. Fannie communicates this stress and trauma best when she states,

As an African American you know the pitfalls that are going to become our kids and you feel that in certain positions you are able to do more but when you start to look around and see who is in position of power, it’s pretty scary.

Fannie’s reflection not only reveals her understanding that race and racism are real and not abhorrent, making reference to scholar Derek Bell’s (1992) racial realism which posits like Fannie, that race is a prominent feature in American society, including its institutions, and thus the policies and practices we engage within it, she also implicitly makes reference to whiteness as property by sharing her desire to engage leadership as a way to equalize education for Black students but expressing fear that her positionality as an educational leader won’t afford her enough power to do so. Fannie confesses, “you feel that in certain positions you are able to do more” but because when she looks around she realizes there are few who look like her with the power to engage the kind of leadership for HMMS that she hopes to engage, also implying that though she has been appointed to a formal leadership position as an assistant principal, she does not have the power to wield the kind of change she hopes she can make, she sees that those who possess this power don’t look like her, think like her and may not exhibit the will to enact the necessary change, including change in policies and practices either. These sentiments are expressed across all eight BWEL narratives. As a result, five participating BWEL reported feeling extreme fatigue, three reported getting extreme migraines and headaches, two reported having back and neck pain requiring medical attention and up to two reported having trouble
sleeping, feeling extreme anxiety, oversleeping, or falling into bouts of fear and anger. Ultimately, and consistent with the research on Blacks and microaggressions (Sue, Capodilupo, & Aisha, 2008), each of the participating BWEL had physical, psychological, emotional, and/or spiritual reactions to the racialized trauma and stress they experienced, negating their multicultural forms of knowledge and intellectual capital as leaders and requiring them to tap into lessons and messages learned while growing up and coming into their leadership, thereby reclaiming their value and worth as Black women (Collins, 1986). They were required to do so in spite of leading within a climate that refused to acknowledge their existence. This requirement for reclamation is consistent with the research and theories shaping BFT and also speaks to participating BWELs’ inability to separate race and gender when discussing their impact and influence on the leadership experience, calling attention to the need for the field to re-imagine how we think about educational leadership and the development of effective social justice leaders, especially within a context of school reform situated in the colonial education project.

The Culturally Specific Resilience of BWEL. This study also revealed that the resilience required of BWEL leadership is not inherent within them as Black women. Instead, it was something they cultivated as a result of their complexly multicultural lived experiences. Furthermore, continued experiences within leadership, particularly those situated in racialized and gendered oppression, served to reshape and re-sharpen their multicultural sensibilities impacting their ability to engage their culturally-specific resilience. Though each of the BWEL in this study engaged leadership through resilience, doing so in spite of their stress and trauma, and making it seem that they were alright, they were still made vulnerable. Vulnerabilities included being made to seem oppositional, as well as being silenced, marginalized, and in the
cases of Ida, Mary, and Althea, pushed out and rendered invisible (Crenshaw, Nanda, & Ocen, 2014; Morris, 2016; Winn, 2011). This means support for these resilient educational leaders was and is still required. As activist Jesse Williams (2016) reminds, just because they have Black Girl Magic, it doesn’t mean they are not human.

**How do BWEL navigate these understandings, particularly when making leadership decisions and engaging leadership action?**

Don’t ever underestimate the importance you can have because history has shown us that courage can be contagious and hope can take on a life of its own.

~ Michelle Obama

Just as the study’s findings illuminated how each leader experienced leadership, including helping us understand what impact school policies have on BWEL and revealing vulnerabilities and potential needs for leadership support, it also elucidated how the eight participating BWEL leveraged their multicultural identities, perspectives, and subjectivities to navigate these understandings. For starters, seven of the eight leaders shared situating their leadership in their experiences with family and/or community, with the community being childhood neighborhood community and/or racialized Black diasporic community. They then drew on lessons instilled about self-worth, family pride, and the importance of living for the greater good to provide a purpose for their leadership, a phenomena consistent with servant leadership (Sergiovanni, 2007), as well as to sustain themselves when leadership challenges ensued (Santamaria, 2014; Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014). Defining family beyond the traditional nuclear family of majoritarian households, seven of the eight BWEL also maintained close relationships with families, drawing on their love and support as a means to restore value and worth when in question (Collins, 1987).
Additionally, all eight of the participating BWEL described students broadly, HMMS specifically, and the needs of Black students, especially Black boys, more explicitly, as being critical to their purpose for engaging teaching, learning, and leadership as a profession (Roberts, 2010; Ware, 2006), and as a formative contributor to their beliefs about social justice and equity (Grant, 2012). Likewise, all eight of the participating BWEL drew on the learning experiences of these students, as well as their own lived experiences as former historically marginalized and minoritized students as a way to shape their understanding of social justice, the need for social justice, the shaping of their personal identity as an educational leader advancing a social justice agenda and used this knowledge to power critical (Stovall, 2004) culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009) and responsive (Gay, 2010) pedagogy and actions as leaders within contested spaces (Santamaria, 2014; Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012, 2015).

Tapping into the power of family, diasporic Black community, and the promise of the future of the HMMS they served, the eight leaders engaged a visionary transformative social justice liberatory praxis (Freire, 1972; hooks, 1994) situated in a desire to create space for the students and families they served to engage the power within them to push back on systems they recognized as being unjust (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Freire, 2968; Stovall, 2004). In this way, they viewed their leadership as servant oriented work, important to creating a better future (Sergiovanni, 2007), and they engaged several leadership practices consistent with ACL, but nuanced due to their unique multicultural identities as Black women to do so.

What leadership practices emerge as a result?

Affirming, amplifying and building on Santamaria’s (2014) research on the leadership of women educational leaders of color (WELOC), and validating her premise that WELOC practice
applied critical leadership (ACL), BWEL respond to the challenges they are forced to confront in the contested spaces forming U.S. P-12 schools by employing a different approach to educational leadership. This approach is born of their multicultural identities, causing them to experience leadership through “different filters than their mainstream peers, rendering their leadership practice qualitatively different” (Santamaria, 2014, p. 3), and enabling them to leverage these “rarified and authentic multicultural perspectives” (Santamaria, 2014, p. 3) to lead for racial equity and social justice, even as they themselves combat racialized inequities and social injustices as historically marginalized and minoritized educational leaders operationalizing leadership for social justice to push back on and dismantle the status quo. Engaging some of the ACL practices as macro or more prominent leadership actions and others in support, all are employed. As discussed in the overview of findings in chapter four, illuminated in interpretive cases, and explicated throughout this discussion, the eight practices forming ACL (Santamaria, 2014) and presenting as part of BWEL leadership include: (1) Critical Conversations, (2) Critical Race Theory Lens, (3) Group Consensus, (4) Stereotype Threat, (5) Academic Discourse, (6) Honoring Constituents, (7) Leading By Example, and (8) Trust With Mainstream. Each is defined in the appendices (Appendix S). Additionally, though all eight BWEL exhibited all eight ACL characteristics, table 6.1 provides an example of each characteristic as employed by at least one participating BWEL.

Table 6.1. Participant summary examples of applied critical leadership (ACL) as culled from the counter stories of BWEL.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACL Characteristic and Description</th>
<th>Participant Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACL Characteristic 1</td>
<td><strong>Mary:</strong> “We have to have a conversation and sometimes those conversations will be difficult and it may not be the outcome you hoped for but we have to have the conversation.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Conversations – willingness to initiate and engage in</td>
<td><strong>Mary:</strong> “We have to have a conversation and sometimes those conversations will be difficult and it may not be the outcome you hoped for but we have to have the conversation.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACL Characteristic and Description</td>
<td>Participant Example</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACL Characteristic 2: Critical Race Theory Lens – consider multiple perspectives of critical issues; race first, valuing story, critical of liberalism and understanding the reality of racism</td>
<td><em>Joy:</em> “I had a teacher of African descent who was very dismissive of me and he went to the principal for everything. The principal is male and younger than I am and he said it was about age because he had a daughter my age but I think it was gender; if it was really age he wouldn’t go to the principal. In a different setting, I was in a leadership role and quite often I would be dismissed by white males.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACL Characteristic 3: Group Consensus – used consensus building as the preferred strategy for decision making</td>
<td><em>Fannie:</em> “I am pretty direct about the expectations but flexible in the sense that I want to include all staff in whatever we do, whatever we champion at the school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACL Characteristic 4: Stereotype Threat – conscious of stereotype threat or fulfilling negative stereotypes associated with their perceived racial, ethnic, or linguistic group</td>
<td><em>Althea:</em> “I work hard, harder than white people work…this causes a lack of confidence in some settings; second guessing myself; coming from a place what I have to do this right, I have to be perfect, I have to always be appropriate or be on my p’s and q’s – as AA people we always say she or he can do it (white people) but you know you can’t do it (cutting corners; mediocrity; making a poor choice; failing).”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACL Characteristic 5: Academic Discourse – considers educational research as opportunity to tell truth about education; make empirical contributions and to add authentic research-based information to academic discourse regarding underserved groups</td>
<td><em>Ida:</em> “In terms of your research that’s why it is so important especially in the context of education and especially now when you can look at television and see how white privilege really plays out when students can put on Instagram some type of racial or really demeaning representation of their classmates and their parents can get an attorney and say its freedom of speech. I just think your research is really important. You have a lot of work to do girl.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACL Characteristic 6: Honoring Constituents – need to honor all members of their constituencies; seek out and include voices</td>
<td><em>Angela:</em> “My colleague goes Kathy you have a certain way of getting people to do things...part of it is knowing how to change my register for who I am taking with and meeting families where they are no matter who they are and finding some commonality to build a relationship where it’s for four years, ten years, or ten minutes, seeing them for who they are.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACL Characteristic and Description</td>
<td>Participant Example</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ACL Characteristic 7:</strong> Leading By Example – led by example to meet unresolved educational needs or challenges; lead to give back; their responsibility to bring critical issues to the forefront</td>
<td><strong>Tonya (me as researcher):</strong> I seek to answer how race, gender, and policy impact and influence the leadership of BWEL. I have decided to explore this inquiry for all of the little girls wrapped in Black bodies like Amara, who will grow up to be beautiful Black women like me, each fighting for their humanity within the contested spaces forming P-12 schools. My hope for this work is that it will provoke critical reflection, dialogue and a call to action so that Black girls and Black women learning, teaching, leading, and serving in education, experience the right to be who they are, unapologetically, in all of their beautifully intersectional Black Girl 'Magichoods'! I stand in solidarity with each of them, fighting, so one day we can express ourselves authentically, and be seen, loved, cared for, nurtured, understood, valued, affirmed, and provided with the space, time, and place, to learn, serve, teach, and lead, without being PUSHED OUT!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACL Characteristic 8:</strong> Trust With Mainstream – build trust when working with mainstream constituents or partners, or others who did not share an affinity toward issues related to educational equity; need to win the trust of individuals in the mainstream, as well as to prove themselves qualified and worthy of leadership positions and roles</td>
<td><strong>Soujourner:</strong> “Making sure people are not intimidated by your color or personhood so they have a conversation with you. I am a collaborative leader and I propose to work with others.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACL Characteristic 9:</strong> Servant Leadership – called to lead; led by spirit; Transformative servant leaders who work to serve the greater good</td>
<td><strong>Marva:</strong> “It is my faith in Christ that guides me in how I respond in leadership, which is not always understood.”</td>
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Summatively, the study’s comprehensive results indicate that each of the eight BWEL participating in the study manifested ACL, including engaging leadership practices consistent with the research and theories comprising the conceptual framework guiding this study. As such,
the leadership narratives for Ida, Angela, Althea, Joy, Marva, Sojourner, Mary, and Fannie, reveal common leadership traits central to their shared identity as Black Women and characteristic of their leadership as BWEL advancing racial equity and social justice. Specifically, participating BWEL exhibit a unique racially, ethnically, and culturally-situated strand of ACL employing the six emergent leadership practices I argue comprise CR-TML: (1) engage a Black female multiconsciousness informed by, and informing, an intersectional CRT analytic lens; (2) engage simultaneity by centering purpose for leadership in the needs of HMMS, community, and self with consideration for impact of situational and socio-historical context on the leadership space; (3) build complex reciprocal relationships with all potential stakeholders, (4) assume an activist, ally, and advocate stance as deemed necessary to accomplish equity given the school and situational context, (5) employ a critically responsive and liberatory praxis (Freire, 1972) characterized by participating in a recursive and reflective process of critical inquiry, reflection, dialogue, and action, and (6) engage in self and communal care to refresh, rejuvenate, and revolutionize one’s personal multiconsciousness and transformative professional practice. A description of the characteristics comprising CR-TML, follows.

**Critically Relevant Transformative Multicultural Leadership**

As validated by the findings for this study, CR-TML is a social justice leadership paradigm, process, pedagogy, and praxis engaged by BWEL with the aim to dismantle inequities in education, reconstructing educational systems and institutions toward a moral arc of racial equity and social justice instead. As paradigm, BWEL encourage educational stakeholders to value, believe in and celebrate the personhood, potential, and possibility of every child, educator, and community, especially HMMS and their respective communities. As process, BWEL
engage in a reflexive cycle indicative of critical action, reflection and dialogue with hopes of constructing knowledge meant to render education equal for HMMS through equity and justice. As pedagogy, BWEL select transformative multicultural leadership strategies derived from a consideration of the socio-historical, racial, ethnic, and cultural legacies of themselves and the constituents they serve. Rooted in Black feminist thought (BFT) standpoint, and a collage of critical pedagogies inclusive of critical race theory (CRT), CME, and social justice leadership (SJL), it is operationalized as a form of critically relevant and culturally responsive equity pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995) and professional development (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Kohli, Picower & Martinez, 2015), with the transformative power to liberate self (BWEL engaging it as praxis) and others (Friere, 1972), including stakeholders in P-12 schools. Also delivered with radical love and care (Darder, 2017), CR-TML is engaged at the intersection of interlocking racial, cultural, and social identities and the oppressions resulting from those identities, becoming a dynamic, different, and transformative form of educational leadership employed with reflective consideration for context (socio-historical, local, and personal), persons impacted by its application, and the leader engaging it as praxis. In this way, CR-TML becomes a transformative, restorative, and liberatory multicultural leadership praxis.

Characteristics comprising CR-TML are described in brief in this section. I situate descriptions in at least one exemplary example (in some cases more) from participating BWEL narratives. I chose to describe each characteristic in brief given the full explication of their prevalence within interpretive cases and the discussion in this chapter. CR-TML characteristics provide an answer to the overarching research question, *How do BWEL committed to advancing...*
racial equity through the development of a social justice leadership praxis experience and engage educational leadership in U.S. P-12 schools?

Engage Multiconsciousness Informed by Identity as Black Woman

Consistent with ACL BWEL engage a CRT analytic lens. As codified by the research (Santamaria, 2014), this lens was employed to help educational leaders consider multiple perspectives when engaging critical issues, better positioning them to address and discuss inequities within the schools they led. Amplifying and building on this argument, this study found that BWEL engage a CRT lens situated in a BFT standpoint (Collins, 1987) affording them a unique ability to leverage multiconsciousness shaped by their complexly, interlocking, co-dependent, multicultural identities as situated in experiences with anti-black oppression.

Shared best in Althea’s narrative,

…what is often overlooked is my ability to have a broad sense of empathy because of challenges that my people have come through and continue to go through; if I sense racism even if another person of color I can identify with that because of similarities and not being white. I am not sure that this is understood or valued, even sometimes from people of color. They don’t understand that we have empathy for all kinds of discrimination and a profound sense of empathy because of our experiences.

As Althea’s words describe, BWEL multiconsciousness is employed as an intersectional analytic tool enabling them to lead with a vision for social justice rooted in and centered on the schooling experiences of those most disenfranchised within systems informed by white privilege, and oppression. Since BWEL positionality is situated at the most oppressive end of the privilege-oppression spectrum, their multiconsciousness affords them a unique empathy able to understand what it feels like to become silenced, marginalized, and rendered invisible, no matter
the reason for the erasure (Collins, 1987; Crenshaw, 1991). Understood through this lens, leadership and the multiconsciousness informing it becomes sensitized to the needs of HMMS. As the research on Black educators bears out (Foster, 1987; Irvine, 1989; Lotomey, 1989, 2005; Ware, 2006), it is this sensitizing that affords BWEL with the skill and will to sharpen their lens on meeting the needs of HMMS, especially Black students. When few Black students are enrolled within the school, as in Marva’s case, those students perceived to be most critically impacted by inequities and unequal education within the schools BWEL led became the focus. Engaging leadership through this lens also equips BWEL with the knowledge, skill, and will to recognize systemic and structural inequities others are likely to miss (McKay, 2010), as was the case with Mary when facing overt and covert racism in her principal placements. A second example can be found in Althea’s narrative when engaging restorative practices to avoid civil rights violations as a result of discipline disproportionality, and a third in Joy’s story when finding the resilience to create pathways to leadership on her own when overlooked for critical leadership opportunities. Each was able to recognize systemic racism operationalized in their respective schools and districts, due to their positionality of viewing leadership phenomena from a vantage point as the outsider within (Collins, 1987, 1991). Given this vantage point, planted within them was a desire to attend to the voices and experiences of others, especially those also experiencing school and schooling from this vantage point, and being willing to initiate and engage in critical conversations (Singleton & Linton, 2006), including those situated in race and racism to do so. By engaging these conversations, BWEL were emboldened, empowered and enabled with tools to recognize, confront, grapple with, address, and in some cases solve inequities situated in policies like high stakes testing and no discipline policies, and to do so at
the intersection of race, class, and gender oppression, on behalf of themselves, and the HMMS they led to serve.

**Engage Simultaneity and Purpose Situated in Marginalized and Minoritized Communities**

With a keen ability to mete out inequities others miss, and the will and desire to honor constituents by listening to their stories, creating space for their voices and experiences to be shared, understood, and leveraged for equity, BWEL engaged leadership consistent with BFT and CME in that they simultaneously remained attentive to the needs of self, others and a diasporic Black community, with a critical and sharp concern for Black boys, but as situated in context, including local school context (policies and practices and culture and climate), socio-historical context (system and structural racism due to colonialism and the colonial education project), cultural context (overlapping and co-dependent factors influencing and having impact on students and other constituents), and personal context (overlapping and co-dependent factors influencing and having impact on self). Interpretive cases also reveal that participating BWEL delivered leadership with culturally responsive care (Roberts 2010) using a warm demander pedagogy (Ware, 2006). They did so simultaneously, foregrounding the elements of their social and multicultural identities most required to make sense of the leadership issues presenting in the school context at the time, and leveraging the information gleaned to reflect on how each shaped the other in order to inform their response. This was most exemplified in Ida’s leadership story as she recounted leadership across three settings, all different, and all requiring her to engage her consciousness differently, building on what she learned from each setting as she transitioned. Each transition represented Ida’s ability to attend to her needs as a leader, as well as maintain a concern situated in the students and families she served. Each time she transitioned, she chose to do so because of her challenges with the mismatch between her social justice epistemological
orientation and her understanding that the policies and practices she was expected to engage ran counter to her professional disposition. By transitioning, Ida maintained her integrity but also continued to employ leadership in service to HMMS and the broader community, especially Black children, even when situated in a different context. The multiconsciousness she and the other BWEL exhibited in this regard allowed for simultaneity (Collins, 1986), a tool of resilience developed as a result of experiencing the world from the bottom tier of the privilege-oppression spectrum and without the privilege of retreating to whiteness when leadership experiences become uncomfortable. This common practice alone renders BWEL leadership different, unique, and revolutionary in that it has the power to help them and those around them persist, sustain, resist, and transform consciousness when challenges levied against self and others feel insurmountable. It is also the common characteristic that renders their leadership transformative and opens space for liberatory praxis to occur.

