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Embracing the Race: How Black Women Principals Construct Their Professional Identities in Ontario Schools

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Abstract

Although developments in provincial and school-level policies have increased the number of Black leaders in Canadian K-12 schools, research on Black women leaders continues to be disproportionality underrepresented in education leadership and administration (ELA) research. Of the studies conducted on Black principals, the intersection of their race-and-gendered identity markers are not adequately addressed nor presented in most literature (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Lomotey, 2019; Mponguse, 2010; Nickens & Washington, 2017), particularly in spaces where the study of principals' professional identities is linked to achieving school reform initiatives. While the extant literature on school improvement acknowledges principals as key sources of knowledge, there remains a space in ELA literature for a deeper interrogation of Black women principals' professional identities in a Canadian context. In response to this gap in the literature, the present qualitative study uses a narrative life history (life history) approach to examine how seven Black women principals construct their professional identities in Ontario school districts. Focusing on the historical, political, and sociocultural tensions that encompass the race-and-gendered identity of the Black woman, this study draws on the tenets of intersectionality as a conceptual framework for situating the narratives shared by participants. Findings from semi-structured interviews reveal that Black women obtain leadership positions based on contingent situations and context-related circumstances, that is, through shoulder-tapping or employment equity initiatives—where being at the right place at the right time affords them entrance into leadership. When finally in these roles, Black women must then construct their professional identities in racially contentious environments characterized by a lack of organizational supports, absence of mentorship, and limited career advancement opportunities. All while simultaneously being held to higher standards of practice than their counterparts. This

dissertation offers novel strategies for re-examining professional standards outlined in the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF; The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013), the deployment of school board mentorship programs, and principal recruitment processes. Given that school improvement initiatives identify principals as key agents for change, this study provides significant insights and contributions for leadership theorization, school leader preparation program development, and practitioners' understanding of principal practices in Ontario's K-12 public schools.

Keywords: Principals; Black Women; Educational leadership; Professional identity; Ontario Leadership Framework; Micropolitics; Mentorship; Intersectionality; Gendered racism; K-12 public schools; Narrative life history; Anti-Black racism

Summary for Lay Audience

Although developments in provincial and school-level policies have increased the number of Black leaders in Canadian K-12 schools, research on Black women leaders continues to be disproportionality underrepresented in education leadership and administration (ELA) research. When studies are conducted on Black principals, the intersections of their race and gender are not adequately examined, nor reflected in the educational literature (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Lomotey, 2019; Mponguse, 2010; Nickens & Washington, 2017). This underrepresentation is evident in spaces where the study of principals' professional identities is connected to achieving school reform initiatives. While literature on school improvement identifies principals as key sources of knowledge, the underrepresentation of Black women provides an opportunity for better understanding their professional identities in a Canadian context. To address this issue, this qualitative study investigates how seven Black women principals construct their professional identities in Ontario school districts. In particular, the experiences shared by participants are framed by a narrative life history (life history) approach that uses semi-structured interviews as the data source and the principles of intersectionality as the theoretical framework.

Findings from the analysis reveal that Black women obtain leadership positions via context-related circumstances such as shoulder-tapping or preferential recruitment though employment equity initiatives. When finally in these roles, Black women must then construct their professional identities in racist environments with limited organizational supports, mentorship, and career advancement opportunities. Adding to these concerns, Black women principals are held to higher standards of practice than other non-Black women principals. This study is justified in that it illuminates the theoretical and practical misconceptions of how Black women

principals negotiate their race-and-gendered identities while constructing their professional identities, and argues for this recognition in leadership theorization. This dissertation is intended to help us further understand Black women principalship and offer new strategies for advancing provincial school leadership frameworks, the delivery of school board mentorship programs, and principal recruitment processes. Since school improvement initiatives identify principals as key actors for change, this study provides significant contributions for leadership theorization, resources, and practitioners' understanding of principal practices in Ontario's K-12 public schools.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late gogo, Tendai Rosemary Chitewe. Her continual support,

prayers, and love will be cherished forever.

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I can do all things through Him who strengthens me

—Philippians 4:13

I stand a little taller and smile a little wider today because of the wonderful community that has continuously supported my graduate journey. First, to God be all the glory. The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the strength, guidance, and mercy from God, for through Him all things are possible.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Term
ADFO	Association des directions et des directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes
BLDS	Board Leadership Development Strategy
CPCO	Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
EA	Educational Assistant
ELA	Education leadership and administration
EQAO	Education Quality and Accountability Office
K-12	Kindergarten to grade 12
KSA	Knowledge, skills, abilities
OCT	Ontario College of Teachers
OLF	Ontario Leadership Framework
OLS	Ontario Leadership Strategy
OME	Ontario Ministry of Education
OPC	Ontario Principals' Council
PLR	Personal Leadership Resources
PPM	Policy/Program Memorandum
PQP	Principal's Qualification Program
RBF	Racial Battle Fatigue
U.S.	The United States of America

Definition of Terms

As qualitative research develops to acknowledge the sociocultural and political complexities inherent to the study of lived experiences, field-specific terminology is commonly used to define and situate the phenomena under study. While advantageous for unifying individuals in the same profession, a taken for granted approach to using field-specific terminology may result when terms are interchanged without consideration for their historical significance and context-specific implications (Fitzsimons et al., 2011). To maintain clarity for the reader, I aim to deviate from this approach by explicating how the following four commonly used key terms are operationalized in this study.

Black

The historical trajectory of terms used to describe and discuss racialized people has continued to evolve over time with literature making references to terms that are often interchanged (Agyemang et al., 2005). Some of these terms include but are not limited to African American, Black, minority, racialized, and people of colour. Although the literature that informs this study uses varying iterations of the aforementioned terms, the contexts in which the term Black is studied has historical significance for addressing the multifaceted and nuanced understanding of race as an identity marker (Dei, 2018). Indeed, Black is a contested term and how it is defined has consequences for those who are directly subjugated by its definition (Dei, 1995; 2018, Maylor, 2009). In this work, the term Black surpasses the colour of one's skin. Black is used as a "political signifier" that acknowledges:

> A state of 'becoming' (racialised); a process of consciousness, when colour becomes the defining factor about who you are. Located through your 'otherness' a 'conscious coalition' emerges: a self-consciously constructed space where identity is not inscribed by a natural identification but a political kinship. (Maylor, 2009, p. 370)

Given that the practices of principals are informed and often prescribed by country-specific

policies, the term Black Canadian is used when contextually appropriate to distinguish the political and historical differences between Canada and other countries. Further, providing a localized understanding of Black women principals, their professional identities, and the experiences of structural discrimination. While I do not attempt to categorize Black principals as a monolithic group, the parameters of this study did not require participants to specify the distinctions of their racial identity and thus positions them under the collective term Black.

Education Leadership and Administration

The extant literature on school leadership positions the role of the principal under the umbrella term of ELA. While beneficial for delineating the general duties of specific educational actors, it is important to note the nuances of this categorization given the contextual governance of ELA in Canada. In Ontario, ELA is characterized by actors in the following positions or offices: Ministry of Education; school boards; trustees; directors of education; superintendent; and principals (People for Education, n.d.). Notably, this group is not inclusive of teacher leaders, despite their acknowledgement in emerging scholarship on leadership practices in K-12 schools.

While findings in this study present implications for ELA research and practitioners, this study largely focuses on the role of principals, which is defined in Ontario's *Education Act* (1990a) as "the instruction of and the discipline of pupils in the school; and the organization and management of schools" (c. E.2 s.11-11.1). The Ontario Principals' Council (OPC; a professional association which supports the practices of Ontario principals) further textures the roles of principals as "instructional leaders, business managers, data analysts, community engagement experts, parent liaisons, and fund raisers" (Ontario Principals' Council [OPC], n.d., para 1) where the role of a principal presents significant implications for school improvement

and student success.