**Build Complex Reciprocal Relationships**

Given their knowledge of their positionality as Black women within a hierarchical macrostructure that privileges whiteness and gender conforming maleness, participating BWEL expressed an understanding of their need to build, cultivate, and nurture complex relationships (Santamaria, 2014) and support networks across racialized, gendered, and classed borders. This included seeking out mentorship and coaching, as well as collegial and friendly fellowship from other BWEL. These relationships and support networks were often formed in counter spaces outside of the school but employed within schools and districts as well. One example includes Marva’s ability to forge professional relationships with faculty and staff to better support her student body. This is noteworthy given she was the only Black adult within her rural middle school characterized by limited diversity and few Black students. She understood she needed to
forge relationships with her white colleagues to meet the needs of a white student body, many of whom were children of families living below the poverty line requiring non-traditional support and services from the school, but unwilling to accept support from her because of their white supremacist backgrounds. In this instance, Marva worked with her white, male assistant principal and a white female teacher within the school with an affinity for social justice and willingness to deliver non-traditional services to their shared student body. Marva’s story provides a second example in her creation of Women Educational Leaders, a private Facebook support network for female-identified educational leaders used as a safe space to celebrate, problem-Pose, vent, and support women leading within U.S. P-12 schools. For each of the BWEL engaging this study, support networks were relied on to secure information, material, physical, and human resources as well as to help them advance their careers and professional purpose as social justice leaders. Networks were also leveraged as a tool of resilience and resistance when attempting to lead in oppressive environments. Consistent with research on ACL (Santamaria, 2014) participating BWEL also forged relationships with other (W)ELOC, especially other BWEL, individuals who were likely critical in recognizing their potential, helping them move into leadership pathways. Relationships forged with majoritarian allies were often more formal. Still, BWEL leveraged these relationships for many of the same purposes relationships with other BWEL entailed, including securing allyship with those with the power and positionality to open up access and opportunity for themselves and the students they served.

**Engage in Self and Communal Care**

BWEL were keenly aware of the need to take care of self. Given their complexly layered multiconsciousness so too was their awareness of health and healing as one being situated in opening up space to heal and care for themselves, even as they found ways to heal and take care
of others (Stovall, 2004). Forming intentional networks of support was one way BWEL engaged self and communal care. Understanding the tensions that rise with the requirement to balance multiple needs, BWEL develop strong, loving, and culturally responsive caring (Roberts, 2010) networks of support comprised of other Black women or women of color, primarily family, friends, and those professional peers, colleagues, and supervisor with whom trusted relationships were built and nurtured. Consistent with the research on sister circles (Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, & Murray, 2011a, 2011b), often indicative of Black woman care and healing, these networks of support comprised one of the many ways BWEL exercise self-care utilizing them as a way to unwind socially, receive feedback and advice on personal and professional life, and engage extra-curricular activities. All eight women reported belonging to a sister circle and expressed its importance in relieving them of stress and trauma experienced in their professional lives as BWEL. As indicated in all eight BWEL narratives but explicitly amplified in Sojourner's interpretive case, support networks were also utilized intentionally in the work space magnifying their import in exercising communal care as well. As Sojourner reminds, Black women who came before her made sure she was positioned to be effective as a leader and it was her responsibility to reach back building networks of support intentionally with the same goals in mind. A second exemplary of the simultaneous self- and communal-care indicative of support networks is offered in the research testimonial shared in the closing chapter. It illustrates how the critical inquiry action group engaged during phase III of the study served as a proxy for the sister circles indicative of BWEL leadership demonstrating the power of networks and the critical professional development experience as a leadership and leadership development tool for WELOC who express leadership differently than their majoritarian female-identified counterparts.
Lead as Advocate, Ally, and Activist

Given their multiple and complexly diverse identities and unique ability to view the leadership space from a variety of vantage points (McKay, 2010), participating BWEL also took on various roles and purposes during their leadership experiences, roles I liken to advocate, ally, and activist. As advocates BWEL served as an important critical friend to HMMS and other ELOC, trumpeting their causes and often helping stakeholders redefine deficit laden perceptions of their ability and potential. As allies, BWEL empathized with HMMS, leveraging their positionality to open up and create space for HMMS to tell their own stories and ensuring they were equipped with skills to forward their own causes, including being able to achieve and thrive in their respective school spaces. Finally, as activist BWEL leveraged their power as leaders to disrupt and dismantle inequitable policies, transforming them and their school spaces so HMMS receive equal access and opportunity to services (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Kohli, et al., 2015). Fannie’s story provides an example of these phenomena when she speaks of leveraging her position as a specialist in her alternative school to ensure Black boys pushed out of comprehensive high schools returned without making their way back to her school for a different discipline infraction. As advocate, Fannie trumpeted the need for programming that would equip students and teachers with the skills and resources to make her work possible. As an ally, Fannie opened up space through her lessons for students to learn material that would render them successful. As an activist, Fannie leveraged her positionality to ensure the school didn’t hire an AP so she could continue her work unfettered by systems that might negate it. She also taught the Black boys and youth she worked with to recognize the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1992) within these schools so they were better prepared to navigate them, including equipping them with the skill to determine how, when, and if they should code switch (Delpit, 1988, 2006)
between home, community, and school culture, providing them with strategies to advocate on their own behalf when injustices situated in discipline occurred. Determining when to engage an advocacy, ally, and/or activist stance depended on which was required to secure equity and justice for HMMS at the time, given the context. Like Fannie, each BWEL engaged all three roles with an acute consideration for both the local/global social and situational context as shaped by socio-historical factors and meanings; and with the needs of multiple stakeholders in mind, but those of HMMS, especially Black students in the foreground.

**Employ Reflection, Dialogue, and Critical Praxis**

Each of the eight participating leader’s also engaged leadership as liberatory critical race praxis (Freire, 1972; hooks, 1994; McKay, 2010; Stovall, Lynn, Danley, & Martin, 2009) in order to learn, grow, question, and push back on the current state of education, with hopes of engaging a more equitable and just leadership style, inclusive of opening up space for constituents to do the same, especially teachers and students from historically marginalized and minoritized backgrounds. By bridging reflection, dialogue, and action in an iterative and reflexive leadership process, participating BWEL continued to learn and grow as leaders, offering critique on systems and structures, constituents engaged within systems and structures, and themselves (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995; Stovall, 2004). Reflection and dialogue, especially with those with whom relationships were built, resulted in each leader adjusting and modifying practices when desired or expected outcomes were not achieved, rendering their leadership actions critically relevant in that they were responsive to context, the constituents they served, and themselves in ways that multiple and diverse voices, perspectives, and needs were simultaneously considered as part of the problem-posing process (Kohli, Picower, & Martinez, 2015). When needs were not met, as evidenced by persistent
inequities and injustices, rendering their school climate and culture toxic and rife with a hidden curriculum, the work continued. In this way, and as Marva’s counter story reminded, participating BWEL worked on fixing self, even as they engaged others in a process to work on self. By collectively engaging communal care steeped in individual and communal ways of knowing, simultaneous, multi-layered, and continuous transformation occurred. This transformation didn’t only occur within the school, as is the traditional way of thinking about and approaching hegemonic educational leadership practices, nor was it situated solely within the individuals viewed and perceived as needing transforming, namely HMMS and ELOC, but rather, and more importantly, transformation occurred with and within each constituent invited to engage the process of reflection, dialogue, and action along-side BWEL, equipping them with the knowledge to transform collective school communities, systems, and structures within the schools, as well as entire educational settings within which BWEL and those engaging the process with them led. In this regard, transformation is engaged toward an audacious hope of achieving equity and justice, in leadership service for the greater good by privileging outcomes of leadership actions rather than intent of those actions.

**Synthesizing Revelations**

The leadership of eight BWEL, each employing individual and personal leadership styles (Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014), within diverse school context in diverse settings across the U.S., but situated in spaces bound by policies, practices, and systemic structures rooted in the intersecting oppressions defined by the colonial education project, characterizes the leadership practices comprising CR-TML. CR-TML is a culturally-situated and specific approach to leadership, engaged by BWEL, with the intent to open up space for constituents, especially HMMS, to join them in their leadership within the contested spaces of U.S. P-12 schools and to
do so by recognizing, pushing back on, disrupting, and dismantling policies and practices that are inequitable and unjust. Defined by the leadership of BWEL advancing leadership for racial equity and social justice, CR-TML is critically relevant liberatory equity pedagogy (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995) in action. Those who engage it do so with hopes it can be done without judgement or (fear of) retribution, especially if calls for racial equity and social justice within the contested spaces of U.S. P-12 schools are authentic. The research testimonial included in chapter seven illustrates how CR-TML is engaged as liberatory leadership praxis when brave and courageous space are opened up for BWEL to do so.

Chapter Summary

Chapter one provided an overview of this study, chapter two situated the study in the research, and chapter three illuminated the methodological approach used to engage this study. Leadership narratives (Yosso, 2005) for Ida, Angela, Althea and Joy were presented in chapter four. Story sharing was continued in chapter five providing interpretive cases for Marva, Sojourner, Mary, and Fannie. This chapter provided an in-depth discussion of how the collective stories for the eight BWEL participating in this study sharpen our understanding of how they experience advancing a social justice leadership agenda within the contested spaces of U.S. P-12 schools. It also explicated how doing so was shaped by identity, particularly at the intersection of race and gender, as well as the school policy context within which they lead. This analysis was carried forth by answering the secondary research questions, explicating what it means for BWEL to lead through race, with resilience and resistance. The chapter closed by codifying emergent themes comprising CR-TML, the culturally-situated leadership approach engaged by BWEL. The final chapter includes radical reflections and revolutionary conclusions indicative
of my final thoughts on the findings. Limitations and how they were overcome are also shared.

Appendices and references follow chapter seven.
CHAPTER 7

RADICAL REVELATIONS, RESTORATIVE REFLECTIONS, AND REVOLUTIONARY CONCLUSIONS: MAKING SWEET LEMONADE WHEN GIVEN BITTER LEMONS

“I had my ups and downs but I always find the strength to pull myself up. I was served lemons but I made lemonade.”

~ Hattie White (Beyonce, 2016, track 10)

African centered emancipatory research methodologies (ACEM), I began this culturally relevant qualitative examination of how Black women school leaders advance racial equity and social justice within the contested spaces comprising United States (U.S.) P-12 schools to rebuke the silencing and marginalization of women of color within educational leadership. Drawing on the principles of critical auto-ethnography and interpretive storytelling I explored and examined the leadership experiences of eight complexly diverse Black women educational leaders (BWEL), nine including myself. I opened chapter one by sharing a leadership testimonial describing my experience serving as an assistant principal in a U.S. P-12 public elementary school located in a small suburban community in the Southwest. Shared to situate the study, my testimonial illuminated the challenge BWEL face when attempting to engage social justice leadership (SJL) within contested school spaces shaped by neoliberal school reform policies and practices oppositional to their social justice epistemological orientations and Black women personhoods. Grounded in the research and theories shaping a unique strand of applied critical leadership (ACL) I call critically relevant transformative multicultural leadership (CR-TML), and told through rich culturally-centered descriptions, I also constructed leadership cases to highlight the leadership stories of the eight BWEL walking the talk of CR-TML through activist
research alongside me. Engaging this work as co-inquirers with me, rather than as objects of study for me, they included Ida, Angela, Althea, Joy, Marva, Sojourner, Mary, and Fannie. I made every attempt to tell each of their stories, exactly as their stories were shared with me, and doing so through each woman’s voice and using her own words when possible. Shared in this way, and situated in the sentiment expressed by the words opening this chapter, the collective leadership of BWEL, represents pure alchemy.

Their leadership is an alchemy rooted in the figuratively creative recipes born of Black grandmothers who “spun gold out of their hard lives, conjured beauty from the things left behind, found healing where it did not live, discovered antidote in their kitchens, broke the curse with their own two hands, passed these instructions down to their daughters, who then passed it down to their daughters” (Beyonce, 2016), lacing it with a magical creativity colloquially termed #BlackGirlMajic. Given these phenomena, the leadership of BWELs is like spinning base metal into gold, and listening to their leadership stories, power. It is a power validated by the emergent but growing body of works highlighting the SJL of women educational leaders of color (WELOC) (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Santamaria, 2014; Stovall, 2004; Tillman, Brown, Cambell-Jones & Gonzalez, 2006), advancing an argument that their leadership holds promise for helping us solve some of the most difficult equity challenges of our time (Santamaria, 2014; Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012, 2015). These works also call on us to pay close attention to the lessons about leadership embedded within their leadership experiences. This study joins that call. It does so because the lessons embedded within their narratives, formed as a result of unique multicultural experiences, subjectivities and perspectives, woven into a radical culturally-centered leadership meant to transform U.S. P-12 schools undergoing 21st century school reforms, into places where
historically marginalized and minoritized students (HMMS) rightfully experience an equal
education, prove formative for us all. They are especially potent given the current state of U.S.
P-12 education. Characterized by a racialized student-teacher gap, a racialized discipline gap,
and a racialized access and opportunity gap, U.S. P-12 schools are rife with inequities,
exacerbating the chronic education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) HMMS are already owed.
Confronting equity challenges like these require educational leaders equipped with the
knowledge, skill and will to take them on, and the heart, tenacity, and fortitude to engage their
work in spite of the stress and trauma one is likely to experience while doing so. Filling a gap in
the literature on educational leadership, findings from this study reveals how the leadership of
BWEL comprises this kind of SJL.

Specifically, BWEL lead using CR-TML, a culturally-centered and alternative leadership
approach employed to disrupt and dismantle inequities within the contested spaces of U.S. P-12
education, especially for HMMS. Grounded in a collage of critical theories, CR-TML holds
promise in illustrating how the field of educational leadership might re-imagine the work of
transforming schools so that those attempting to teach, learn, and lead within them can do so,
experiencing a warm, affirming, racially equitable, and socially just teaching, learning, and
leadership environment, and so that all students experience a robust and challenging curriculum,
and receive an equal education. Given these findings, this work provokes critical dialogue on
what it entails to develop social justice leaders, including determining how the field of
educational leadership might re-think how we currently recruit, sustain, and retain educational
leaders like those represented in the stories shared in this work. There is a sense of urgency to
enter into this discourse, especially if calls for equity and social justice within the field are
authentic and the expressed desire to cultivate educational leaders prepared to engage the kind of
social justice leadership meant to confront the challenges the BWEL in this study faced and combatted are real.

Inviting the reflection and dialogue this study is engaged to provoke, I encourage those reading this chapter to critically consider the final reflections, conclusions and implications put forth. They too prove formative for educational leaders, those who develop educational leaders, those who establish school reform policies and practices impacting the leadership of educational leaders, and anyone with an interest in educational leadership. Additionally, given the alternative methodological approach utilized to employ this study, findings also invoke import for those in higher education with an interest in educational leadership, multicultural education, and critical race theory scholarship. Before closing with final reflections and conclusions, I will review the findings discussed in chapter six. My review is meant to situate discussions offered in the remaining sections of the chapter. I follow the review by sharing a research testimonial. It is shared in the spirit of walking the talk of liberatory leadership praxis, including on the pages of this work, forming a natural bridge to the transition between this work and my discussion of its implications for our future in educational leadership, by providing an illustrative picture of what it means and looks like when BWEL engage CR-TML. The testimonial is followed by final thoughts and conclusions. I close the chapter and work with a discussion of the study’s limitations and the trustworthiness.

**Radical Revelations: Revisiting Findings**

The words that open and close Fannie’s interpretive leadership story in chapter five:

*Never forget where we came from and always praise the bridges that carried you over.* They are important words wrapped in ancestral reminders, meant to empower future generations of Black people, in the case of this study, BWEL, to cross the bridges built, laid, and paved by those
strong Black women who came and led before them. These words also deliver a potent message of tenacity and resilience. Specifically, they form an important reminder to BWEL to bravely and courageously engage their leadership by building on and extending the bridges already laid by those formidable BWEL who came before, so those who come behind, may walk over them towards racial equity and social justice in the future. Situated in this message, Fannie Lou Hamer’s words form the true essence of why and how each of the participating BWEL engaging this study led. They also illustrate what their leadership has to teach us, namely that we already have the knowledge to do that which we seek to accomplish in educational leadership, we need only look to the bridges already built for answers (Collins, 1990, 2000; Dillard, 2000; DuBois, 1973; Hilliard, 2001).

Supported by the literature grounding the study, particularly research conducted on black teachers and social justice leadership and centering WELOC (Santamaria, 2014; Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014), findings affirm the sentiments embedded within Fannie Lou Hamer’s words. Specifically, findings provide evidence that BWEL advance leadership for social justice as servant leaders who feel called to lead and lead by spirit to serve a greater good (Sergiovanni, 2007), inclusive of “giving back to the communities with which they identified or served, and supporting their own social justice journeys” (Santamaria, 2013, p.27) along the way. It also validates literature asserting they lead by example so that their families, communities, and the children they serve are proud, and their faculty and staff are better positioned to improve upon their practice (Robinson, 2011) in pursuit of justice for all children but especially HMMS. Additionally, findings from the study confirm the leadership of BWEL is engaged with the intention set forth in the research theorizing ACL (Santamaria, 2014; Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014), shaping my emergent theorizing on CR-TML. This theorizing advances the notion that
though complexly diverse, BWEL draw on shared multicultural subjectivities shaped by lived experiences to advance a social justice leadership agenda within the contested school spaces comprising United States (U.S.) P-12 education (Santamaria, 2014). They actualize learning environments that are racially equitable and socially just for those least served within them, and especially at the intersections of race, gender, and class. BWEL are forced to do so through culturally-specific resiliency also shaped by lived experiences (Collins, 1987, McKay, 2010), allowing them to persist and sustain themselves when forced to grapple with systemic and structural barriers rooted in white supremacy, power, and anti-black oppression. Often delivered through a hidden curriculum exacerbated by colorblind racism delivered subversively through 21st century school reform policies and practices (Gillborn, 2005), oppression results in BWEL experiencing racialized stress and trauma to which they respond with strategies honed and cultivated as a result of their multiconsciousness as Black women (Collins, 1987, McKay, 2010). Findings revealed six emergent themes characterizing the culturally centered strategies BWEL utilize. They include: (1) engage a Black female multiconsciousness informed by, and informing, an intersectional CRT analytic lens (McKay, 2010); (2) engage simultaneity by centering purpose for leadership in the needs of HMMS (Ware, 2006), community, and self with consideration for the impact of situational and socio-historical context on the leadership space (Collins, 1987); (3) build complex reciprocal relationships with all potential stakeholders (Robinson, 2011); (4) assume an activist, ally, and advocate stance to accomplish equity given the school and situational context (Sleeter, 1996; Stovall, 2004); (5) employ a critically responsive and liberatory praxis (Freire, 1972) characterized by participating in a recursive and reflective process of critical inquiry, reflection, dialogue, and action (Kohli, Picower, & Martinez, 2015); and (6) engage in self and communal care to refresh, rejuvenate, and
revolutionize one’s personal multiconsciousness and transformative professional practice (Sealey-Ruiz, 2007). The strategies comprising CR-TML are embodied and powered by the sentiment expressed in Fannie Lou Hamer’s words and form the crux of how and why they get operationalized to advance racial equity and social justice within the contested spaces of U.S. P-12 schools. I offer an illustrative example of CR-TML as employed in this work by the BWEL engaging it by sharing a research testimonial. Conclusions and implications follow.

**Restorative Reflections: A Research Testimonial**

You are the one that you are looking for.

~ Audre Lorde

Audre Lorde’s words are demonstrative of the research testimonial that follows. I decided to share the testimonial after reflecting on Fannie Lou Hamer’s reminder to remember the bridges I crossed. Indicative of the lessons shared by the great, great, great grandmothers who became leadership alchemist spinning lemons representing the *hard knocks* defined by the oppressions engendered in the colonial project known as their difficult lives, into the sweetest lemonade ever tasted, becoming the lives they created for themselves, with hopes they would lead to better lives for the daughters and granddaughters to come, these reminders make me mindful of the audacious hope those who came before me maintained. Grounded in this hope, great, great, great grandmothers imparted their recipes for making sweet lemonade (better lives), born in their kitchens (the spaces that gave them respite allowing them to cultivate and nurture solutions to the problems presenting in their lived experiences), to their daughters who shared it with their daughters who shared it with their daughters who shared it with them, in this case them being the BWEL engaging this study. As these daughters gulped cold glasses of great grandmother’s sweet lemonade (time spent with the Black women in their families and those
they adopted into their professional and familial villages), they took in the juice, the pulp, and even the pits (lessons imparted through their experiences with the Black women in their families and village), but more importantly they took in the lessons that would embolden them with grandmothers and mothers’ indigenous ways of knowing how to survive and thrive when the hard knocks known as their difficult leadership challenges overtook them and it seemed like these challenges would be too much for them to keep pushing through. Thus, Fannie Lou Hamer’s word, like the recipes for making sweet lemonade, served to empower them with a unique, culturally-centered resiliency to carry the work of their leadership forward, enabling them to push the moral arc of their schools towards a goal of racial equity and social justice, especially for HMMS. This resilience shows up across all of the stories shared in this work. It also showed up as a living example during the critical inquiry action group. I chose to share this experience in my testimonial. Sharing is my way of rebuking the silencing nature of white privilege and power on and over my leadership and research as a BWEL engaging this study. I do so reclaiming indigenous African and U.S. Black ways of knowing, thinking, and storytelling, by highlighting the literary and intellectual traditions of Black epistemologies rooted in ancient and indigenous Western African culture. Specifically, I weave poetic verse, embedded messages and double-entendre into the telling of my testimonial. Like with this research, I also carry my sistah’s in Black Womanhood and educational leadership with me as I do so. Ultimately, by sharing this testimonial, I invite the reader to walk the talk of liberatory praxis (Freire, 1972; hooks, 1994) and activist research (Stovall, 2005) with myself and each of the participating BWEL. Provoking contemplation and critical reflection on and about the potency of, and implications for, the lessons about the ways BWEL engage leadership as resiliency, restoration,
and resistance as situated in Fannie Lou Hamer’s poetic words, I also invite critical dialogue, even if internal.