Gendered Racism

The race-and-gendered focus of this study warrants a discussion of gendered racism. Coined by Essed (1991), the term is widely used in the social sciences to describe how everyday racism and sexism intersect to oppress Black women in pervasive ways (see Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Particularly, Black women are oppressed through raced and gendered power hierarchies (see Hill Collins, 1998; 2019 and hooks, 1981;1984) that normalize the perception of "everyday practices such as jokes, storytelling, generalizations or even so-called compliments" through racist gender roles (Thomas et al., 2008, p. 307). While Black women experience forms of sexism that are comparable to White women and racism to that of Black men, the "confluence of racist attitudes can lead to a different and perhaps more harmful form of sexism for Black women" (Thomas et al., 2008, p. 307). By drawing on Crenshaw's (1991) tenets of intersectionality as the study's conceptual framework, gendered racism is used to examine the consequences of oppression at both the structural and individual levels. While oppression at the individual level may appear as a priority, an understanding at the structural level is of significance given the study's focus on organizational supports, mentorship, school leader preparation programs, and the neoliberal governance of ELA practices. This significance is further rationalized by the United Nations' identification of gendered racism as informing the "allocation of resources along racially and ethnically ascribed understandings of masculinity and femininity as well as along gendered forms of race and ethnic discrimination" (Essed, n.d.). Given that Black women principals enter school spaces as Black and woman, it is a necessary to acknowledge that their intersecting identities cannot be separated and should not be examined as mutually exclusive, particularly in contexts where their identity is a central unit of analysis. In

addition to using gendered racism, allusions to the term may be presented in this work as the following terms: race-and-gendered identity; race-and-gendered challenges; and race-and-gendered negotiations.

Canada and the United States of America

Occasionally, this study makes comparisons between Canada and the United States of America (U.S.) given the countries' shared political history (Bothwell, 2019; Clarke et al., 2019; Thompson & Randall, 2010). As well, scholars conducting comparative studies of the two have identified a number of contextual similarities in their economic and public policy sectors—sectors that may inform the access to, funding, and governance of the education sectors and school reform initiatives in both countries (Bothwell, 2019; Congressional Research Service, 2011; Dumas, 2016; Economic Policy Institute, 2022; Teyssier, 2009; Walks & Bourne, 2006). For example, Canada and the U.S. have a long history of bilateral trade relationships (e.g. the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, formerly the North American Free Trade Agreement) that has supported economic growth in both countries (Congressional Research Service, 2011). Growth that informs the socio-economic quality markers in global education assessments such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment. In turn, the results of such assessments are used to shape education policy research and practice (OECD, 2019).

The study of Black principals and Black education has been largely conducted in the U.S. context, thus, given the social and historical convergences between Canada and the U.S., the theoretical and practical contributions that have emanated from these studies provide significant insights for framing this study. It is important to note, that while this study makes contributions to the study of ELA in Canada at large, the K-12 education system in Canada is not federally

governed. Section 93 of the *1867 Constitution Acts* tasks each province in Canada with the responsibility for the laws governing public education (People for Education, n.d.). As well, though a number of similarities exist, notable differences of significance remain. In regard to the education sector, this study pays particular attention to the history of racial and school segregation and school leader evaluation and preparation between both countries. Each is discussed in turn.

Firstly, the intended consequences of slavery in the U.S. present context specific implications for understanding anti-Black racism in Canada, in part due to the migration of Blacks seeking refuge from the U.S. to Canada (see McLaren, 2004) and the emergence of racial segregation in the housing sector (see Walks & Bourne, 2006). The maintenance of racially segregated communities, which Walks and Bourne (2006) assert as "urban ghettos", shape the racial and socio-economic demographics of schools and what this study will reveal further shapes the over-placement of Black principals in high needs schools. While the manifestations and stratification of racial segregation in both countries are not the same, the systems of oppression that continue to marginalize Blacks in both countries share a long history of colonialism, Eurocentrism, and White supremacy (Bundy, 2019; Cooper, 2007; Crenshaw, 1991; Dumas, 2016; Hartman, 2008; Howard, 20203; Fleras et al., 1996).