**CR-TML in Action: The Lemonade Ain’t Sweet Enough Yet**

The poetic testimonial that follows recalls and symbolizes our collective experience engaging the final critical inquiry action group held during phase III of the study. During this session, four of the eight participating BWEL were present and three joined us via text and email when called upon for support. We were charged with supporting Marva through an emotional leadership day, one ending with her expressing a desire to quit her role as an educational leader to return to the classroom as a teacher. Marva sought solutions to help her grapple with and address several leadership challenges. They were posed in the following inquiries: (1) *What do I do when my teachers ask me not to visit their classrooms because they feel threatened and uncomfortable by my presence?* The phenomena Marva describes is likely situated in white fear of the Black female presence and white fragility in not wanting to confront the racism inherent in this request, especially given that Marva was asked not to visit the classrooms of her white female teachers, all of whom she was the direct supervisor and by law was required to supervise, support, and evaluate which meant visiting and observing them in their classrooms as part of her supervisory duties as the school’s principal; (2) *One of my English teachers has quit without leaving lesson plans, grades, or resources for the students in her classes, and I have been covering her classes and all of the responsibilities that come with. What should I do? Is that how things are supposed to work?* Though Marva can require the other English teachers to cover the classes, a typical practice when a teacher leaves mid-semester, the teaching team at her school leveraged white privilege to contact Marva’s supervisor before she exercised this right, complaining of being overworked and asking that they not be asked to take on any more
responsibilities. The absurdity embedded in her narration is that Marva is left with the sole responsibility of taking on both her school leadership duties, as well as all of the teaching duties for a missing teacher, leading to her being overworked, particularly since duties she could have easily split between four other teachers and herself are now labor she is forced to take on alone;

(3) My supervisor issued me a written disciplinary warning for not making myself available beyond required school hours. He claims I didn’t return a call within 48 hours on a weekend, and that I missed the direct order to redo my master schedule even though I had just submitted them electronically and the district has access to them. I can’t believe he did that. Is this right? What should I do? Her supervisor’s actions imply Marva is to be available and responsive to him and his directives regardless of time and location, and that she has no property right to a personal life outside of her role as a school principal in spite of a contractual agreement that states otherwise; and finally, (4) Is anyone else struggling with work, life balance? The additional time I have been spending at school planning lesson plans and grading papers has begun to take a toll on my relationship with family and my home life is suffering. How do you manage?

Though many of Marva’s leadership challenges are situated in racialized undertones, symptomatic of policies and practices indicative of contested spaces, and result in racialized microaggressions (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), she fails to attribute them to these things, instead internalizing them as indicative of her inability to lead and questioning her will to do so (Collins, 1987). The declarative statement she begins our collective problem posing with is,

“I can’t do this anymore, if this is what leadership is, I think I am ready to quit, because this isn’t what I signed up for. I can’t believe that I am supposed to give up my life for this job. I can’t do this. I am just going to go back to the classroom.”
Marva’s follow-up question was, “Is this what I am supposed to be experiencing? Is this how other leaders experience this job? Maybe I just didn’t understand when I started this. Am I missing something?” The poetic testimonial describing our research experience is grounded in the theories forming CR-TML and models those theories in action by explicating how participating BWEL leverage their multicultural identities to turn proverbial bitter lemons into great grandmother’s sweet lemonade, in this case Marva’s leadership challenges situated at the intersection of race, gender, and class, into solutions situated in the multicultural sensibilities, identity and perspectives of BWEL.

I Got All My Sistahs With Me: A Poetic Recipe for Making Sweet Lemonade

What happens when Great Grandmother doesn’t pass on the recipe for making sweet lemonade? What happens? Is it the same thing that happens when the dreams of our children get deferred? Is the lemonade made bitter? Or do the lemons remain on the tree, festering like a sore, juice made syrupy, running down the trees trunk, stinking, rotten, like meat, crusted and sugared over? Do the lemons sag? Or do they get tossed into your bag, becoming a heavy load for you to carry? Until these bitter lemons, explode! Perhaps.

Maybe not. Maybe not if you have all your sistahs with you. Sistahs whose Great Grandmothers didn’t forget to pass on the recipes to their daughters who gave birth to their Mothers who gave birth to them. Sistahs who know the recipe for making sweet lemonade born in the kitchens of their Great Grandmothers, and derived from hard lives conjuring beauty from the things left behind, finding healing where it did not live before. Perhaps your lemons, bitter, bruised, split, ready to explode, will also become sweet lemonade. Because you have your sistahs with you. Perhaps.
Perhaps you will walk into the space where your sistahs await, bag of lemons in tow, back bended, arms bruised, fingers prickly and bleeding from hours of picking bitter lemons and throwing them into the bag. The bag already too full of bitter lemons. A bag you carried way too far, and for much too long, all by yourself, without the recipe to your Great Grandmother’s sweet lemonade. A bag that is full, heavy, burdensome, dirty, not nearly adequate for the lemons you carry and crying for release because mixed in with the lemons are rocks, big ones, loaded in with the lemons by whiteness when you weren’t looking, and sometimes when you were, but disguised in the subtleties’ of microaggressions delivered onto your body by way of your bag through wicked tongues and masked spirits meant to have you fail and refusing to support you because they can’t get past your Black Female body. A bag carrying bitter lemons and heavy rocks loaded with fear that you will use the majic they can’t understand, to whip the lemons they too never learned how to make sweet, into Great Grandmother’s sweet lemonade. Perhaps it is this bag you will carry into the room where your sistahs await.

And when you walk in. Your sistahs will know. They will know what you don’t because you were never given the recipe to see whiteness’ ugly hand, tossing rocks too heavy to carry into a bag full of bitter lemons already to full. They will know and they will feel it’s heaviness before you even tell them how heavy it is. They will know as soon as you enter the space, and they look at you, body bended, shoulders slumped, heart heavy, ready to put your bag down and go home, giving up, because it is too heavy, the lemons too bitter, and you don’t have the will to carry it much longer.

They will know that you have carried your bag too far, for too long, and that it was too heavy, for you to carry alone. They will recognize that your Great Grandmother
left too soon, forgetting to pass on her recipe, and you, left at the will of a school system refusing to pass on evidence of her existence and a society that negated her legacy, you were left unprepared. But they will know. They will know not to allow you to carry the weight of the bag full of bitter lemons, and whiteness’ rocks by yourself another second, another minute, another hour, another day…any longer. They will know! They will know what to say to you. They will know what to do. They will know you can’t see how carrying it a day more will help. They will know.

They will know and they won’t let you quit, not without their help first. They will remember your Great Grandmother’s recipe for you, because it is the same recipe shared with them by their Mothers who learned it from Grandmother, who learned it from Great Grandmother. They will know. They will carry you until you know too. You knew enough to walk over the bridge that your Great Grandmother and ‘nem built even without her sweet lemonade recipe, and you knew enough to enter the kitchen where your sistahs were waiting for you even without knowing that they had the recipe you needed. You knew enough to bring your bag full of bitter lemons mixed in with whiteness’ heavy rocks, so they could help you carry it, and YOU, until you were ready to cross that bridge again alone. You knew enough to remember that you and they were ENOUGH! So they will carry you. They will!

And as promised when you crossed that bridge and entered your sistah’s kitchen, they saw you. They exchanged nonverbal echolocations of memory and they knew. No need to peek inside your bag, they already knew what was there. They have been in your shoes before. They have carried that same bag, the bag their Mothers carried before them, and Grandmother before her, and Great Grandmother before her. A bag full of
lemons, bitter ones, and rocks - heavy, burdensome, dirty, bending their bodies, straining their backs, making their shoulders slump, and eyes water, until salty tears ran down their face and sobs of pain left their mouths, they believed they couldn’t go on anymore just like you feel now, but remembering to cross the bridge they landed in their sistahs kitchen like you, where the circle of love awaited and they too re-learned how to make Great Grandmother’s sweet lemonade. They have been here before. They knew. They did.

So when you mustered the strength to lift your bag, pouring its contents onto the kitchen table and filling that table, in your sistah’s kitchen, with bitter lemons and whiteness’ heavy rocks, bruised and battered but containing the essence of “You’re not good enough!” “You’re too assertive” “You’re not assertive enough” “You’re not a team player” “Why are you always working with them” “You’re unapproachable” “You have too many ideas.” “You’re too loud and social” “You’re too quiet, anti-social even” “You’re not focused” “You’re too focused” ”You’re not spending enough time at work” “You’re spending too much time at work, loosen up” “You can’t make a decision” “You make too many decisions ” “You’re a micromanager” “You’re not intelligent” “You’re too smart, elitist even” “You’re too needy” “You’re a loner” “You’re talk too much” “You’re not a good communicator” “You’re not loyal” “You’re articulate but…” “You are not professional enough” “You’re too professional, lighten up” “You’re not what we are looking for” “You have the wrong hair” “You’re not white” “You’re not male” “You’re not the right fit” “You’re JUST TOO ANGRY!” Yes, my sistah! They knew! They knew the toxicity of those bitter lemons because they have tasted them before. They knew the burden of carrying whiteness’ heavy rocks because they have carried
them before. They knew. They have carried these bitter lemons, mixed in with whiteness’ rocks, too heavy to carry alone, so they already knew. Your sistahs understood! They did!

You came to the right place. You never forgot the bridges that carried you over, even if Great Grandmother forgot to tell you how those bridges got built. And when you crossed them, to enter your sistah’s kitchen, they were ready. Ready to listen. They didn’t interrupt. They didn’t silence you, make you feel inept, as if you didn’t belong. They didn’t insert their voice or ideas without you asking for them. They didn’t tell you what you should do, re-centering them and forgetting to see you. Whitesplaining and mansplaining was not their response.

They cared for you, protected you, and heard what you had to say because they listened with their hearts. They opened up courageous space for you to pick up the lemons you carried in your bag, helped you prepare them to make the lemonade for which you had no recipe. And when you could not, they took the lemons from your hand. One by one, they picked up the lemons, rolling them to soften, slicing them, squeezing them, tasting their bitter juice, removing the pits, pushing the rocks to the side.

There in that kitchen, they gave you the recipe for Great Grandmother’s sweet lemonade. Not through word, they didn’t shove a book in your hand and tell you to go read the recipe yourself. They gave it to you, showed you, through demonstration and care, and practiced with you until you were ready. Their words matched their actions. They didn’t tell you to do one thing while they did another. Nor did they ignore you, dismissing your tears as unimportant or incidental. Instead, your sistahs listened, soothed, hugged, loved, critiqued, provided space for you to cry, they cried with you,
then they passed you the tissue and lovingly told you to wipe your eyes. They warmed your heart with soft and hard truths, and they gave you a mirror to hold up to your image, telling you to look into your eyes, where you will see your soul, and there in your eyes, looking into your soul, is where you also reconnected with Great Grandmother’s spirit. A spirit that has always been within you. They reshaped your inner eye so you could see her, it, you, and Great Grandmother’s recipe too. Together, all of you, practiced making her sweet lemonade. You practiced and practiced, tasting it each time, bitter sometimes, until it was perfected. You continued to cry, the bittersweet taste of their love hurt but the space in the kitchen you occupied together made room for your salty tears and heavy hearts. It also made room for tries leading to failures, a result of the bitter taste of your practiced lemonade, still not quite sweet enough.

But your sistahs were there, they stayed as long as you needed them, even as the hours passed, and together, they lifted you up as you fell, sharing the recipe once more, until you knew how to get up on your own. When they had no words to share, and the recipe was not quite right, they called on more sistahs, the ones who weren’t there in the kitchen with you but who remembered Great Grandmother’s recipe too. And in rapid speed through text, email, messenger, Facebook posts and video, these sistahs sent what they knew and together with the sistahs in the room they helped you perfect Great Grandmother’s sweet lemonade once more.

And when that sistah love wasn’t enough, then you and they gathered in the circle you learned to perfect on Sunday mornings in the old halls of Great Grandmother’s place of worship, holding hands and calling Great Grandmother on the mainline, the one she taught you to use for emergencies, emergencies that only Goddess can help you heal, and
you and your sistahs, with the mainline on speaker phone, listened to Great
Grandmother’s voice, risen from sleeping and breathed into your spirit, and what she
shared helped you refine that sweet lemonade you needed so desperately to learn how to
make. You did that together. Until it was sweet enough. Just like YOU!

Sweet enough for you to take the recipe back to your own kitchen. Sweet enough
for you to make it alone when you need to. Sweet enough to turn no substitute to cover
your most difficult English class into two who volunteer to stay as long as you need them
and who grade papers so you won’t have to, giving you more time to spend with your
family. Sweet enough to help you smile just enough for teachers who once saw fear in
your body to now smile back, offering a kind word, and hating your visits to their
classrooms less, seeing an opportunity to learn and grow instead, and eventually desiring
the kind of collegial relationship that has them hanging a big welcome sign on their
classroom doors. Sweet enough to help your supervisors see the absurdity in expecting
someone who juggles the responsibility of caring for an aging mother with health issues,
providing assistance to a sister with a special needs child, teaching and attending courses
at church, raising and tending to the needs of a teenage boy who is active academically
and socially, managing a household, and providing care for a husband with running a
middle school, including conducting home visits, attending the non-school events of her
students, and building a climate of inclusion and acceptance within one absent of these
things when she arrived, to answer a phone call on a Saturday and calling her disloyal
and saying she isn’t a team player when she doesn’t. Sweet enough to cure you of the
racialized fatigue born of your battle in the trenches of racialized microaggressions,
levied onto your body because it was Black. Because it was female. Because they
deemed it not enough. Sweet enough to make way for renewed energy to carry the bag full of bitter lemons and rocks, even when heavy, because you know that work life balance doesn’t exist but balance in spirit will always carry you through when you have the recipe to turn your bag full of bitter lemons and rocks tossed in by whiteness’ hand, into Great Grandmother’s sweet lemonade.

Yes our beloved sistah. You and your sistahs did that! Together, you made sure that you had what you need to make that sweet lemonade. Now you can whip up a cool batch on your own. But just in case you forget again, now you know, you always have your sistahs. They will be there to remind you that even if Great Grandmother didn’t share her recipe with you, the recipe was shared with them, and if you remember to carry your bag of lemons over the bridge that has already been laid, and into your sistah’s kitchen, they will be there to teach you the recipe as many times as you need, even if it means they will need to carry you back across the bridge, until you can walk it alone, ready to carry somebody else so they can carry another just like Great Grandmother would have taught you to do, had she only remembered.

By Tonya Walls

The research testimonial illustrates how nine BWEL leveraged their multicultural subjectivities across regional U.S. boundaries to employ CR-TML. Bridging theory to action, they help Marva solve the leadership challenges she faced in real-time. Reminiscent of the sister circles (Harley, 2002) used by Black women in grassroots community spaces to provide the culturally-responsive care (Roberts, 2010) necessary to sustain themselves when navigating oppression centered in race, class, and gender (Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015) become too burdensome, what took place during the critical inquiry action group affirms
the literature on microaggressions asserting that people of color establish and use academic and social counter-spaces in response to the daily barrage of racialized interactions they experience in traditional school settings (Solarzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). They collectively counteracted deficit notions of themselves as educational leaders, challenging the toxic environments that posed a threat to their emotional, psychological, and social well-being (Solarzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008), while simultaneously problem-posing solutions to real-life equity challenges experienced while leading within the contested spaces comprising their respective P-12 schools. As a unit, they also leveraged the research space as a site of restorative practice (Morris, 2016; Winn, 2011) and care (Roberts, 2010) to enable Marva to release frustrations born of racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2004, 2011). Engaging culturally responsive care (Roberts, 2010) participating BWEL also supported Marva as she reconnected with her multi-consciousness to restore multicultural sensibilities situated in her Black femaleness (McKay, 2010) and cultivated through her socio-historical ethnic legacy but not necessarily explicitly nurtured by the family within which she was born. In this case, the critical inquiry action group, a proxy for the counter-space or sister circle, became the location of nurturing, where these sensibilities were restored, allowing Marva to grow in her leadership and enabling her to remain resistant and tenacious in solving the challenges she faced in her school. It is worth noting that this experience and praxis, rooted in the cultural work described in the literature forming Black feminist thought (Collins, 1986, 1989) may solely exist within the standpoint of WELOC, in this case BWEL, rendering their leadership praxis unique, providing import for the need for more BWEL to mentor and support those already in the field, and suggesting the field may require radical transformation, including working more intentionally to include, understand, and provide space within U.S. P-12 schools and the academy that prepares
teachers and educational leaders to teach and lead within them, for the engagement of the
different and rarified culturally and racially–specific leadership approaches employed by these
leaders (Santamaria, 2014; Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014).

In the section that follows, revolutionary conclusions for this work are offered. They are situated within the collective voices engaging it.

**Revolutionary Conclusions**

“You may write me down in history with your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt but still, like dust, I'll rise.
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise I rise I rise.”

~ Excerpt from Maya Angelou Poem

Final thoughts and implications situated in the sentiments expressed by the words opening this section of the chapter follow. They are not revolutionary because they offer something radically different or new, they do not. Instead, they are revolutionary, precisely because they do not. They do not, because there is nothing radical or revolutionary new to offer to the discourse surrounding racial equity and social justice in education that we cannot already find in the scholarship preceding this work. The latter statement may sound odd given the argument for the relevance of this work in filling a gap in the literature, however, just as the colonial project is not new and keeps reinventing itself by engaging education policy and practices as white supremacy (Gilborne, 2005) so too does the research engaging educational topics situated in these phenomena, including the one explored in this study. Thus, though I make every attempt to share my understanding of BWEL leadership as situated in the respective stories of the eight BWEL engaging this work alongside me, and doing so by engaging and
describing it differently than any work before it has done before, I also seek to describe it in the tradition of ACEM, paying homage to the historical footprint left by scholars before me as expressed in Fannie Lou Hamer’s words, and honoring the stories that speak what we speak here, they have already shared with us, and yet, also honoring the collective experiences of the BWEL engaging this work with me. Situating conclusions in this approach itself is revolutionary. Doing so, I wrap the conclusions gleaned it in the collective voices of the Black women engaging this work, as rooted in their authentic leadership experiences from the field, exactly as they experienced them, including exactly as they shared those experiences with me. I also do so understanding that the truth-telling they each engaged with me is unique, differently expressed, and collectively relevant to the discourse in educational leadership. So, while I confess that the content of their narration, infused with my own is not revolutionary or new, how we attempt to deliver our experiences to the public and the manner in which the content of our stories are narrated is. It is revolutionary. Finally, I also share revolutionary conclusions with hopes that this time; our stories (BWEL) will be listened to, heard, embraced, understood, celebrated, affirmed, valued, and applied. Thus, I embrace my sharing as a collective sharing wrapped in the word, we. I will narrate conclusions speaking in our collective voices and using the word “we” moving forward. That sentiment in mind, we share as a way to add to, build on, amplify, and expand a discourse situated in the privileging of majoritarian narratives. Rebuking this privileging, as well as the marginalizing and silencing that come with, we honor the bridges that we have crossed. We also honor the voices and experiences of those narrating our stories before we ever could and did.

Situated in the bridges crossed and the sentiments expressed in the words opening this section, we offer culturally-centered answers to hegemony’s two themed questions: (1) What
have you learned from this work? and (2) How will this work’s findings, as situated in what you learned, add something innovative, new, and unexplored to the field, including the current body of research? In the spirit of our inspirations, those freedom-fighting BWEL who came before us-Ida B. Wells, Angela Davis, Althea Nelson, Sojourner Truth, Mary Magdalene, Marva Collins, Fannie Lou Hamer, and no namesake but emotional reminder, Joy—we also provide answers the same way we began this work, with an intent to engage in activist research, in resistance to the current colonial U.S. P-12 educational leadership context and its higher education mother, the academy. Humbly rooted in this inspiration and purpose, our answers to each of the inquiry questions forming the study’s concluding thoughts and implications, comprise what we learned and what we want others to take away.

What We Learned: Sharing Sweet Lemonade

As endarkened black feminist (Collins, 1990, 2000; Dillard, 2000) epistemologies remind, our lives are for us to explore, and who better to narrate our experiences than us. Narrating our explorations, we humbly proclaim, we learned nothing we didn’t already know, because we live what we experienced engaging this work every day. However, what we knew before we engaged this work was revealed more transparently then if we had never explored our inquiries at all. In reflecting on and narrating concluding thoughts on and implications for our collective experience, we came to understand that we know better three things. First, we learned, understand, and know that women, especially Black women are powerful beyond measure and dangerous because of it. We are powerful and dangerous because engaging this work through CR-TML taught us we not only have the power to tap into our own multiconsciousness, sharpening it to engage leadership for social justice, CR-TML also enables us to open up brave space for others to do the same. By tapping into and sharpening our own consciousness, we, as
well as our students, families, communities, and teachers are empowered with knowledge, voice, and agency to dismantle inequities in education (Freire, 1972; hooks, 1994) as a radical collective, potentially rendering education in the U.S. equal, a feat never accomplished before. We also understand that if engaging CR-TML provides a weapon and tool for social justice leaders to engage social justice leadership waged as resistance against hegemony’s colonial grip, that thought must be scary to whiteness, including those embodying whiteness as a property interest. In this regard, our leadership is dangerous, because it is powerful beyond measure, making BWEL dangerous and explaining the silencing and marginalizing we experience within the contested spaces forming U.S. P-12 schools. We likely experience these phenomena because whiteness as a property interest will always retreat to whiteness to protect itself, history shows us that. Allowing our power means relinquishing its power, something whiteness has never done or exercised a will to do. Yet, we learned that through the engagement of CR-TML we have the power to become social justice allies, advocates, and activists with a strategic focus on responding to context, building relationships with community, and transforming the praxis of other potential social justice allies across the proverbial colorline. We can also teach others to do the same. This too is powerfully dangerous. It is also revolutionary. And so, we learned and understand that we must persist, resisting oppression, remaining ever-vigilant to dismantle inequities, and continuing to tell our stories as we do so.

Our second understanding and new learning is embedded in the power of our voice and storytelling (Yosso, 2005). When engaged through a critical race lens (Ladson-Billings, 1998) to counter the master narrative being told about us as BWEL, storytelling is liberating. By engaging this work to liberate self and other Black women from the invisibility that our Black womanhood affords us within educational leadership and the hegemony of an academy that
seeks to demand that we can only express our intelligence through the degrees we have each collected and in the voice and experience of one foreign to our spirit and soul, we also learned that by engaging this work through storytelling, our collective goals have been accomplished. In that regard, we have been liberated, and today, we are better positioned to create space for the liberation of others than before we began. Remembering our desire to engage this work as activist researchers and educational leaders, we also learned that this new knowledge of our liberation is enough, as are we.

Finally, and third, we learned that by situating this inquiry about other BWEL in an understanding of our power, especially the power inherent in our lived experiences, leadership, research, voice, and stories, narrating each of these things, guided by knowledge of the robust literature on black teachers and in the fields of CRT and CME, and engaging the work employing ACEM, positioning ourselves as co-inquirers alongside each other rather than as objects of study, we could provide and open up brave space to speak in our authentic voices, using our authentic words, in our authentic ways of communicating, and engaging in the kind of truth-telling necessary to understand our work in P-12 education, educational leadership and research as uncompromisingly political (Stovall, 2005, 2006a, 2006b). We also learned how to do so fully accomplishing the four tasks we set out to accomplish. First, we elucidated six socially just leadership practices comprising CR-TML, each resulting from the positive aspects of the multicultural identities of BWEL advancing racial equity and social justice. Second, we illuminated the disparate and racially traumatizing impact that current educational policies have on us, particularly as situated within a socio-historical context influencing national school reform efforts, including demonstrating that despite such impact, BWEL continue to lead advancing social justice, doing so relying on a culturally-centered resiliency also born of their multicultural
identities. Third, we determined BWEL leverage diverse multicultural perspectives and educational leadership approaches as a tool to disrupt and dismantle policies and practices that lead to inequities in U.S. public schools, replacing them with policies and practices that are racially and socially just instead. They do so by relying on an intersectional CRT lens sharpened each time they experience interlocking oppressions rooted in the colonial education project and indicative of the contested spaces forming U.S. P-12 schools. Fourth and finally, by sharing eight interpretive stories and two testimonials drawn from our leadership experiences while advancing racial equity and social justice in U.S. P-12 schools, we provided culturally centered narratives of social justice leadership in order to inform important education stakeholders about how educational leadership development might be constructed differently.

Because we professed to do each of these things together, sharing our stories as a collective we, rather than I, we have chosen to conclude this work by walking the talk of that proposition. Just as engaged with this work, we offer conclusions highlighting and centering the voices of the BWEL engaging this work. We do so authentically, sharing our ideas and thoughts on the implications of our work, in our own words, because our words, like us, are absolutely and unapologetically, enough.

**Situating Findings in What We learned**

Over 60 years ago civil rights legislation requiring the nation to ensure every child an equal education under the law was passed. Today, six decades later, schools are more segregated than they ever were then, education for HMMS within these schools is unequal, their experiences with racialized oppression at the intersection of gender and class is similar to and or worse than the generations that birthed and raised them, and the oppressive system reinforcing the inequitable and unjust education that they are forced to receive continues to exacerbate the
education debt owed them (Ladson-Billings, 2006) giving rise to a persistent and recursive pattern of reinventing itself with outcomes on the other end mirroring those of centuries past-patterns that are not new, patterns that push HMMS, especially Black students out of schools and into prison economies (Alexander, 2011), even when those prisons chain their minds, psyche, spirit, and soul when not their bodies (West, 2001). More pertinent to this study, patterns that silence the very voices and experiences of the women who have always been there to carry them through when the patterns persist are also prevalent and have a similar impact on BWEL that unjust policies and practices have on HMMS. As evidenced by the robust literature, much of which I cited in this work, we already know what to do about these patterns. Scholars have written about solutions for centuries. Scholars like Julia Ana Cooper, Carter Woodson, W.E.B. DuBois, Kimberle Crenshaw, bell hooks, Patricia Hill-Collins, Audre Lorde, and a litany of others, including literary, political, and public academics. Their scholarship holds solutions, solutions that don’t need repeating because their work has already been cited here. Thus we humbly proclaim we already have a solution to the problems, if only we engage the will to break the cycle of the patterns we continue to repeat. And yet, rather than engage the will, we continue to do what is prudent. Including privileging knowledge and transferring the right to create scholarship to those who follow standards made dominant by those with the privilege to dominate. By choosing to engage this work and this closing in resistance to that domination, and in ways that problematize what it means to create empirically sound knowledge, including closing this work without offering new solutions to an old problem that we already have all of the knowledge we need to solve, instead we share knowledge imparted by the authentic voices, rooted in the experiences of those we profess we need to listen to, in order to break the chain of the patterns we are all so familiar with anyway. In doing so, we also share this: we need to
listen to what BWEL have to tell us with hearts, not eyes or ears, and not to respond, appropriate, coopt, or debate, but rather to listen for understanding. We must hear to understand with that same heart with which we must listen, because like their beautifully created Black woman minds, Black woman bodies and Black woman spirits, their Black woman leadership stories are enough. Colloquially stated, we must remember to #SayHerName because their #BlackLivesMatter!

That shared, the beautifully created, imperfectly perfect nine BWEL who engaged this study and whose Black womanhood is wrapped in the magical powers of a culturally inspired Black woman multiconsciousness were asked, What else would you like others to know about BWEL leadership. They shared the following ideals, as rooted in their understanding of their respective and collective leadership experiences as engaged in this study.

**Ida: Center the Experiences of Our Children to Solve the Education Debt.** Ida advocates problem-posing for solutions to educational inequity in similar ways that this study problem-posed for solutions to inequity in educational leadership, by centering the work in the authentic voices, experiences, and stories of those most closely situated in the problem of educational inequity in order to better understand how to dismantle it. Namely, Ida advocates centering the work of transforming an education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) exacerbated by inequities in education like the racialized opportunity gap, racialized student-teacher gap, and racialized discipline gap, into an education surplus resulting in an equal education for all, including HMMS. As she invokes, until we understand the teaching, learning, and lived experiences of HMMS, we will not engage leadership that recognizes, understands, affirms, validates, values, and celebrates the best of what HMMS bring to the educational setting (Moll, et al; Yosso, 2005). According to Ida, the one critical take-away from this study is understanding that BWEL engage leadership centered in HMMS. A critical finding in this study,
Ida suggests harnessing the knowledge shared in stories from this study to better understand how to leverage the power of voice and story to serve all students, but especially HMMS. She believes if we do this, we can find solutions to tackle the education debt. Ida states, "What I hope comes across is that while attempts at equity often means more funding for materials and opportunities, this does not address the explicit and implicit actions, hidden curriculum, and bias that ignore or deny the existence/lived experiences of students of color – their aspirations and the barriers they overcome adjusting to a system that resists and discards the influence of their ethnicity, language, and cultural background that differs from mainstream, dominant ways of seeing, valuing, and experiencing the world must not be ignored. Only then will we achieve true educational equity."

**Althea: Transform Policy to Transform Educational Leadership.** Althea builds on Ida’s points but also highlights a need to build intentional reflection on how to attract, retain, and sustain educational leaders committed to advancing racial equity and social justice in U.S. P-12 education. She feels an important take-away from this work is understanding the impact policies and practices situated in white supremacy, privilege, and power have on educational leaders committed to transforming schools into spaces that are equitable and just. Like the research exploring education policy and practice as an act of white supremacy (Gilborne, 2005), Althea suggests educational leaders become serious about studying policies and programs and willing to critically examine the day-to-day impact these policies have on those who are oppressed, especially HMMS. She also suggests the field will do little more than call for the recruitment of educational leaders of color and educational leaders committed to social justice more broadly without understanding the negative and disparate impact many education policies and practices have on historically marginalized students, teachers and educational leaders. Developing a more
keen understanding of the value of developing educational leaders who apply a critical race lens (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate, 1997) and praxis (McKay, 2010; Stovall, 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2006b) to recognize how racial realism (bell, 1992) is woven into education policy, and seeing that as a critical take-away from this work exploring the leadership of BWEL, Althea states,

“Engaging this important work provides awareness and guidance around educational policy, programs, and the day-to-day experiences of those who are oppressed. In the field of education, we must acknowledge and place a high regard on attracting, retaining, and supporting African American female leaders, including doing what is necessary to maintain and sustain robustness in their presence and contributions when leading in educational spaces.”

Angela: Believe in Our Children and Engage Equity Pedagogy. The import of Angela’s take-away is stated fully in her final words. She speaks of the importance of teachers’ belief systems about the achievement and life success of HMMS (Ross & Gray, 2006). Captured in works on critical multicultural education (Banks, 1994; Gay, 2003; Nieto, 2004; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995), Angela also speaks to the importance of using an equity pedagogy situated in their lived experiences and a belief that they can succeed to ensure their success (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995). She also amplifies the voices of historical scholars (Cooper, 1892, 1988; Dubois, 1973; Hilliard, 2001; Woodson, 1933, 1977 as cited in Tillman, 2002) in invoking that we have all we need to help students succeed and understands that it is in the BWEL leadership explored in this study that we can learn much about centering our purpose for education leadership praxis in high hopes and standards for the achievement of HMMS. Angela shares,
“Our school system has our children for half the day. This is sufficient to help them internalize their own learning. We can help them with self-regulation. We can help them build the capacity and desire to learn. This may be cliché but we have what we need to help them become future leaders and to see themselves in that role as they grow older no matter what they choose to do whether it’s being a plumber or business owner. We can help them find their passion and that’s what I want to see for them. It is possible but first we have to believe it is.”

**Joy: Honor Cultural and Community Knowledge.** Joy’s take away aligns with the literature on social justice leadership (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Santamaria, 2013; Stovall, 2004), Black teaching (Foster, 1994; Irvine, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009; Ware, XXXX), and culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Muhammad & Hollie, 2011). She feels those engaging the findings of this study must understand the importance culturally responsive leadership approaches have on leadership for social justice. In particular, Joy understands the power in the stories shared in this work; especially those describing the practices that connect BWEL to the communities they serve. Having the ability to embrace the culturally-centered knowledges, ways of thinking, and being students, families, and communities bring to the school space (Moll, et. al, 1992; Yosso, 2005), even when different from their own, enables them to engage leadership practices aligned with the diverse needs of these individuals and groups. Understanding how they do so is critical if calls for social justice leadership (Santamaria, 2013; Stovall, 2004) are to be realized. Joy calls for leadership situated in these phenomena. She states,

“Social justice begins with respecting the needs and experiences of those that we are charged with serving. We have to begin at our core with an understanding that our work
is centered in the children, and so it should be student-centered. We must engage strategies, instructional and otherwise that meets the needs of diverse populations. We must engage community outreach, make the school space safe for the parents and the students and not ourselves, develop our growth mindset along with theirs and remember that our children are brilliant.”

**Sojourner: Build Intentional Networks of Support.** Sojourner recognizes the power in building intentional networks of support prevalent in the leadership of BWEL and invokes this practice as critical to sustaining and retaining educational leaders with the will to engage social justice leadership, especially WELOC. Drawing on the literature of Black teachers advocating the use of culturally responsive care (Roberts, 2010) as one way to sustain and restore oneself when navigating oppressive spaces and aligned with findings suggesting BWEL practice self-care as communal care in developing personal and professional sister circles (Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, & Murray, 2011) within and outside of the professional realm, Sojourner invokes, “Leadership is meant to provide access and opportunity to individuals in protected classes. The decisions and behaviors we engage, including being culturally responsive and continuing to use our positions to create access and opportunity is critical.”

**Mary: Create Avenues of Access and Success through Culturally Responsive Mentoring and Coaching.** Like Joy, Mary reminds that we must remember to embrace the cultural wealth and funds of knowledge (Moll, et. al, 1992; Yosso, 2005) that all stakeholders bring to the education space and points to the leadership of BWEL as an example of how to do so. Like Sojourner, she also recognizes the value and import for creating sustainable networks with the power to open up access and opportunity to those locked out of oppressive systems, including institutions like U.S. P-12 schools and encourages the creation of culturally relevant
mentoring and coaching programs for educational leaders of color. Drawing upon her own experience having to navigate coaching and mentoring as an act of resilience and resistance waged in secret, she calls for the creation of brave and safe spaces to engage in culturally relevant mentoring and coaching in the open, not in secret, and not in fear of retribution (Neal-Barnett, Stadulis, & Murray, 2011). Mary states,

“Our students’ families may not have done what we aspire for the children we serve but we must remember they are from good stock, and what they don’t get from home we can teach them if we just work hard to do it. Also, we must create spaces for minority mentoring programs and programs that will allow them to do what is necessary so they don’t have to do it behind closed doors, under the cover of secrecy, as if engaging an educational underground railroad.”

**Fannie: Open Space for Courageous Conversations.** Invoking a reminder that racial realism (Bell, 1992) exist and engaging an understanding that unless we confront this reality and equip ourselves with the ability to employ brave conversations about its existence, we will continue to fail to confront the inequities steeped in interlocking oppressions rooted to race holistically. Without situating educational leadership in a socio-historical context, the recursive cycle of the colonial education project will continue. Fannie’s take-away is steeped in BWELs’ ability to wage leadership that engages the tough but critical conversations centered on race and racism. She feels this is an important lesson for the field to also take away. Fannie states,

“I don’t care what anybody says, there has to be a point when we are allowed to talk about and address anti-blackness and our struggle as Black people. It is in our DNA and our make-up, passed down generationally and yet we have never addressed what happened in our communities. Until we do, we will continue to get teachers who think
we are dumb and stupid and that we don’t know anything. They will fail to look at the big picture [socio-historical context]; and just keep calling us dumb or stupid. We have to talk about it.”

**Marva: Allow Us To Be, Even as We Are Becoming.** Marva’s words bring this work and the implications and import for this work full circle. Stated simply, her final words remind us of one of the primary purposes within which this work was situated: to decenter whiteness by elevating, highlighting, and affirming the voices, perspectives, and experiences of historically marginalized and minoritized peoples in educational leadership, especially those experiencing anti-black oppression rooted in white privilege and power across intersecting, interlocking social dimensions like BWEL. Impassioned about this purpose because embedded within it is the idea that failing to do so renders those experiencing leadership in this way invisible causing them great psychological, emotional, spiritual, and physical harm, Marva reminds us all what BWELs require of those who engage them in educational spaces. It is the same thing needed by HMMS if their educational experience is to yield racially and socially just outcomes. She reminds, “I must be positioned to help you without hurting myself.”

**Implications and Recommendations**

There is resonance within the final words offered thus far, particularly since the findings for this study answer the overarching question, *How do BWEL committed to advancing racial equity through the development of a social justice leadership praxis experience and engage educational leadership in U.S. P-12 schools?* It does so by revealing how the leadership of BWEL contributes to the empirical evidence validating ACL as a different and unique approach to leadership situated in their lived experiences, multicultural subjectivities and complexly layered perspectives. Also illuminating the interlocking nature of class, race, and gender on their
leadership, BWEL lead to advance racial equity and social justice within the contested spaces of U.S. P-12 schools, centered in Black ethnic, racial, and social culture, and informed and shaped by lived experiences rooted in a socio-historical and situational context inclusive of educational policies and practices rooted in interlocking oppressions. Within the U.S. these oppressions are situated in a global colonial education project showing up as white supremacy, power, and privilege. It is delivered in the hidden curriculum shaping the contested spaces of the U.S. P-12 schools within which they lead. As a result, they employ six emergent strategies indicative of CR-TML to combat multiple oppressions levied against themselves, as well as the constituents they serve, especially HMMS, and specifically Black students, and they do so in solidarity to one another. Waging this constant battle hones an ever-sharpening and complexly dynamic multiconsciousness enabling them to engage culturally-centered resilience to continue to confront inequities even through their experiences with racialized trauma and stress. In this way, BWEL continue to overcome racial battle fatigue, oft avoiding fragility and internalized racism by leveraging the positive characteristics of multicultural leadership identities to advance a social justice leadership agenda, including engaging the skill and will to disrupt and dismantle inequities in schools even as they recognize calls to do so are often nothing more than language appeasement at best and the colonial project reinventing itself at worst.

Much like my sisters in this inquiry, I offer my final thoughts and conclusions in response to this research, and the research findings. They are as follows:

**Educational Leadership and Multicultural Education.** Findings from this study amplifies the importance of bridging works in educational leadership to CME and CRT (Santamaria, 2014; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012), especially towards a goal of understanding how best to advance leadership for social justice. Drawing a bridge to critical multicultural
education helped explicate the ways educational leaders can use critical frameworks for equity pedagogy to guide and shape leadership decisions. It also provides a pathway for engaging in culturally responsive leadership practices. Continuing to explore frameworks for equity pedagogy as a way to dismantle and disrupt inequities is required. This work provided one model for how to do so. It accomplished this task by leaning into scholar Gloria Ladson Billings’ words offered in her keynote address at the 2017 national conference for the National Association of Multicultural Education. During this address, Billings’ states, “We can’t prepare culturally relevant teachers and leaders if we don’t have culturally relevant folks developing their praxis. In order to ensure we are preparing culturally relevant leaders equipped with the knowledge, skill and will to engage culturally responsive school leadership pedagogies, including social justice leadership, this work demonstrates that the field of critical multicultural education will need to join forces with educational leadership. This may require scholars and leaders in the field of educational leadership to embrace multicultural education epistemologies as a first step. Engaging multicultural epistemologies will also need to include engaging in the introspective work present in the critical inquiry action group engaged during this study. That work must include reflecting on the question Ladson-Billings posed, *Are we culturally relevant? Are we engaging our cultural relevance in efficacious ways so as to develop culturally aware educational leaders?* By bridging CME to SJL and incorporating a collage of critical pedagogies including CPD, this work calls all educational leaders and scholars operationalizing critical multicultural curriculum and professional development models into the brave space it has created. It does so because educational leaders and those leading the field need knowledge offered by the field of multicultural education and it is up to those scholars to ensure they have it. If it entails engaging research across content borders, bridging CME to SJL and educational
leadership more broadly, that is what this work calls us to do. This work also calls on us to continue to explore CME as situated in practical examples of its pedagogies by exploring exemplary models beyond teaching. Currently, there is a dearth of literature focused on practical examples in educational leadership (Theoharis, 2008). Helping educational leaders and the field that supports them to understand what CME looks like on the ground within educational leadership is essential, particularly if education leaders are to engage critical multicultural education pedagogies. Situating that work in the leadership experiences of WELOC, especially BWEL, by opening up space in the field for future investigations of their pedagogy is an excellent starting place. This work forms an example.