Secondly, Canada and the U.S. share parallel histories of the segregation of public schools which rested on Anti-Black racism and was fueled by slavery in both countries. Furthermore, the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court decision—which occurred during the American Civil Rights movement—had and continues to have significant implications for the attitudes towards the recruitment, retention, and career advancement of Black principals in education (Fenwick, 2022; Goldstone & Ray, 2004). Particularly, given it

challenged racist ideologies that were reflected in the proposed 1849 School Bill which allowed

for school segregation in Canadian public schools (McLaren, 2004). Although the ruling had

legal consequences for the provision of education in the U.S., aftershock effects occurred in

Canada as a result of the anti-Black racism that emanated from this ruling and its connection to

slavery in both countries (McLaren, 2004; Goldstone & Ray, 2004). Additionally, the

significance of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling to education systems in Canada lies in

its use as an exemplar to contest compulsory education legislation because of its emphasis on

education in a democratic society (Goldstone & Ray, 2004).

      Finally, the rationalization for this regional focus is that teacher education degree and

school leader preparation programs in Canadian provinces share comparable elements to

programs in American states. The path to becoming a principal in Ontario and various American

states typically requires an undergraduate degree, a teaching certificate from an accredited

teaching association, a graduate degree and/or enhanced certifications in education leadership,

and professional experience in an educational setting (American College of Education, 2022;

OME, 2023). While each province and state have jurisdiction over educator accreditation, there

is a degree of cohesion for overseeing principalship at the national level. For example, the

National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Canadian Association of Principals

respectively provide a national voice of advocacy for principals, including assistant and vice-

principals. Divergences between Canada and the U.S. become more apparent when examining

the enforcement, or lack thereof, of standards for leader evaluation and preparation. In the U.S.,

the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, formerly the National, formerly known as

the Interstate School Leader Licensure Consortium and the National Educational Leadership

Preparation provide key touchstones for defining desired practices across the nation. In Canada,

there is incongruence between the provinces that provide explicit standards through frameworks such as the OLF in Ontario and those that do not. As well, developments have increasingly been made in the U.S. to include discussions of equity and cultural responsiveness (Farley et al., 2019; Lambert & Bouchamma, 2019; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015) however, this effort is not explicitly reflected in all provincial standards. For example, the inclusion of cultural diversity in leadership competencies is absent from leadership standards in Québec but present in those of Alberta and the U.S (Lambert & Bouchamma, 2019). Further, the OLF includes discussions of supporting "all" students but omits to blueprint how equity is integrated in the Personal Leadership Resources (Campbell, 2021).

Given the contextual similarities presented in the sections above, the developments made in the evaluation and preparation of school leaders in the U.S. may provide significant implications for better understanding the study of principalship in Ontario and other provinces.

Women

This study makes the conscious decision to use the term women rather than female to align with contemporary discourse on gender-biased language. Traditional conceptions of the term categorized it as a sex-term that described the biological anatomy of an individual and was interchanged with the terms female and lady (Cralley & Ruscher, 2005; Diaz-Leon, 2016). Scholars such as Diaz-Leon (2016) have since challenged how the term is operationalized and argued for a recognition of the differences between the terms, woman and female.

Sex is biological, anatomical or morphological, and based on genetics (Meyer, 2016). By this definition, the term female is used to denote an individual who has reproductive capacity and the XX chromosome (Meyer, 2016). When the term woman is interchanged or arguably misconstrued as a sex-term, it is allotted to individuals who are biologically female. Feminist

theorists perceive this categorization to be problematic because it: a) omits to acknowledge intersex and transgender people (Diaz-Leon, 2016) and b) perpetuates sex-role stereotypes (Cralley & Ruscher, 2005). First, a sex-term approach to the term woman becomes exclusionary when it rests on polarizing biological criteria that some people do not fit. Second, a sex-term approach presents opportunities for using stereotypes such as submissive, intuitive, nurturing, and dependent to describe a woman. As a result of the stereotypes, there are expectations for women to possess specific qualities and behave accordingly, as non-conformity to the "stereotypic prescriptions is unwelcome" (Cralley & Ruscher, 2005, p. 301).