**Educational Leadership and Critical Race Theory.** The bridge work characterized by this study also re-imagines how we currently operationalize the work of educational leadership by synthesizing it with theories, research, and practical examples drawn from CRT. In the same NAME keynote address referenced above, Ladson-Billings highlights the import of the critique offered by CRT scholarship; particularly critique situated in bell’s theory of racial realism, especially given the salience of race throughout U.S. P-12 educational institutions. However, she also shares the importance of putting action behind the critique. By bridging CRT to educational leadership as fused with CME, this study does what Ladson-Billings calls us to do, implying that this study also serves as a practical example of how to put CRT theory into action by bridging it with CME and SJL. CR-TML provides the bridge for this work. In this regard, I argue the import for CRT scholarship and scholars, to continue to explore social justice leadership as situated in a fusion of CRT and CME. This means moving beyond traditional critiques of ME, to use frameworks like CR-TML as a way to continue to explore the practical viability of educational leadership for social justice in actions, especially as acts of resistance,
resilience, restoration, and transformation. This work, and the writing of its findings, forms a first departure from traditional research on educational leadership by employing a CRT lens bridged to CME and SJL. In this regard, it provides impetus for a provocative dialogue surrounding what it means to engage academically rigorous, empirically sound, and robust research, particularly in educational leadership, including providing us with ways to re-imagine how we might construct leadership and leadership development by employing a CRT lens, especially with consideration for how to employ this lens guided by action-based leadership frameworks shaped by effective practices in CME and SJL.

**Time to Re-Imagine Educational Leadership.** Consistent with Santamaria’s (2013) work examining the social justice leadership of WELOC, this study underscores the import for the recruitment, retention, development, support and sustenance of women of color in leadership spaces, including in U.S. P-12 schools. In synthesis, and specific to educational leadership, it argues that the recruitment and retention work engaged by those in the field calling for social justice leadership and more educational leaders of color to engage it, must be engaged not as colorblind diversity work with the intent to secure bodies as a way of appeasing requirements calling for inclusive school practices, but rather as a way to walk the talk of equity and justice by sustaining the untapped potential of (W)ELOC and BWEL already occupying P-12 spaces and working with them in allyship to find a third way to recruitment and retention. This requires listening to them by decentering systems and structures situated in hegemony in order to create networks of support and alternative ways of imagining the recruitment, support, and development process for those who are yet to come.

**Reflecting on CR-TML.** Finally, by expanding on our knowledge of the culturally situated leadership of BWEL, including the resiliency, resistance, restoration, and transformation
that result, this study provides inspiration to continue theorizing on CR-TML. This theorizing is necessary because it will help us highlight and understand important alternatives to more traditional and commonly used approaches to, and theories for, educational leadership, especially for those “who race themselves outside of the confines of whiteness” (Santamaria & Jean-Marie, p. 357). Future work is also needed because theorizing on CR-TML is emergent. Further research will help further validate this study’s findings. As with this study, future research on the leadership of BWEL should center their experiences, voices, and stories. It should also be attentive to purposefully including a more diverse pool of participating BWEL to determine if cross-cultural data reveals the same findings, particularly with consideration for identity dimensions beyond race and gender. In the interim, there is promise and hope in opening up critical and brave space within educational institutions for BWEL to employ CR-TML as a way to lead for social justice differently. This will need to include bridging the discourse in educational leadership to the discourses in CRT and CME, by creating more spaces that center BWEL and engage their theorizing authentically, because after all, they and these things are enough.

**Limitations & Trustworthiness of the Study**

One of the limiting factors of the study includes the impact that time constraints imposed. Though I would have liked to have taken more time to explore and honor the complexly rich and diverse leadership experiences shared by each participating BWEL, the study was bound by a specified timeframe, limiting me to one interview and requiring efficiency on my part during the sister check-in (member checking) process to ensure trustworthiness, as well as to ensure the data collected represents an accurate portrayal of each BWEL’s experience. Additionally, while the information gleaned proves formative to the field of educational leadership, I understand that
the leadership experiences explored are unique to the individual experiences of participating BWEL and may not wholly transfer to situations and contexts beyond those studied. Yet, given the robust data collection and analysis process, what was gleaned is formative, and serves as an important starting point for continued exploration and validation.

A second factor posing limitations for the study is connected to the sample population. Because this study was limited to BWEL, we are not able to make definitive conclusions about factors that impact and promote transformative social justice leadership experiences and practices by all school leaders, particularly across gender, other racialized backgrounds, and in relation to school policy contexts’ other than those explored through each of the eight participating BWEL’s stories, and my own. Furthermore, because this study was limited to school leaders with an expressed social justice orientation, and who lead within a bounded context, the conclusions drawn limits our ability to make generalizations about educational leaders using standpoints other than social justice leadership orientations and leading in spaces beyond the context identified, however, this strategic and narrow focus can also be viewed as a strength in that the data tells us much about how to develop a social justice lens in those who don’t have the standpoint but seeks to find ways to lead in schools with similar equity challenges. It also provides insight into how and why a specific subset of educational leaders we have struggled to recruit and retain might be recruited, as well as how to sustain, develop, and retain them; this information may be more transferable to a broader group of educational leaders of color as well and is information and insights we haven’t previously had within the education leadership arena.

The topics and content explored in this study are not limiting but did pose challenges worthy of noting. Gender, race, and other social factors in relationship to leadership practices,
decisions, and dispositional change can be difficult to engage given their dynamic nature across individuals and variant affinity groups. Since this study to investigate the thoughts, feelings, and experiences connected with topics that many people may be unwilling or unable to report, as sole researcher, it was my responsibility to create a safe environment where participants felt supported and encouraged to do so. While there is an assumption that I exemplify the knowledge, skill, disposition, and practical ability to do so, there is no reliable evidence that this assumption is rooted in anything other than my own biases. Likewise, individual researchers without the skill and will to engage such a process may find doing so challenging. This is limiting in the sense that repeating the research process may prove difficult which makes validating it across various contexts difficult as well, but not unworthy of trying.

Additionally, though I worked intentionally to temper personal biases and subjectivities as they relate to organizational policy initiatives and the implementation of school reform and change efforts surrounding these initiatives, I also intentionally included my lens of these things in the study by positioning myself as subject as a way to provide counter narrative to how these phenomena are traditionally explored within current educational leadership literature. As such, I understand that even as I worked hard to engage this research in an empirically robust manner, it may still be impacted by a certain amount of bias as I myself am a BWEL who engaged leadership in U.S. P-12 schools. While my background as an elementary school leader provides insider insight into cultural norms and behaviors, it may have also hindered my ability to fully understand how my own experiences differ from (and assign different cultural meanings for) the BWEL engaged in this study. I worked hard to mitigate interference; however, it is difficult to be certain.

Finally, I had to work to remain consciously aware of the impact that personal
connections with the research content and participants with whom I maintained a relationship with before this study (I had previous professional relationships with 4 of the 8 participants) may have had on my ability to utilize the conceptual frameworks identified to maintain a pure inductive process, including developing a credible and accurate understanding of the phenomenon being explored. Ultimately, I used the reflective process to remain critically aware of how and when personal biases and subjectivities overshadowed the narrative and voice of each participant’s experience, in order to ensure that the data obtained and results reported, truly reflect meaningful, credible and dependable answers to the questions posed. In this way, the study, including the methods used prove trustworthy, and help to provide space for an accurate and transferable analysis of the leadership experiences of BWEL whose multiple intersecting identities enable the advancement of a social justice agenda in U.S. P-12 schools, and to do so by engaging CR-TML, a unique approach to leadership situated in a unique culturally centered and liberatory leadership praxis.
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Applied Critical Leadership Characteristics

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Appendix Q: UNLV IRB Exempt Notice
APPENDIX A: APPLIED CRITICAL LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

ACL Characteristic 1: Critical Conversations – willingness to initiate and engage in

ACL Characteristic 2: Critical Race Theory Lens – considers multiple perspectives of critical issues; race first, valuing story, critical of liberalism and understanding the reality of racism

ACL Characteristic 3: Group Consensus – used consensus building as the preferred strategy for decision making

ACL Characteristic 4: Stereotype Threat – conscious of stereotype threat or fulfilling negative stereotypes associated with their perceived racial, ethnic, or linguistic group

ACL Characteristic 5: Academic Discourse – considers educational research as opportunity to tell truth about education; make empirical contributions and to add authentic research-based information to academic discourse regarding underserved groups

ACL Characteristic 6: Honoring Constituents – need to honor all members of their constituencies; seek out and include voices

ACL Characteristic 7: Leading By Example – led by example to meet unresolved educational needs or challenges; lead to give back; their responsibility to bring critical issues to the forefront

ACL Characteristic 8: Trust With Mainstream – build trust when working with mainstream constituents or partners, or others who did not share an affinity toward issues related to educational equity; need to win the trust of individuals in the mainstream, as well as to prove themselves qualified and worthy of leadership positions and roles
ACL Characteristic 9: Servant Leadership – called to lead; led by spirit; Transformative servant
leaders who work to serve the greater good
## APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT SETTING CHART

### Individual Case Setting: School/District Chart

#### SETTING ONE

**One Public Elementary School (P-5) Assistant Principal**

Fifth largest school district in the nation. Urban, Rural and suburban district. Educating 75% of all students in the state –356 total schools (217 ES; 59 MS; 49 HS; 14 Alt; 9 Adult; 8 Special; 7 Charter) with an average class size of 23 and $9,449 per pupil

**Teachers:** Information not reported by district. 22 to 1 Student Teacher Ratio

**2015-2016 Student Enrollment:** 320,400 total; 45.7% Latinx/Hispanic; 26.2% Caucasian; 13.3% Black; 6.4% Asian; 6.4% Multiracial; 1.6% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; and .4% Native American – 60.32% FRL; 18.48 EL; 12% SPED; 72.07%

**Policy Context:** Title 1 Funding, College and Career Ready Curriculum, Common Core Standards, High Stakes Testing - End of Course and SBAC Exams, Pull Out and Tracking Programs – GATE, EL, SPED, No Tolerance Policies Disproportionality in Discipline with Blacks 2.7 more likely to be suspended than any other racial group, State Achievement Zone, Charters, and State Sponsored Voucher System; Average Daily Attendance 95% ; Transiency Rate 27.5%

#### SETTING TWO

**One District Level Leader Serving Middle and High Schools**

Fifth largest school district in state. Suburban district covering 320 square miles and includes 67 schools (42 elementary, 9 middle, nine high, 4 alternative) with an average class size of 21.3.

**Teachers:** 2% American Indian; 4.6% Asian; 3.8% Black; 1.5% Filipino; 9.9% Latinx/Hispanic; .2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; 68.1% White – 73.1% Female and 26.9% Male – Average years of experience is 14 years - 20 to 1 Teacher Student Ratio

**2015-2016 Student Enrollment:** 62,767 students; 7% American Indian; 22.5% Asian; 13.4% Black, 5.8% Filipino; 26% Latinx; 1.7% native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; 21.4% White - 17.5% EL; 54.4% FRL

**Policy Context:** Title 1 Funding; College and Career Ready Curriculum; Common Core and State ELD Standards; High Stakes Testing – SBAC; Implement PLC’s District Wide; Pull Out and tracked classes-GATE, Indian Education, EL, SPED; No Tolerance Discipline; Disproportionality in Discipline and SPED with Blacks more likely to be referred than any other racial group

#### SETTING THREE

**One Public TK-8 School Principal**

Medium sized district in large west coast state. Offers traditional programs; magnet; alternate; newcomers; early childhood and summer programs. There are 86 district run schools and 37 charters (48 ES; 6 K-8; 1 Alternative middle and 7 Alternative HS; 3 6-12; 7 HS; and 1 Ind) Average class size is 23.5 students. Average Daily Attendance 95.4%; Graduation Rate 64.2%

**Teachers:** 2,683 total teachers; .3% American Indian; 10.7% Asian; 18.7% Black; 1.9% Filipino; 2.4% Hispanic/Latinx; .03 Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; .03 Two or more races; 53.5% White; 19 to 1 per pupil ratio; average experience 8 years
**Students**: 49,600 students; 0.3% American Indian; 12.8% Asian; 25.6% Black, 0.9% Filipino; 44.5% Latinx; 0.9% native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; 3.4% two or more races; 9.7% White -17.5% FRL 74.1%; EL; 31.8%; SPED

**District Website**: Title 1 Funding; College and Career Ready Curriculum; Common Core and ELD Standards; High Stakes Testing – CSAAPP and SBAC Exams; Black Male Empowerment Programs and Restorative Justice Discipline District Wide; Public, Independent, and State Sponsored Charter Schools

**School Site**: 359 Students; Title 1 School; Traditional Calendar; 17.8% Asian, 14.8% Black; 1.1% Filipino; 62.1% Latinx/Hispanic; 0.6% Two or more races; 86.6% FRL; 57.9% EL; 23 students average class size

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### SETTING FOUR

*One K-5 Elementary School Principal*

Small suburban coastal district near urban area with 21 schools total (10 ES; 3 MS; 3 HS; 2 Alt; 1 Continuation; 2 K-12). Offers Alternative Programs, Independent Study, Magnet, Online Education, Thematic Schools, Smaller Learning Environments, and Five Charter Schools. Scores above state averages on state exams. Average Daily Attendance 9,068; Average class size is 24.1

**Teachers**: 2,683 total teachers; .3% American Indian; 10.7% Asian; 18.7% Black; 1.9% Filipino; 2.4% Hispanic/Latinx; .03 Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; .03 Two or more races; 53.5% White; 19 to 1 per pupil ratio; average experience 8 years

**Students**: 11,101 students; 0.3% American Indian; 26.6% Asian; 8.8% Black, 7.1% Filipino; 16.9% Latinx; 0.9% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; 9.1% two or more races; 30% White FRL 26.8%; EL; 17.6%; SPED

**Policy Context**: Title 1 Funding. Common Core Curriculum, Early College High School Programs; State Exams – CAASPP, SBAC; Five Year Strategic Plan; No Tolerance and Disproportionality in Discipline and SPED Referrals

**School Site**: 535 Students; Title 1 School; Traditional Calendar; 0.6 American Indian/Native Alaskan; 21.9% Asian, 17.4% Black; 6.4% Filipino; 18.9% Latinx/Hispanic; 3.6 Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander; 22.6%; White; 8.6% Two or more races; 62.8% FRL; 33.5% EL; 34.5students average class size

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### SETTING FIVE

*One K-8 Charter School Assistant Principal*

Located near the nation’s capital; one of the nation’s largest 25 school districts; 130,000 students, 208 schools and academic centers and a diverse population with urban, suburban, and rural communities. Board governed; theme based academies, early literacy and GATE programming, as well as career academies.

**Teachers**: 32 total teachers; 24 Black; 8 White; 19 to 1 per pupil ratio; average experience 8 years

**Students**: 61.4% Black; 29.6% Latinx/ Hispanic; 4.2% White; 2.8% Asian; 4% American Indian/ Alaska Native; .2% Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander; 1.5% Two or more races; 15.8% EL; 11.1% SPED; and 63.8% FRL
**Policy Context:** Title 1 Funding, Common Core, Career and College Ready, Charter School Lottery System; High Stakes Testing – PARCC, SAT/PSAT/ACT, Tracked Course Schedules, Disproportionality with Black Students Suspended and Referred to SPED more than any other racial group

**About the Charter School:** District sponsored Charter school affiliated with national charter organization Imagine Schools. Located on the East Coast in an urban district. Uses Core Knowledge Curriculum sponsored by the Heritage Foundation. The entire Administrative Team self-identifies as African American – 3 females and 2 males with the Principal being an African American man. 32 total teachers; 24 Black; 8 White; 19 to 1 per pupil ratio; average experience 8 years; Title 1 Funding; Common Core Standards, RTI, High Stakes Testing – MSA, Measured Student Learning Progress Monitoring, Social Emotional Growth and Individual Learning Plans, Character Education Curriculum

### SETTING SIX

**One Middle School Principal**

Small rural school district located in the midwest. The information below applies to the MS. Average attendance is 95% compared to a district average of 94%. Student transiency is 11% compared to 12% district average. 1.5% of students are chronically truant. Average class size is 22 and per student spending is $9,935.

**Teachers:** 82 total teachers; 0% Black; 97.5% White; 1.2% Latinx/Hispanic; 0% Asian; 1.2% Two or more races; 0% Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander; 0% American Indian/Native Alaskan; 17 to 1 per pupil ratio; 80% retention rate average experience 8 years

**Students:** 1,100 student 16.1% Black; 19.4% Latinx/ Hispanic; 51.5% White; 0.5% Asian; 0% American Indian/ Alaska Native; 0% Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander; 1.5% Two or more races; 9% EL; 11.1% SPED; and 53.7% FRL; 16%; 1% Homeless

**Policy Context:** Title 1 Funding, Common Core, Breakfast Programs, PBIS; Disproportionality with Black Students Suspended and Referred to SPED more than any other racial group
Greetings!

My name is Tonya Walls and I am a former assistant principal who is now studying in the Department of Teaching and Learning at The University of Nevada Las Vegas. I am a doctoral student conducting a study to capture the leadership experiences of PK-12 African American female school leaders (AAFSL) who serve as principals, assistant principals, deans, or in some other non-traditional leadership role at a diverse public or charter school within the continental U.S. I would love to have you participate. There are two phases to the study with opportunities for you to share and reflect on your experiences, develop a network of peers and colleagues committed to equity and justice for all children, and collaboratively develop solutions to some of the most pressing diversity challenges of our time.

The first phase of the study includes taking a brief 10-15 minute survey. The survey provides an opportunity to share your leadership experiences, especially as connected to race, gender, leadership identity, and education policies. Even if you don’t participate in the full study, you can complete the survey! As an African American female and former school leader of color myself, I believe our voices, experiences, and knowledges about education are not only important, but also critical to ensuring equity and access for all students. Unfortunately, our voices are often silenced. By participating in the study, or at the very least completing the survey, you will provide valuable information that can be used to capture our experiences, elevate our voices, tell our stories, and provide valuable insights into solving some of the most pressing diversity challenges facing education of our time, including educating our beautiful and brilliant children! If you want to take the survey, please go to the survey and review the consent information. It will provide you with details about the study, including benefits, possible risks, how I will keep what you share confidential, and more. If after reading the consent information, you decide you want to participate in some of the other parts of the study, you can indicate that when you answer the final few questions of the survey. As long as you meet the criteria and provide voluntary consent, I will contact you to move on to the next phase.

Thanks in advance for your time and consideration. I hope you decide to participate in this important study, because like I shared, your voice is important, you are valuable, and we are very much needed in the conversation surrounding educational equity and justice for all children! CLICK HERE to go to the survey/consent information. Remember, it should take approximately 15-30 minutes, and will provide critical information about the leadership experiences of AAFSL, as well as indicate your interest in participating in future research activities. Check it out, and let your storytelling begin!
APPENDIX D: DIGITAL FLYER – CRITICAL STUDY ADVERTISEMENT

CRITICAL STUDY

EXAMINING THE LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES OF AA FEMALE LEADERS

CALLING ALL PK-12 AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE LEADERS! TIME TO TELL YOUR LEADERSHIP STORY!

The purpose of this study is to capture the leadership experiences of African American PK-12 School Leaders by providing them with a way to share their leadership stories. We are especially interested in those stories as connected to race, gender, leadership identity, and education policy and practices. You are being asked to participate in the study because you meet the following criteria:

- a school leader in a PK-12 public or charter school
- Self-identify as African American
- Self-identify as female
- Committed to leading for equity and social justice
- Lead a school that serves a significantly diverse, and/or majority historically marginalized student population
- Want to be part of the study and will sign a voluntary consent form to do so.

This study includes only minimal risks. The pre-study survey, which is all we are asking you to do now, will only take 10-30 minutes, and includes more details and all consent information. CLICK HERE to learn more, or use the contact information below to begin with the researcher directly.

[Contact Information]

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APPENDIX E: RECRUITMENT SURVEY

Written Digital Consent: I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can refuse to participate by not answering any question or leaving the research study at any time. Do you voluntarily consent to participate in the following survey? (Answer yes, no)

Please select a 4-dit numerical code that you would like to use.

Which state, city, and local district do you lead in?

What type of school do you lead in? (public, charter, private, other)

What level do you currently lead? (ES, MS, HS, Other)

How would you characterize your school context?

How long have you been a school leader? (Pre-service, First Year, 2-5 years, 5-10 years, 10+)

How do you identify racially?

Please describe your gender identification.

How would you characterize your leadership identity?

Would you say that leading for social justice is a priority for you as a school leader? (yes, no, maybe) Please explain your answer.

Leadership and School Context Questions (Scaled SD, D, N, A, SA – unless open ended)

I feel isolated at my school site in my commitment to racial and social justice.
I feel isolate in my profession in my commitment to racial justice.
I have allies in my school site in pursuing racial justice.
I have allies in my profession in pursuing racial justice.
I am confident in my abilities as a school leader.
My contributions to the profession are valuable.
My contributions to the profession are valued at my school and by my superiors.
My ideas about education and educational leadership are important.
I can leverage my leadership knowledge and practices to make changes at my school site towards a goal of social justice.
I am an effective leader at my school and in my profession.
I am acknowledged by others in my district as an effective leader.
I am acknowledged by others in my profession as an effective leader.

Reflecting on Professional Training (Scaled SD, D, N, A, SA – unless open ended)
I understand the struggles of my racial community.
I understand the struggles of other communities of color.
I am comfortable applying a critical race analysis and theory to my leadership practice.
I am confident in my ability to address racism at my school site.
I have the tools to identify and confront racism at my school site.
Caring for myself is important in my pursuit of racial and social justice.
My teacher education program prepared me to do racial justice work in schools.
My school or district professional development prepares and/or supports me to do racial justice work in schools.
I am able to find professional development spaces that prepare me to do racial justice work in schools.

Reflecting on Career Trajectory and Students of Color (Scaled SD, D, N, A, SA – unless open ended)

I plan to stay at my school for the next three years.
I plan to stay in educational leadership for the next three years.
I am planning a long career in school leadership.
In their interactions with teachers and administrators, students of color at my school are undervalued for their academic strengths.
In their interactions with teachers and administrators, students of color at my school are treated as less capable than they are.
In their interactions with teachers and administrators, students of color at my school are treated with less respect than they deserve.
In their interactions with teachers and administrators, students of color at my school are described in deficit ways.
In their interactions with teachers and administrators, students of color at my school are unfairly/excessively disciplined.
In their interactions with teachers and administrators, students of color at my school are racially discriminated against.
The mistreatment of students of color has a negative impact on me.

Reflecting on Job as a Leader of Color (Scaled Never, Yearly, Monthly, Weekly, Daily – unless open ended)
Your training/preparation is questioned despite being equivalent or superior to that of your peers.
You are treated as less competent than your peers.
You are treated with less respect than your peers.
You are overlooked for other leadership opportunities.
Your expertise at successfully working with students of color is undervalued, ignored, or questioned.
Your expertise at successfully working with students of color is undervalued, ignored, or questioned.
You feel solely or primarily responsible for the well-being of your students of color.
You have experiences that are racially discriminatory in nature.
My mistreatment in my professional context has a negative impact on me.
Please describe policies that impact your ability to lead in your school?
Please describe coping mechanisms you use to deal with professional experiences and/or physical psychological effects your professional leadership experiences have on you.

Are you willing to participate in a follow-up individual interview?
Would you like to participate in phase II of the study: 4 critical inquiry sessions and post-survey? (Yes, no, maybe)

Is there anything else you would like us to know about you and/or your leadership before ending this survey?
APPENDIX F: UNLV CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form: Interview and Critical Action Group

TITLE OF STUDY: Race, Gender, Education Policy and Critically Responsive Transformative Multicultural Leadership as Praxis: A Culturally Relevant Examination of the Leadership Experiences of African American Female School Leaders Committed to Social Justice

INVESTIGATORS: Dr. Christine Clark; Tonya Walls

For questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Dr. Clark at 702.895.3888 or Tonya Walls at 702.777.4753.

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794, toll free at 877-895-2794, or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.

Purpose of the Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. The study will consider how PK-12 African American female school leaders (AAFSL) committed to social justice navigate race, gender, leadership identity, and school level policies and practices when making critical leadership decisions.

Participants
You are being asked to participate in the study because you
✓ self-identify as female
✓ self-identify as African American
✓ currently employed as a school leader within a U.S. public or charter school
✓ serve as a leader in a school with a significant diverse student population (racially, culturally, and linguistically)
✓ maintain a vision to lead for social justice
✓ want to participate in the study and are willing to complete all phases of the study
✓ will provide written voluntary consent to participate in the study

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in the following research activities:
✓ Take a brief 10-30 minute pre-study survey
✓ Participate in two in-depth interviews (1 hour each; pre- and post- action group sessions)
✓ Participate in four, weekly 2-hour critical action group sessions (at UNLV)
✓ Complete a minimum of four journal reflection entries on your leadership

Benefits of Participation
Participation in the proposed research study could enable educational leaders’ to refine, further develop, and improve the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to engage an effective social justice leadership practice, and improve academic achievement for all students. This experience could also help provide teacher education instructors with information to enhance teacher education programs, professional development for teachers and educational leaders, and policies and practices in education and educational leadership.

Risk of Participation
There are no serious risks for this proposed study. We will however, deal with topics of cultural identity, perceived or unperceived stereotypes and biases, race, gender, white privilege, power, oppression, equity, access, diversity, and racial justice which can often be uncomfortable for individuals to discuss openly. Because of this, if at any time you are not comfortable you can choose not to answer a question, end the research activity, or leave the session and/or study immediately, and without consequence.

Cost/Compensation
The total amount of participation time is estimated at 12 - 17 hours. Snacks will be provided during critical inquiry action group sessions but there is no monetary compensation for time. There is also not financial cost to you for participating in this study.

Confidentiality
All information gathered in this study will be kept as confidential as possible. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for 3 years after completion of this study. After the storage time the information gathered will be kept by the researcher for further studies and destroyed through shredding when no longer necessary to maintain. Participants should also be advised that due to the participatory nature of critical action groups, absolute privacy and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in group study activities.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without effect to your relations with the researcher or UNLV. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Participant Consent
I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have been able to ask questions about the research study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me for my records.

_________________________________________  ______________________
Signature of Participant                              Date

_________________________________________
Participant Name (Please Print)
APPENDIX G: CONSENTING INFORMATION EMBEDDED WITHIN SURVEY

UNLV
SURVEY CONSENT/ASSENT FORM
INFORMATION SHEET
Department of Teaching and Learning

TITLE OF STUDY: Race, Gender, Education Policy and Critically Responsive Transformative Multicultural Leadership as Praxis: A Culturally Relevant Examination of the Leadership Experiences of African American Female School Leaders Committed to Social Justice

INVESTIGATOR(S) AND CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: Tonya Walls, Doctoral Student 702-777-4753, or Dr. Christine Clark, Senior Scholar and Professor of Curriculum and Instruction 702-895-3888, or Dr. Katrina Liu, Assistant Professor 702-895-2067.

The purpose of this study is to capture the leadership experiences of African American PK-12 School Leaders. We are especially interested in those stories as connected to race, gender, leadership identity, and education policy and practices. You are being asked to participate in the study because you meet the following criteria:

- a school leader in a PK-12 public or charter school
- Self-identify as African American
- Self-identify as female
- Committed to leading for equity and social justice
- Lead a school that serves a significantly diverse, and/or majority historically marginalized student population
- Want to be part of the study and will sign a voluntary consent form to do so.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: take a brief 10-15 minute survey first. If after completing the survey, you are informed via email and/or phone call that you meet the criteria for the study you will also be invited to participate in two in-depth interviews, complete 4 reflection journal entries, and take part in four, 2-hour, weekly critical inquiry action group sessions designed to engage you in reflection, dialog, problem-posing and critical study of your own leadership decisions and practices as mediated by race, gender, and education policy. Action group sessions will be held the final week of January 2017 - February 2017. I know it may sound like work, but believe me it’s not! Instead, consider this an opportunity to build a network of critical friends, while
getting the culturally responsive support you need to both share and develop solutions for some of your own pressing leadership challenges. How cool is that!

This study includes only minimal risks. The pre-study survey which is all we are asking you to do now, will only take 10-30 minutes. The entire study will take approximately 12 – 17 hours of your time; however please remember that once the study begins, this amount of time is spread out over the course of five weeks. You will not be compensated for your time. There is no financial cost to you.

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794, toll free at 877-895-2794, or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study. Participants should also be advised that due to the participatory nature of critical action groups, absolute privacy and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in group study activities.

**Participant Consent:**

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Participant Printed Name: ____________________________________________

Participant Signature: _______________________________________________

Location of Consent: ________________________________________________

Date of Consent: ____________________

Time of Consent: ____________________

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APPENDIX H: UNLV SEMI-STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

PROTOCOL I

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol 1

1. What is the location of the interview?

____________________________________________________________________________________

2. What is your full name?

____________________________________________________________________________________

3. How do you identify racially or ethnically?

____________________________________________________________________________________

4. What level and kind of school do you lead? For how long?

____________________________________________________________________________________

5. How did you come into the education profession? How did you come into educational leadership? What role did race and gender play in your getting to this place in your career?

____________________________________________________________________________________

6. What kind of leader are you? What makes you that kind of leader? What are your goals for you as a leader? How have those goals changed over time?

____________________________________________________________________________________

7. What has it been like for you as a PK-12 school leader? Describe your successes and challenges?
8. Have you ever taught or led a school somewhere other than at the school you lead now? If so, what was that like and how was/is it similar to and/or different from your current school? Please elaborate.

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

9. What would you say are your biggest obstacles as a school leader? What have been your greatest supports?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

10. What role, if any have race, gender, and other social identity factors played in your experiences as an educational leader?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

11. If you lived in a perfect world, and you could design the best education system ever, what would it look like?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

12. Do you feel supported as an educator/educational leader of color? Explain.

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

13. What would a supportive administrator, school, school community, and education community look, feel, and sound like for diverse students? Do you provide that as a leader?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

14. How have educational policies impacted your career in educational leader? Which have been the most impactful (both positively and negatively)?
15. If you were left alone to do your job anyway you pleased, and you had every resource you needed available to you without concern for cost, what would teaching, learning, and leadership look like in your classroom?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

16. What else do we need to know about you, teaching, learning, leadership, and your goal as a leader for social justice to make your participation in the action study group sessions and reflection journals a worthwhile research experience?

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
### Critical Inquiry Action Group
#### Flexible Probably Schedule of Sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SESSION</th>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
<th>Probable Exercises</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Let’s Talk Leadership, Social Justice, and Equity! Why this Discourse is Critical to Student Achievement!</td>
<td>Identify Individual Social/Cultural &amp; Leadership Identity Traits and Analyze Implications for School Leadership Discuss and define leadership concepts: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Cultural Competence, Social Justice Leadership and Transformative Leadership Discussion: Leadership Challenges and Goals</td>
<td>Literature/Research: Assigned Articles Video Clip: Adichie TED Talk; Prince Ea I am Not Black, You are Not White Exercises: 6 Word Summary Culture Maps Jot Thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confronting Social Context and Policy, Naming the ‘isms and Putting Leadership into Action!</td>
<td>Share and Discuss Leadership Experiences in relationship to social justice and equity matters Co-construct future critical inquiry action group experiences</td>
<td>Content Co-Constructed as informed by previous two sessions</td>
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*Schedule is tentative, flexible, fluid, and subject to change as influenced by data received by, from, and about study participants, and in an attempt to have the researcher engage and model ‘Critically Responsive Transformative Multicultural Leadership’ Research Pedagogy as process and praxis, even as the investigator of a study meant to research it as a valuable tool for use with educational leaders of color.*
Critical Action Group Session One

Research Articles/Literature


Video Clips

How to fix a broken school? Lead fearlessly, love hard TEDTalk by Linda Cliatt-Wayman
https://www.ted.com/talks/linda_cliatt_wayman_how_to_fix_a_broken_school_lead_fearlessly_love_hard?language=en

Every kid needs a champion TEDTalk by Rita Pierson
https://www.ted.com/talks/rita_pierson_every_kid_needs_a_champion?language=en

Exercises

Name Stories (Gorski, retrieved online October 2016): Investigator asks participants to write short stories about their names and shares that they will use this to introduce themselves to the class. Point is not to get too specific and leave it open to individual interpretation. After some reflection and writing time, bring group together in circle and begin a sharing of the stories stopping for discussion as spontaneously desired. Possible prompts that can be shared to spurn creative thought below. Information retrieved from:
http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activities/name.html

- Who gave you your name and Why?
- What is the ethnic origin of your name and what does this mean to you? If you don’t know, why is that and what does that mean to you (if anything)?
- What are our nicknames, if any and how did you come about those ways of naming yourself?
- What do you prefer to be called?
- What do you like and/or dislike about your name and why?
- If you could rename yourself, would you, why and to what?
- What (exciting, surprising, funny, awkward, painful, loving) experiences has life thrown your way as a result of your name

**Norm Setting:** Investigator shares relevancy for establishing norms, poses the following question, “What will you need to occur in this shared space between each of us in order for you to feel comfortable getting uncomfortable as a way to engage as your authentic self (and without fear or shame)?” Provides time for reflection then asks each person to share and records what is shared. After all have shared and all is recorded, the group engages a discussion, sometimes modifying what has been contributed to the recordings, and/or adjusting language as needed, clarifying meanings, until everyone has agreed on a set of norms which will become the group's shared ways of being and norms for the shared culture while together in space and time. Each session will begin with a reflection upon the norms as a way to remind and adjust/modify to ensure they meet the needs of the changing collective group moving forward.

**One Minute Leadership Herstories:** Study participants asked to reflect on and record thoughts to the following prompt: Who are you? Who are you as a leader? How have your life's experiences as situated in your race and gender, shaped your beliefs about yourself as a leader (your leadership identity), and how is that identity shaping your leadership (knowledge, attitude/disposition, relationships, goals, professional growth and development, decisions, and practices)? After 3-5 minutes of silent reflection and journaling, participants paired and asked to engage in a structured one-minute oral storytelling of their ‘Leadership Herstories’ assuming the following partner roles…

- **Facilitator/Investigator:** Describes exercise, explaining ways of sharing, sets time, and observes intently (taking notes or recording for later transcription).
- **Partner A:** Listens attentively without interrupting or speaking. Can only listen. After the 3-5 minute storysharing time is up, partner A summarizes what was heard, provides an affirming statement of feedback about some aspect of the experience, and engages the sharing partner in one question for either clarification or to learn more about a topic shared. Listens to partner A’s response then prepares for swap.
- **Partner B:** Shares the “Leadership Herstory” taking up the entire meeting and speaking in stream of consciousness relying on recorded reflections only when and as necessary. As storyteller, partner B must use up the entire time. Accepts positive feedback from Partner A, answers Partner B’s question, and prepares for swap.
- **SWAP:** When time is up, Partner A and Partner B swap roles and repeat exercise.
- **Facilitator/Investigator:** Brings everyone back together, has each pair (re)introduce their partner as a leader to the group relying on information gleaned from the sharing exercise, then leads the group in a debrief of the
exercise, debriefing both content, pedagogy, and process as connected to themes and goals/objectives of study.

**Critical Leadership Challenges Table Top Blogs:** Place charts around the room with provocative question in the center. Questions should be related to topics we might need to discuss as connected with research objectives and goals. Ask each participant to take a colored marker and to spend some time walking the room, reflecting on questions and jotting down thoughts and answers as connected with their personal leadership identities and leadership experiences in their respective schools. Explain that it is much like a blog in that they are talking through text so they can either post an original response to the question or a reply to a post someone else has already shared on the chart. The purpose is to engage a silent dialog which we will discuss verbally to unpack as a group later. Provide time for participants to engage in this way then bring everyone together and walk as a group around to each chart using it as a way to provoke collective critical reflection and discussion. While the questions for the table top blog will be informed by and developed from research data collected about participants in surveys and interviews, examples of potential questions to include are as follows:

**Critical Action Group Session Two**

**Research Article/Literature**


**Video Clips**

The Danger of a Single Story TEDTalk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

['https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en']

I just Sued the School System: The People Vs. The School System by Prince EA

['https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dqTTojTija8']

**Exercises**

**6 Word Memoirs:** Ask participants to think about how they might capture their leadership identities in a six-word memoir. Explain that a memoir is an account of one’s life and experiences, in this case your leadership life and experiences. Ask them to reflect on it for a while then jot down their six word memoir. Bring the group together, sit in circle, allow time for everyone to share, then discuss as it organically and authentically unfolds.

**Culture Maps:** The Circles activity engages participants in a process of identifying what they consider to be the most important dimensions of their own identity, concurrently developing a
deeper understanding of stereotypes as participants share stories about when they were proud to be part of a particular group and when it was especially hurtful to be associated with a particular group. Ask participants to pair up with somebody they do not know very well. Invite them to introduce themselves to each other, then facilitate them in exercises defined by the steps below. Retrieved from: http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activities/circlesofself.html

1. Ask participants to write their names in the center circle. They should then fill in each satellite circle with a dimension of their identity they consider to be among the most important in defining themselves. Give them several examples of dimensions that might fit into the satellite circles: female, athlete, Jewish, brother, educator, Asian American, middle class, and so on.

2. In their pairs, have participants share two stories with each other. First, they should share stories about when they felt especially proud to be associated with one of the identifiers they selected. Next, they should share a story about a time it was particularly painful to be associated with one of the identity dimensions they chose.

3. The third step will be for participants to share a stereotype they have heard about one dimension of their identity that fails to describe them accurately. Ask them to complete the sentence at the bottom of the handout by filling in the blanks: "I am (a/an) __________ but I am NOT (a/an) __________." Provide your own example, such as "I am a Christian, but I am NOT a radical right Republican." Instructions for steps 1, 2, and 3 should be given at once. Allow 8-10 minutes for participants to complete all three steps, but remind them with 2 minutes remaining that they must fill in the stereotype sentence.

4. Probe the group for reactions to each other's stories. Ask whether anyone heard a story she or he would like to share with the group. (Make sure the person who originally told the story has granted permission to share it with the entire group.)

5. Advise participants that the next step will involve individuals standing up and reading their stereotype statements. You can simply go around the room or have people randomly stand up and read their statements. Make sure that participants are respectful and listening actively for this step, as individuals are making themselves vulnerable by participating. Start by reading your own statement. This part of the activity can be extremely powerful if you introduce it energetically. It may take a few moments to start the flow of sharing, so allow for silent moments.

6. Several questions can be used to process this activity:
   1. How do the dimensions of your identity that you chose as important differ from the dimensions other people use to make judgments about you?
   2. Did anybody hear somebody challenge a stereotype that you once bought into? If so, what?
   3. How did it feel to be able to stand up and challenge your stereotype?
   4. (There is usually some laughter when somebody shares common stereotype such as "I may be Arab, but I am not a terrorist" or "I may be a teacher, but I do have a social life.") I heard several moments of laughter. What was that about?
   5. Where do stereotypes come from? How are they connected to the kinds of socialization that make us complicit with oppressive conditions?
**Jot Thoughts**: Based on the leadership challenges discussed in session one, the investigator will create cards with leadership challenges posed as questions on them and place them on tables around the room. Participants will be given a stack of post-its and asked to visit each table, reflect on possible answers to the question, then jot down as many solutions they can think of by recording one solution per post it and placing the post-its on the table with the question card. At the end of the exercise, each question and table should have a collection of post-its representing solutions brainstormed by participants. These tables with the leadership challenges posed as questions and the post-its representing possible solutions will become the discussion points for future sessions and session discussions in hopes of leading to plans that can be put into action for participating leaders. After the initial Jot Thought brainstorming, the group will work collectively to develop a plan of attack to discuss and work through all of the problems posed.
### APPENDIX K: RESEARCH NOTE-TAKING PROTOCOL FORM

**RESEARCH OBSERVATION TOOL**  
**CRITICAL INQUIRY ACTION GROUP SESSIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Name:</th>
<th>Location:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluator Name:</td>
<td>Observation Time:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation Date:</td>
<td>Duration:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This tool is used to collect evidence throughout the observation.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation Evidence: <em>What did researcher and participants say and do?</em></th>
<th>Themes/Patterns/and Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Critical Notes and Thoughts: |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|

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APPENDIX L: FINAL SURVEY

Describe your experiences participating in this study.