A probable solution to the shortcomings of the sex-term approach is the gender-term or social position approach which groups individuals within a shared social role (Barnes, 2020; Diaz-Leon, 2016). Haslanger (2000) explains that gender centers on how an individual is treated, viewed, and how their life is socially, legally, and economically structured. Notably, this categorization acknowledges a hierarchy of oppression that positions men as superior to women while accounting for overlapping systems of oppression due to racism, sexism, ageism etc. This acknowledgement is significant because how a society stratifies individuals into categories based on socially constructed or "unchosen physical differences", is politically informed and presents exclusionary implications for certain groups (Haslanger, 2000; Meyer, 2016). Cosker-Rowland's (2023) view further complicates the discussion on gender by introducing the concept of gender-identity, a sense of self as a man, woman, genderqueer, and so forth. Additionally, an individual can possess a gender-identity that is different than the gender they were assigned at birth (Cosker-Rowland, 2023). More definitely, a gender-identity is informed by the groups an individual feels they belong to, how they choose to behave (Barnes, 2020), and their "sense of self" (Cosker-Rowland, 2023). It is within Cosker-Rowland's (2023) definition of "sense of self"

that the use of the term woman is substantiated in this study. The participant recruitment process

tasked candidates to self-identify their race-and-gendered identity—this ask implied a subjective

perception of oneself. Given this approach, onus was placed on candidates to apply their

understanding of the terms "Black" and "woman" and use discernment in assessing whether or

not these terms aligned with their "sense of self".

Indeed, the term woman bears imprecision. It would be remiss of me to use the term

without acknowledging some of the criticisms that exist, especially given the intersectional focus

of this work. In their discussion of the term woman, Diaz-Leon (2016) explains that reliance on a

gender-term perspective is problematic as "there is no particular social role that all women share,

just in virtue of being a women" (p. 246). Highlighting the multifaceted components of social

identity, Diaz-Leon (2016) asserts that women embody varying social positions as a result of

their intersecting identity markers such as class, age, race, and sexual orientation. Writing in a

similar vein, Barnes (2020) views gender as a socially constructed system that privileges some

and excludes others using prescriptive social roles that individuals are expected to occupy. This

narrowed view does not adequately account for nor identify the nuances of who is considered a

woman. Rather, Diaz-Leon (2016) calls for a recognition of the term woman as a "contextually-

shifting term" that can account for its varying definitions (i.e. sex-term, gender-term, or

something new) in varying contexts.

For the purpose of this study, I adopt a gender-term/social position view of the term

woman since the roles and responsibilities of principalship are positioned to be in relation to

others (Lasater, 2016; The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013). While criticisms of the

gender-term/ social position perspective exist, and I do not refute their merits, the relational

focus of principalship warrants the use of a term that reflects the influence of relationships on

ones "sense of self". In Barnes' (2020) view, a social position of gender highlights the ways in which people react to and treat them, specifically the "material social (dis)advantage that is imposed on individuals based on collective norms and assumptions about sexed bodies" (p. 3). This approach was beneficial for this study as it provided an opportunity to analyze how different education actors perceived participants' gender based on assumptions of biological sex, stated gender-identity using pronoun preferences, and visible gender expressions.

Preface

When we deny our stories, they define us.

When we own our stories, we get to write a brave new ending

—Brené Brown

The experiences of Black women have long been placed in the margins of Canadian history, scholarship, and praxis. Experiences illuminating a contentious history of silencing and erasure that willfully negates the complex dance between pain, resistance, perseverance, and triumph endured by Black women in leadership. A dance that more often than not, encompasses the stories of what it means to be Black and a woman in Canada. Stories that we as Black women need to and should have the right to share. Whether you are arriving at this work intrigued by its race-and-gendered focus, make contributions to the field of education in your research and/or practice, or may find your social and professional identities reflected in its title, this dissertation aims to speak to you through *our* stories. Stories that do not aim to have merit when compared to White women or Black men however, challenge you to acknowledge our stories as legitimate sources of knowledge on their own.

In discussing the parameters of this work, let me hasten to situate my claim of the possessive pronoun our and its significance. I wrote this work as an educator and researcher, cognizant of how the struggle for agency and legitimacy for school leaders is an ongoing endeavour that cannot be isolated from the intended consequences of racism and sexism. My positionality as a Black woman provided me with a unique perspective whereby the race-and-gendered focus of this work strongly spoke to a shared lived experience with participants. This shared social identity at times: privileged my access to participants who felt seen due to my insider-status; created spaces of comfort when discussing hard truths that were unique to being