How valuable would you rate this study to your growth and development as a leader committed to social justice? (Scaled responses)

Please share the most valuable and least valuable things about participating in this study, especially as connected with the research objectives.

Are you interested in maintaining your connections with the women involved in the study?

Please explain your answer to the question above.

What leadership and/or culturally situated strategies do you use to combat obstacles you face as a leader connected with race?

What leadership and/or culturally situated strategies do you use to combat obstacles you face as a leader connected with gender?

What leadership and/or culturally situated strategies do you use to combat obstacles you face as a leader connected with education policy?

What ideals do you have to solve teacher-student diversity gap and how might you go about putting those ideals into action in your role as a leader?

What else would you like us to know about your leadership, you, and/or your participation in this study that we have not asked already?

What is your current definition of Culturally Responsive Leadership, especially as connected to equity and social justice? How culturally responsive do you believe yourself to be as an instructional leader. Explain your answers.
APPENDIX M: BUILDING CASES DATA CHARTS

Critical Leadership Strategies: Ida

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader, Level, and Leader Identity</th>
<th>Strategies Indicative of the Critical Leadership Practices of ACL via CR-TML through Critical Multicultural Education (CME), Social Justice Leadership (SJL), Critical Race Theory (CRT) and use of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) and Critical Pedagogy (CP)</th>
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</table>
| Ida (K-5 principal), Collaborative Leader | • Led from a moral and emotional compass, centering students and families before all else  
• Views social justice as avenue for equitable access to equal education, including understanding differences and its relationship to inequality,  
• Engage a racial lens to question and critique district level policies and their impact on her leadership and school  
• Sought out opportunities to learn more about the social and communal context of school to better understand their impact on the district and school decision making process  
• Created opportunities for continued growth through personal reading of professional material and continued discussion with like-minded colleagues and peers  
• Builds strong relationships with students and families both in and outside of school hours  
• Provide information about school and community resources to parents and opened up space for parents to lead within the school  
• Created opportunities to engage student voice to better understand their lived experience, as well as their experience as students within the school  
• Promotes student-centered and project based curriculum building on student’s strengths and communities cultural resources  
• Promote teacher professional development that prepares teachers to actively develop curriculum and lead school activities focused on racial, ethnic, and cultural contributions of students and families  
• Engage stakeholders in instructional discussions that incorporated a focus on whole child: academic, socio-emotional, psychological, and life skills/needs  
• Seeks ways to build on teacher strengths  
• Use school and student-based data to openly discuss and critique inequitable practices, curriculum, and procedures within school and encourage/coach/mentor teachers and other school stakeholders to do the same  
• Seek support from personal and private (professional) networks to problem pose, gain emotional support, or gather necessary information/insights  
• Reflect on and re-evaluate impact as a leader in relationship to leadership values and goals  
• Take risk to change positions when leadership identity and role are not in alignment and the work is no longer meaningful  
• Redefine leadership role and goals given professional context and role  
• Maintain high visibility within the school and remain attentive to engaging all stakeholders as human beings while doing so, but especially students, families, non-licensed staff |
### Critical Leadership Strategies: Mary

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| Mary (K-5 principal), Servant Leader | • Led from a moral compass  
• Views education as a means to social mobility  
• Draws on spiritual, familial, and communal networks and socio-historical legacy for strength  
• Works hard to solve problems and debunk stereotypes about Black women  
• Observant about the treatment of HMMS, especially HMMS and applies policies strategically to ensure they are treated equitably/fairly and have equal access to school’s resources  
• Sought out opportunities to learn more about the social and communal context of school  
• Created opportunities for continued growth through relationship building with like-minded colleagues and peers  
• Builds strong relationships with students and teachers  
• View students, families, and communities beyond stereotypes or surface level social traits, looking for the good in them and/or attempting to understand actions from their perspective and within the context of their lives without judgement  
• Promote teacher professional development that prepares teachers to develop leadership and cultural competency skills  
• Mentors and coaches licensed personnel into leadership decisions  
• Engage collaborative hiring practices and open up space for teachers to support professional development efforts at the school  
• Create an inclusive environment where everyone feels like they belong  
• Seeks ways to build on teacher strengths  
• Seek support from personal and private (professional) networks to problem pose, gain emotional support, or gather necessary information/insights to move leadership to next level  
• Reflect on and re-evaluate impact as a leader in relationship to leadership values and goals  
• Take risk to change positions when leadership identity and role are not in alignment and the work is no longer meaningful  
• Redefine leadership role and goals given professional context and role  
• Maintain high visibility within the school and remain attentive to engaging all stakeholders as human beings while doing so, but especially students and teachers  
• Use ability to code-switch to engage leadership by reading and attending to the needs of stakeholders within respective context–decenter self  
• Engage everyone with kindness and empathy |
## Critical Leadership Strategies: Joy

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| Joy (K-8 assistant principal), Servant & Collaborative Leadership | • Lead by example: social justice orientation is meant to empower students to challenge the status quo  
• Builds trust with community surrounding school by conducting school visits and attending non-school sponsored events  
• Grooms other teachers to be leaders by providing coaching and mentored support  
• Models distributive leadership with a goal of demonstrating collaborative leadership for teachers and other school stakeholders  
• Bring in resources and develop school community partnerships to support families and attend to non-academic student needs  
• Work with and learn from peers in two-way coaching mentoring relationships to grow, learn, and develop personally within the professions  
• Engage a thirst to continue learning and growing; become better; seek other educational opportunities even when not offered or readily available  
• Observant and aware of differential treatment along race and gender lines (AA men and white women gain access to different and more professional opportunities and resources than Black women)  
• Believes in AA female leader’s ability to work with and reach families of color in ways that other can not and willing to take on that challenge to provide resources, information, and academic support  
• Take the initiative to fill skill gaps and create opportunities to learn something new when needed given certain context or audience of stakeholders working for (self-inspired research)  
• Accept and seek relationships and mentorship from other AA women; others too  
• Multi-task and differentiate to prioritize needs of collective and group/student learning and instruction even in the midst of difficult challenges  
• Take on task no one willing to take on when student needs are at risk of not being met, especially HMMS  
• Works to develop collaborative and reciprocal relationships with those who have different mindsets than herself to develop leadership skills as well as meet needs of students and teachers  
• Critiques and problem-poses race/gender based systems and policies even as she offers solutions  
• Self-reflects when relationship problems arise to challenge self before pointing outward for a solution  
• Works hard to develop trusting relationships with superiors and those she supervises  
• Direct communicator & uses data to discuss difficult topics, including those related to race and gender  
• Centers needs of students over all else; Solution and goal oriented  
• Identifies relationship and trust as two important components of leadership |
- Works with family to meet needs of students – whole child
- Looks at diversity as a plus & protective of Black male students

### Critical Leadership Strategies: Althea Nelson

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| Althea Nelson (TK-8 principal), Servant Leader | Takes pride in work, engages it with knowledge that carry family and friends with them as they do – respected in community for work as teacher  
  Works hard to mitigate against stereotypes about Black Women being attributed to here leadership  
  Views self as a natural leader who is willing to take risk, including stepping out to do something different than what’s expected  
  Perseveres even through difficult challenges  
  Takes initiative to learn and grow in knowledge and skills to improve craft even when opportunities not readily available or denied  
  Looks to, Seeks out and accepts mentorship and coaching from leaders who are able to see her value and potential (typically African American women)  
  Takes initiative and advantage of leadership opportunities and seeks out those not available when recognize a gap in knowledge or skills  
  Lead with intentionality, predicting outcomes and accounting for all possibilities  
  Combination of situational and relational  
  Observe people and context over time to better understand their needs and make every attempt to attend to them when making leadership decisions  
  Work hard to develop trusting relationships looking for the strengths in people rather than faults  
  Willingness to work after hours to make conditions right for teachers to do their jobs – minimize distractions  
  Follow a goal orientation and exercise follow-through to complete a task no matter how difficult  
  Decenters self and centers needs of others, foregrounding community and kids, especially when tasks prove challenging  
  Seek out and create opportunities for teachers and staff to learn and grow professionally – coach  
  Lead by example by being willing to dig in and do the work along side staff and faculty – not bound by titles (mentor)  
  Concerned about whole child and seek ways to tap into resources and information to attend to emotional and social needs of families  
  Recognize humanity within all stakeholders and exercise care for the lived experience that each stakeholder experiences that comes along with, attending to how it impacts leadership and school community  
  Willingness to move into different role or position when goals of the school/institution no longer align with personal and professional values and goals  
  Loyal to institution and school even when values don’t align and attempt to find interest convergence without compromising values |
Visibility in order to gain trust of all stakeholders with specific interest on those most marginalized within the school community (HMMS, non-licensed staff, etc.)

Prioritize initiatives based on their value to and impact on kids and community

Engage self-reflective work to check own bias’ – trying to remain neutral even as aware subjectivities are constantly at play

Lead with intention to problem-pose, not wanting to be a burden to superiors

Maintain a collaborative spirit and rely on peers, colleagues, and community for professional support and to work through problems and challenges

Expect supportive and honest relationships from colleagues, peers, and supervisors – defines support as honoring experiences and stories, being there to listen, being there to provide resources and ideals when necessary (not always about doing something)

Trust – safe space to critique as well as make mistakes and be genuinely honest about self and subjectivities

Aware of differential treatment of students, teachers, staff, and leaders based on race – anti-blackness – especially around discipline and attempt to find alternative or restorative ways to engage student push out, including with teachers

Observant about the treatment of HMMS, especially HMMS and applies policies strategically to ensure they are treated equitably/fairly and have equal access to school’s resources

Building Cases

Critical Leadership Strategies: Marva Collins

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| Marva (6-8, principal), Servant Leader | • Observant about the treatment of HMMS and applies policies strategically to ensure they are treated equitably/fairly and have equal access to school’s resources
• Aware of racialized impact of certain policies and works with white allies to dismantle and disrupt
• Centers needs of community, including HMMS as a way to ensure equal education
• Leads with idea of being an exemplary model to diffuse stereotypes about Black women and Black people in general
• Aware of disparities in discipline and works hard to protect Black children, especially Black boys
• Actively seek out mentors and coaches, especially Black women who will understand their stories and voice
• Fighting white flight and working hard to garner resources for students who live in poverty even when the sometimes work against their own interest |
### Critical Leadership Strategies: Angela Davis

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| Angela (MS and HS, instructional facilitator), Servant Leader | - Keen awareness of racialized impact of certain policies on HMMS  
- Engages social justice to give students and families voice in the education process and to increase awareness of inequities amongst education personnel and public  
- Seeks support from families and friends and works even harder to overcome adversity  
- Looks for strengths in teachers  
- Works hard to build trusting relationships in order to engage in coaching and mentoring to increase teacher capacity  
- Views self as a natural leader who works hard and takes risks to meet needs of students and families  
- Centers needs of families and children above all else when making leadership decisions  
- Take risks and initiative to make things better for teachers, students and community  
- Wiling to engage in race based talk to bring awareness to inequities in schools  
- Accepts and seeks out mentoring and coaching from peers and colleagues with more experience – African American  
- Able to take and give critical feedback – honest, direct, but supportive  
- Willing to dig in and work along side stakeholders to get the job done, no matter the task  
- Makes difficult decision while also seeking interest convergence so that decisions are true to core values  
- Looks to leaders whose words match their actions – willing to learn from these people  
- Engages leadership to model for others  
- Takes responsibility for actions and hold people accountable for their actions as well  
- Code switch – attend to audience and context and adapt to meet people where they are, making them feel included  
- Seek support in family and friends  
- Bring resources and information to families and communities in order to help them navigate the school system and life successfully  
- Taps into the rich heritage, values, and knowledge of the community to improve practice, meet their needs, and create a more inclusive environment  
- Works to dispel Stereotypes about Black women and Black people more broadly  
- Continuing to speak out about racism and other inequitable practices in spite of negative outcomes and seeking interest convergence where necessary  
- Focus on more than academic data to improve conditions for teaching and learning and outcomes for students, especially HMMS  
- Provide professional development opportunities for teachers focused on increasing cultural competence  
- Makes attempt to view situations from multiple perspectives in order to come to a decision that meets the maximum amount of stakeholder involvement |
needs

- Observant about the treatment of HMMS, and applies policies strategically to ensure they are treated equitably/fairly and have equal access to school’s resources
- Looks inside for answers and to improve practice as she controls bias’

### Critical Leadership Strategies: Sojourner Truth

**Leader, Level, and Leader Identity**

**Sojourner** (HS, 9-12 principal; district leader – supervisor of principals), Collaborative/Distributive Leader

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<tr>
<td>- Observant about the treatment of HMMS and applies policies strategically to ensure they are treated equitably/fairly and have equal access to school’s resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Aware of racialized impact of certain policies on leadership</td>
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<td>- Makes special effort to be responsive and available even during off duty hours;</td>
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<td>- Engages employees of color with intentionality to and consideration for social, racial, and cultural factors</td>
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<td>- Focuses on positive and celebrates successes even in the midst of challenges</td>
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<td>- Takes initiative to produce without being prodded, prompted, or monitored</td>
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<td>- Self-monitors bias and work ethic</td>
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<td>- Avoids being used as trophy piece for being person of color – tries to make engagement meaningful when this does occur – interest convergence</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Intense focus on being smarter, faster, humbler, quieter, more productive than white counterparts</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Spiritual connection to work – engaged through purpose and recognition of higher meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Collaborative approach to problem-posing leveraging resources even human resources to solve equity and other challenges</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Attend to needs of all stakeholders simultaneously but as centered in needs of kids</td>
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<td>- Engage work as family legacy and importance of being pride of community</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Desire to learn more and fill-in skill gaps</td>
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<td>- Seek out and take support from other women leaders of color</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Seeks out for mentoring purposes other women of color to bring into leadership; creates space for development and growth</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Develop teacher capacity by building on strengths</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Leverage networks – family, personal, private professional</td>
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<td>- Build climate and culture by working on developing trusting relationships</td>
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<td>- Goal oriented – use data but viewed through multiple perspectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Tempering way present – code switch – so not perceived as angry Black woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Attentive to discipline problems for Black children and create alternative programs to mitigate disproportionality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Critical Leadership Strategies: Fannie Lou Hamer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader, Level, and Leader Identity</th>
<th>Strategies Indicative of the Critical Leadership Practices of ACL via CR-TML through Critical Multicultural Education (CME), Social Justice Leadership (SJL), Critical Race Theory (CRT) and use of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) and Critical Pedagogy (CP)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Fannie (ES K-5, asst. principal), Collaborative/Distributive Leader | - Observant about the treatment of HMMS and applies policies strategically to ensure they are treated equitably/fairly and have equal access to school’s resources  
- Aware of racialized impact of certain policies and works with white allies to dismantle and disrupt  
- Took advantage of opportunities to engage leadership even when not officially serving in an administrative role and used these opportunities to gain knowledge, expertise, and leverage social justice agenda  
- Constantly learning and growing, creates opportunities where none exist  
- Works to dismantle inequities for Black boys – felt a sense of urgency to do so  
- Does work with passion and sense of responsibility to give back  
- Use resources available to make a difference for students  
- Center needs of students above all else, especially when making leadership decisions  
- Willingness to confront and tackle difficult topics and issues and believe in ability to do so  
- Direct communicator with high expectations for outcomes  
- Collaborative and flexible in how task get completed; willingness to consider multiple pathways and perspectives  
- Keep communication open with parents and families, provide resources and information to meet academic and social needs of students and families  
- Provide teachers with culturally responsive professional development to increase awareness of race and improve relationships with students and families  
- Looks for positives in students, teachers, and families and celebrate/honor that  
- Critique district policies when not in alignment with equity and justice goal orientation  
- Works in collaboration with peers and colleagues drawing on each other’s strengths to make things happen for students and grown own professional knowledge and skills  
- Think outside of box to maximize resources available  
- Aware of unique perspective bring to leadership as well as negation of that perspective  
- Acts as cultural mediator when problems arise  
- Attends to audience and context when making leadership decisions, being flexible  
- Holds high expectations for students and teachers due to belief that they can achieve them then supports them by being a model in own practice  
- Does not take things personal; self-reflects to ensure own bias’ are not coming into play  
- Keen awareness of anti-blackness |
**APPENDIX N: EXAMPLES OF SJL AND BFT**

Examples of SJL and BFT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Justice Leadership Attributes (Stovall, 2004; Theoharis, 2008)</th>
<th>TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES (Kouzes &amp; Posner, 2010)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethical and moral obligation to dismantle inequities</td>
<td>Challenge the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value cultural knowledge by interacting with entire school community</td>
<td>“I believe and push for every children to see themselves in the content we teach. I as my teachers to be intentional about this.” (Jai)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use data to address</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice Leadership Attributes (Stovall, 2004; Theoharis, 2008)</td>
<td>TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES (Kouzes &amp; Posner, 2010)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Challenge the process</td>
<td>Inspire shared vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problems through an equity lens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seek out others to help sustain the work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demand every child’s success</td>
<td>“I am going to stay student-centered because I include all staff in whatever we do and I ask what impact can we have on kids, what do we want to do and are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice Leadership Attributes (Stovall, 2004; Theoharis, 2008)</td>
<td>TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES (Kouzes &amp; Posner, 2010)</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on race-based (intersected with other ‘-isms’ PD)</td>
<td><strong>Challenge the process</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>willing to do so they can make it in this world.” (Fannie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage within community outside of school and leverage resources within community</td>
<td>“there is a policy at schools where parents have to give 24 hours notice before they can visit their child’s classroom, what is that saying and when parents have the day off they should be able to come and help and share so I challenged that policy.” (Angela Davis”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergent/Core Themes</td>
<td>TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lead from inside out and through lived experiences</td>
<td>“I tell them don’t believe what you see because that kid you are talking about that was me, but that’s why I think I am supposed to be here to recognize those things we see in our kids.” (Mary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Valuation: Value, honor, and protect indigenous knowledge &amp; ways of being</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Culturally Responsive Problem Posing: Attack issue not the person and consider context and multiple perspectives [voices]</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Hold Self (& Others) Accountable                                                   | “I am the type of leader that I won’t ask anyone to do anything I am not
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent/Core Themes</th>
<th>TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commit to ongoing learning &amp; applied competence, even when resources scarce &amp; access is denied</td>
<td>“So we have weekly reflections, journal articles, we meet once a month, we do site visits, we have quarterly leadership development team meetings and we use a protocol for systemic improvement” (Joy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rearticulate Purpose: Commit to meaningful, goal-oriented and purpose driven work and take risk to find new ways to lead when work &amp; values not in alignment</td>
<td>“My Latinx parents were getting antsy and the school was growing and I felt like they needed a change; I had been there for so long and I just knew it was time for new leadership.” (Althea)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX O: EXAMPLES OF ACL AND CRT

ACL and CRT: Participant summary and examples of applied critical leadership (ACL) and critical race theory (CRT) found in BWEL stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participating BWEL</th>
<th>Examples of ACL</th>
<th>Examples of CRT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ida</td>
<td><strong>ACL Characteristic 5 – Academic Discourse:</strong> “In terms of your research that’s why it is so important especially in the context of education and especially now when you can look at television and see how white privilege really plays out when students can put on Instagram some type of racial or really demeaning representation of their classmates and their parents can get an attorney and say its freedom of speech. I just think your research is really important. You have a lot of work to do girl.”</td>
<td><strong>Critique of liberalism:</strong> “I have learned a lot from education and what I learned is that what we say we value and what we do are hugely different and that any question you have about why or how something works, people have already asked the same questions and the answers are out there.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>ACL Characteristic 4 Stereotype Threat:</strong> “I work hard, harder than white people work...this causes a lack of confidence in some settings; second guessing myself; coming from a place what I have to do this right, I have to be perfect, I have to always be appropriate or be on my p’s and q’s – as AA people we always say she or he can do it (white people) but you know you can’t do it (cutting corners; mediocrity; making a poor choice; failing).”</td>
<td><strong>Storytelling is an important form for exploring race and racism:</strong> “I think what is often overlooked is my ability to have a broad sense of empathy because of challenges my people have come through and continue to go through...I am not sure this is understood or valued; they don’t understand that we have a empathy for all kinds of discrimination and a profound sense of empathy because of our experiences.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Althea Nelson      | **ACL Characteristic 6 Honoring Constituents:** “My colleague goes | **Emphasis on racial realism:** “race plays a big part in what I
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participating BWEL</th>
<th>Examples of ACL</th>
<th>Examples of CRT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td><em>You have a certain way of getting people to do things...part of it is knowing how to change my register for who I am taking with and meeting families where they are no matter who they are and finding some commonality to build a relationship where it’s for four years, ten years, or ten minutes, seeing them for who they are.</em>”</td>
<td>do. I am the only African American coach on the team and so people look at me like what is this Black girl doing here and I think sometimes my students are taken aback by the fact that I’m African American and I’m the teacher... and I also know that some of the misunderstandings that teachers have of our students is because of racial differences.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sojourner Truth</td>
<td><strong>ACL Characteristic 8 Trust With Mainstream:</strong> “Making sure people are not intimidated by your color or personhood so they have a conversation with you. I am a collaborative leader and I propose to work with others.”</td>
<td><strong>Racism is normal not aberrant:</strong> “Making sure I am not received as too angry- having to temper it so I can get what I need from people – self-oppression is how I navigated that. I mean I am sitting here having a conversation and I am going to have to manage me and you so I just feel like we are required to put a lot of time into managing how people receive us.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td><strong>ACL Characteristic 2 Critical Race Lens:</strong> “I had a teacher of African descent who was very dismissive of me and he went to the principal for everything. The principal is male and younger than I am and he said it was about age because he had a daughter my age but I think it was gender; if it was really age he wouldn’t go to the principal. In a different setting, I was in a leadership role and quite often I would be dismissed by white males.”</td>
<td><strong>Honoring Constituents:</strong> “We have to advocate for our kids and understand them because sometimes we have a perception about what they should behave like and how they should learn. You have to get to know them. Our kids are really more diverse and not less brilliant but they just demonstrate it in a different way. And a lot of it has to do with culture. So sadly our society doesn’t really support our kids being brilliant in those ways.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fannie</td>
<td><strong>ACL Characteristic 3 Group Consensus:</strong> “I am pretty direct about the expectations but flexible in the sense that I want to include all staff in whatever we do, whatever”</td>
<td><strong>Racism is normal not aberrant in US society:</strong> “As an African American you know the pitfalls that are going to become our kids and you feel that in certain...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating BWEL</td>
<td>Examples of ACL</td>
<td>Examples of CRT</td>
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<td>we champion at the school.”</td>
<td>positions you are able to do more but when you start to look around and see who is in position of power it’s pretty scary.”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mary</strong></td>
<td><strong>ACL Characteristic 1 Critical Conversations:</strong> “We have to have a conversation and sometimes those conversations will be difficult and it may not be the outcome you hoped for but we have to have the conversation.”</td>
<td><strong>Emphasis on Racial Realism:</strong> “AA are sent to a school because of their ethnicity, there can be a school that is predominate minority but they have no problem placing two white administrators there but they will never place two minority administrators together in a school outside of alphabet city (Black/Latinx part of town).”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neecol (Marva)</strong></td>
<td><strong>ACL Characteristic 9 Servant Leadership:</strong> “It is my faith in Christ that guides me in how I respond in leadership, which is not always understood.”</td>
<td><strong>Critique of liberalism:</strong> “As our AA student population is growing I am becoming the go to person teachers come to ask about how to connect with children of color. I know I am the principal but I have never asked my colleagues to help me connect with white kids.”</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## APPENDIX P: CR-TML FOUR P FRAMEWORK FOR DATA ANALYSIS

**CR-TML Four P Descriptive Conceptual Framework**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CR-TML</th>
<th>Paradigm</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Pedagogy</th>
<th>Research Praxis</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical Race Theory (CRT)</td>
<td>Race and institutional racism as central factor in shaping inequities in schools</td>
<td>Establish professional climate that foregrounds race and racism as intersected with other -isms for the purpose of identifying, naming, and combating systemic inequities in school policies and practices</td>
<td>Develop experiential leadership knowledge through engaged action, presence, and relationship building (w/ students, families, and other diverse stakeholders)</td>
<td>Investigate and examine school-based data to uncover racialized inequities in current policies and practices</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Minoritized populations experience oppression at the intersection of race, gender, class, and other societal -isms (ability, sexuality, language, religion, immigration status, etc.)</td>
<td>Establish school as center of community for students and parents and engage school as a place where all can come and where non-hierarchical, anti-racist relationships are forged</td>
<td>Resist color-blind leadership, including replacing oppressive policies and practices that promote the status quo (i.e. high stakes testing, no tolerance, etc.) with more equitable and restorative options</td>
<td>Engage action-oriented participatory inquiry processes that challenge all stakeholders to create schools where young people/students can challenge oppression and become agents of change towards equity and justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational leaders commit to social justice and challenge dominant/liberal ideologies that promote and maintain status quo</td>
<td>Educational leadership requires diverse experiential knowledge and an interdisciplinary approach to dismantling institutional inequities</td>
<td>Lead PD with a focus on the functions of race in school programs, climate, and culture</td>
<td>Contribute own story to disrupt deficit narratives of educational leadership for and within school communities that serve historically marginalized and minoritized students, and seek counterstory for relevant school related phenomena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformative, Social Justice and Applied Leadership Models (SJL)</td>
<td>View of educational leadership as a tool of resistance, advocacy &amp; liberatory activism</td>
<td>Engage a CRT lens and social justice agenda to dismantle inequities within schools</td>
<td>Leverage multiple identities and lead by example</td>
<td>Collaborate with like-minded individuals to investigate application of critically responsive, school reform efforts and examine implications of implementation for historically marginalized and minoritized students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leader as transformative figure for diverse educational context</td>
<td>Intentional effort to engage stakeholders in transforming schools into equitable and just spaces, including reconstructing educational systems, policies, and practices towards equity and justice for all students</td>
<td>Honor all constituents and push needs of historically marginalized and minoritized students to center</td>
<td>Engage in academic discourse and disrupt deficit narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Goal orientation towards racial and social justice for historically marginalized and minoritized students, families, and communities.</td>
<td>Use of critical conversations</td>
<td>Engage in academic discourse and disrupt deficit narratives</td>
<td>Use of critical conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Build group consensus and enhance staff capacity to lead for justice</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Awareness of Stereotype Threat</td>
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<tr>
<td>CR-TML</td>
<td>Paradigm</td>
<td>Process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Multicultural Education (CME)</td>
<td>Racial, cultural, and social identity impact leadership praxis Leaders as active agents and facilitators of social change Lead to dismantle inequities, reconstruct equitable school systems, and ensure students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, and help create and perpetuate a just, humane, and democratic society.</td>
<td>Critically Engage Banks’ Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education as Praxis 1. Content Integration 2. Knowledge Construction 3. Prejudice Reduction 4. Equity Pedagogy 5. Empowering School Community</td>
<td>Facilitate courageous conversations about race, racism, culture, and social injustices Infuse ethnic studies and focus on culture in curriculum and staff/faculty PD Engage stakeholders in critical reflection and intergroup dialogue Atteniveness to race, culture, and other social factors establishing, selecting, or enhancing policies, practices, resources and programs within school</td>
<td>Reflexive inquiry on leadership praxis as situated in race, gender, culture and other identity factors, including considerations for teaching, learning, leadership, and establishing an equitable and just school climate and culture for all students. Engage data from diverse and multiple perspectives, centered in the ethnic, racial, cultural, and social background and experiences of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Pedagogies (CP)</td>
<td>View historically marginalized and minoritized students, families, communities and teachers as leaders, experts, and politically aware Recognize funds of knowledge that these stakeholders bring and understand they are empowered change agents for equity and justice. Leaders teach, learn, lead, and serve as a de-colonizing liberatory praxis meant to disrupt and dismantle white supremacy, privilege, and power and provoke dialogic problem posing, as well as agency, voice, and restorative (Paris, XX) justice for oppressed populations (in schools and in society at-large).</td>
<td>Situate school in a constant state of inquiry with the understanding that teaching, learning, and leadership for justice is a dynamic, fluid, and reflexive process. Unpack unequal distributions of power and privilege and engage stakeholders in learning about themselves and each other (Gay, 2003) Create liberatory spaces for historically marginalized and minoritized students, teachers, families, and communities to engage a shared knowledge construction process (with mainstream allies and in affinity groups)</td>
<td>Engage self and others in critical inquiry, cultural reflection, dialogue, observation, feedback and action Facilitate unity through community building, as well as intellectual development and learning by doing Centers needs of historically marginalized and minoritized, families, communities, and teachers and create forums and spaces for them to serve as experts in their own social justice oriented professional growth and development Promote agency, voice, cross-group communication and critical collective (&amp; self) care Explore and act on answers: How does racial and social identity enhance or impede one’s ability to see, understand, and engage diverse and divergent teaching, learning and leadership perspectives and practices, especially as situated in a social justice agenda?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culturally Responsive Praxis (CRP)</td>
<td>Understand that educators’ multiple and intersecting cultures shape their sense of self, place, and society, and how they interact with others, including historically minoritized, families, and communities.</td>
<td>Use cultures, experiences, and perspectives of historically marginalized and minoritized, teachers, and communities as filters through which to engage leadership and leadership decisions (Gay, 2003) Remain aware of the deep structure (Tye, 1987) and</td>
<td>Critically reflect on culture at the intersection of race, gender, class and other and other intersecting social categories when making leadership decisions. Build knowledge of other ethnic, racial, and social groups &amp; school context. Explore and act on answers: How does culture and cultural identity enhance or impede one’s ability to see, understand, and engage diverse and divergent teaching, learning and leadership</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CR-TML</th>
<th>Paradigm</th>
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<th>Pedagogy</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Know that other factors across cultures, including historical experiences between cultures and school, local, and societal context affect cross-cultural interactions in schools. Lead to affirm and value cultural difference, and leverage these differences to cultivate equitable and just diverse teaching and learning spaces for all students.</td>
<td>hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1992) operating within the school community and continually challenge, disrupt, and dismantle inequities within each. and facilitate similar growth for stakeholders. *Engage action based on this knowledge. CRP looks different for each school community, identity group, and/or individual, thus there is no one right way to codify CRP. It is engaged praxis situated in, and responsive to the culture and climate of the schools being served, including all of the peoples forming the school community.</td>
<td>perspectives and practices, especially as situated in a social justice agenda?</td>
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APPENDIX Q: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

UNLV

UNLV Social/Behavioral IRB - Exempt Review
Exempt Notice

DATE: November 29, 2016
TO: Christine Clark, Ed.D.
FROM: Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects

PROTOCOL TITLE: [981483-1] Race, Gender, Education Policy, and Critically Responsive Transformative Multicultural Leadership: A Culturally Relevant Examination of the Leadership Experiences of African American Female School Leaders Committed to Social Justice

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
EXEMPT DATE: November 29, 2016
REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this protocol. This memorandum is notification that the protocol referenced above has been reviewed as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45CFR46.101(b) and deemed exempt.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence with our records.

PLEASE NOTE:
Upon final determination of exempt status, the research team is responsible for conducting the research as stated in the exempt application reviewed by the ORI - HS and/or the IRB which shall include using the most recently submitted Informed Consent/Assent Forms (Information Sheet) and recruitment materials. The official versions of these forms are indicated by factor or contains the date exempted. If your project involves paying research participants, it is recommended to contact Carla Shaffer, ORI Program Coordinator at (702) 895-2794 to ensure compliance with subject payment policy.

Any changes to the application may cause this protocol to require a different level of IRB review. Should any changes need to be made, please submit a Modification Form. When the above-referenced protocol has been completed, please submit a Continuing Review/Progress Completion report to notify ORI - HS of its closure.

If you have questions, please contact the Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects at IRB@unlv.edu or call 702-895-2794. Please include your protocol title and IRBNet ID in all correspondence.

Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects
4505 Maryland Parkway, Box 451047, Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-1047
(702) 895-2794 Fax: (702) 895-5805 IRB@unlv.edu
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Tonya Walls is a Nationally Board Certified Educator who serves as an Assistant Professor of Education in the Graduate School of Education, College of Health and Human Services at Touro University Nevada where she focuses on culturally relevant pedagogy, race and education, educational leadership, and grassroots organizing. She holds a Master’s of Science in Education and is completing a PhD. in Multicultural Education, Cultural Studies, and International Education from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). Her work as a scholar engages race and critical pedagogy as praxis with the goal of opening up sacred space for historically minoritized and marginalized youth, educators, and communities to critically examine and dismantle inequities in schools, schooling, and society at-large. Tonya Walls also serves as a founding core member of Teachers for Social Justice Las Vegas and Vice-President of Teaching and Uniting Ladies to Inspire Success (TULIPS), a local non-profit dedicated to cultivating mentored relationships between professional women and aspiring female youth leaders of color, ages 13-21.

CURRENT POSITION
Assistant Professor of Education, School of Education, College of Health and Human Services, Touro University Nevada

TEACHING AND RESEARCH AREAS
Educational equity; culturally relevant pedagogy; race and policy; educational leadership; teacher education; teacher leadership; grassroots organizing

EDUCATION

2017 PhD Candidate, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Emphasis: Multicultural Education, Cultural Studies, and International Studies
Dissertation: Critically Responsive Transformative Multicultural Leadership: A Culturally Relevant Examination of African American Female School Leaders Committed to Social Justice

2002 Masters Equivalent/Administrative Certification, Mills College, Oakland, California
Emphasis: Educational Leadership

1999 M.S.Ed., California State University East Bay, Hayward, California
Emphasis: Education - Reading Instruction

1991 B.A., Chancellor’s Honors, University of California, Los Angeles
Major: Sociology

PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS
2015-Present  Assistant Professor of Education 
Graduate School of Education, College of Health and Human Services, 
Touro University Nevada, Henderson, Nevada

2014  Adjunct Faculty, Ethnic Studies 
Humanities Department, College of Liberal Arts 
Nevada State College, Henderson, Nevada

2000-2002  Guest Lecturer of Teacher Education 
School of Education, 
California State University East Bay, Hayward, California

2000-2004  Adjunct Faculty of Teacher Education 
School of Education 
Holy Names University, Oakland, California

**PUBLICATIONS**

**Book Chapters:**


**Walls, T.** (In Progress). Race, resilience and resistance: Examining the leadership of Black Female School Principals.

**Articles:**

**Walls, T. E., Cornejo, M. N. B. and Wilde, J.** (In Progress). Critical professional development & social justice: Developing liberatory praxis through critical inquiry teacher action groups

**Walls, T.** (In Progress). Rac(e)ing educational leadership: Engaging critical race praxis to prepare school leaders for social justice

**Walls, T.** (In Progress). The sistah’s are not alright! Trouble in the educational pipeline for Black female students, teachers, care-givers and school leaders.

**Print/Public Media:**

Clark, C., Plachowski, T., Singh, R., Smith, A., **Walls, T.**, (Invited Guest Bloggers) (2017, April 28). Policy by, with, and for all students: How to make public education work. Brown Center on

**PRESENTATIONS**

**Conference Presentations and Symposia:**


**Walls, T.** (2017). Abriendo Caminos/opening pathways for students of color into the teaching profession: Giving back to the community through teaching. Panel presentation at the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education Diversified Teaching Workforce Institute. Tampa, FL.


**Walls, T.** (2016). Racing transformational leadership/transforming leadership through race. Research poster presentation at the National Association of Multicultural Education annual conference. Cleveland, OH.


**Invited Talks and Presentations:**

Walls, T. (2017). Critically responsive transformative multicultural leadership: A culturally relevant examination of African American female school leaders committed to social justice. Guest Lecture for students enrolled in a Research Capstone Course with the Department of Interdisciplinary, Gender, and Ethnic Studies at the University of Nevada Las Vegas. Las Vegas, NV.

GRANTS AND FELLOWSHIPS
Student Mentored Research Grant
Touro University Nevada
January 2017
Award Amount: $1,500

Student Mentored Research Grant
Touro University Nevada
January 2016
Award Amount: $1,500

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE
Research Assistant, Teaching & Learning, University of Nevada Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV
October 2016 – June 2017
Amount Funded: $335,224.31
Research Assistant to Dr. Christine Clark, Dr. Allison Smith, and Dr. Jori Beck as part of the Abriendo Caminos/Opening Pathways for Students of Color into the Teaching Profession: Giving Back to the Community through Teaching Initiative

COURSES TAUGHT AND PROGRAMS DEVELOPED
Assistant Professor, Touro University Nevada, Henderson, NV
Masters School Administration Coordinator Fall 2015 – Present
Teacher Leadership Advanced Studies Certificate Fall 2015 – Present
Administrative Internship I and II Fall 2015 – Present
Educational Leadership Social Justice Seminar Spring 2016
Collaboration for Learning Spring 2016
Collegial Coaching and Mentorship for Teacher Leaders Spring 2016

Adjunct Professor, Nevada State College, Henderson, NV
Introduction to Ethnic Studies Fall 2014 – Spring 2015

Part-time Lecturer, California State University East Bay, Hayward, CA
Reading Methods Fall 1999 – Spring 2002
English Language Arts for Elementary Teachers Fall 1999 – Spring 2002
Introduction to Multicultural Education Fall 200 – Spring 2002

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Adjunct Professor, Holy Names College, Oakland, CA
Multicultural Education Fall 1999 – Spring 2001

STUDENT ADVISING
Academic Advisor:
Bryant Urry, 2015-2017, School Administration Masters, Touro University Nevada
Jaime McCoy, 2015-2017, School Administration Masters, Touro University Nevada
Vanessa Chipp, 2016-2018, School Administration Masters, Touro University Nevada
Debra Reed, 2016-2018, School Administration Masters, Touro University Nevada
Michelle Smith, 2016-2018, School Administration Masters, Touro University Nevada

Masters Thesis Chair:
Julie Wilde, 2015-2017, School Administration Masters, Touro University Nevada

Masters Thesis Committees:
Cecilia Bojorquez, 2015-2017, School Administration Masters, Touro University Nevada

SERVICE TO PROFESSION
Appointed/Elected Positions:
Review Board Member, Education and Urban Society (EUS), 2017-2019.

Volunteer Service:

Peer Reviewer, Proposals for National Association of Multicultural Education (NAME) annual conference (2016)


Peer Reviewer, Proposals for National Association of Multicultural Education (NAME) annual conference (2015)


Articles Reviewed:


SERVICE TO UNIVERSITY
Interprofessional Education Task Force (2017-2018)
Faculty Executive Committee Member (2015-2017)
University Engagement Council (2016-2017)

SERVICE TO COMMUNITY
Committee Member, Nevada Educator Preparation Committee, Nevada Department of Education (2017)


Volunteer Instructor, Peterson Academic Center, Clark County School District, Las Vegas, NV (2016-2017)

Executive Equity Trustee of Board of Trustees, Teachers for Social Justice Las Vegas (TFSJLVS), Las Vegas, NV (2016-2017)

Vice President of Board of Directors, Teaching and Uniting Ladies to Inspire Positive Success (TULIPS), Las Vegas, NV (2017)

Mentor, Teaching and Uniting Ladies to Inspire Positive Success (TULIPS), Las Vegas, NV (2017)

CONSULTING:
Professional Development Consultant, Gallaudet University, Washington, D.C.
June 2015 – Present
Multicultural Curriculum Transformation Initiative

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS AND CERTIFICATIONS
Organizational Affiliations:
2016 Institute for Teachers of Color committed to Racial Justice (ITOC) Fellow
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE)
American Association of Blacks in Higher Education (AABHE)
Association of Black Women in Higher Education (ABWHE)
American Educational Research Association (AERA)
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)
Critical Race Studies in Education Association (CRSEA)
Education Leaders of Color (EdLoC)
International Literacy Association (ILA)
National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)
National Association of Multicultural Education (NAME)

Certifications:
Nationally Board Certified Teacher, Literacy: Reading and Language Arts – Early and Middle Childhood, 2005-2025.