Black and a woman; enabled opportunities to fill in the blanks for sentiments and emotions commonly misunderstood as characterizing an "angry Black woman"; and reaffirmed a level of trust between participants and I to unapologetically share our story. As well, these "privileges" were bestowed to me during a historically pivotal time in Canada and the U.S. where identity markers such as race and gender were brought to the fore of discourse centered on governance, leadership, identity politics, social justice, and social responsibility. In particular, this work was conducted during the onset of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the surge in civil rights protests following the murder of George Floyd, and the political unrest that ensued with the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Notably, these select events had implications for the attitudes, values, beliefs, and legislature that not only informed how social institutions such as education were governed but more importantly the ways in which Canadians and Americans perceived others and (mis)understood their stories. Consequently, highlighting the timely significance of examining the intersections of race, gender, professional identity, and school leadership.

Although focusing on Black women, this dissertation is not exclusionary in nature and calls upon a commitment of solidarity from education actors of all race-and-gendered identities. To name a few, it calls upon:

- Fellow Black men to stand in solidarity with their sisters to resist the plight on which racism and sexism stands to disrupt attention on injustice through the division of our collective power.

- The White women who understand that race alone does not afford one companionship nor legitimacy in leadership, to call out the predominately patriarchal and racist ideologies that govern education policies and practice.

- Other racialized groups who are tired of being lumped into the same category as other "visible minorities" to unapologetically ask for their experiences to be heard in isolation of their counterparts.

- Black women already in ELA positions to either start or continue uplifting, upholding, and supporting those who come after them.

- Principals' Qualification Program (PQP) educators to acknowledge the contextual nature of leadership and assert race-consciousness as a necessary factor for understanding school-level leadership.

- Policymakers to re-examine the alignment of current policies and principal recruitment practices to acknowledge race-and-gender as key mechanisms for professional identity development.

- Emerging scholars and tenured researchers interested in school leadership to recontextualize existing leadership frameworks to reflect the intersectional identities of leaders as necessary contributors to successful leadership outcomes.

- White men to not only create spaces for Black women and other racialized groups to exist in leadership positions but to also have agency at the decision-making table.

- Existing and aspiring Black women school leaders to continue sharing their experiences and advocating for change.

I believe the findings and contributions of this work will speak to a wide audience of researchers and practitioners in the field of education. More definitely, policymakers, graduate students, existing and aspiring principals, school leader preparation program educators, and researchers interested in leadership for social justice and equity would benefit from a focused view of race-and-gendered school leadership. Specifically, one that centers the understanding of

Black women principals' professional identities as a necessary condition for improving current

practices and remedying existing inequities in the field.

Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

There is a kind of strength that is almost frightening in Black women. It's as if a steel rod runs

right through the head down to the feet

—Maya Angelou

As education research and school reform initiatives strive to bridge the gap between policy and practice (Hallinger, 2005; Riveros et al., 2016; Volante, 2012), scholars in the field have increasingly pointed to professional leadership standards to ascertain the contexts in which successful leadership outcomes and school improvement occur (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Ingvarson et al., 2006; Leithwood et al., 2008, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2020; Pont et al., 2008). Largely informed by market-oriented ideologies such as neoliberalism and managerialism, policies centered on school improvement consequently identify leadership as a driver for system-wide change and subsequently name school leaders as agents of change that "radically reshape the nature and content of 'public services' and the manner in which they are provided and consumed" (O'Reilly & Reed, 2010, p. 961). As discourse in this area develops, scholars exploring the relationship between successful leadership outcomes and school improvement are increasingly broadening discussions of professional leadership standards to include school leaders' professional identities. Particularly, the role that professional identity plays in addressing the policy and practice gap. While much has been written internationally on professional identity (see Crow et al., 2016; Cruz-González et al., 2021; Mpungose, 2010; Moral Santaella, 2020; Notman, 2017; Ritacco & Bolivar, 2019; Robertson, 2017; Trede et al., 2012), the extant literature presents a hegemonic portrayal of leadership that normalizes the experiences of White male principals as the benchmark for success (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Cruz-González et al., 2021; Mpungose, 2010). Indeed, when studies are conducted on racialized

groups, the contributions of Black women tend to be neglected as a result of the intended consequences of gendered racism that continue to exclude their representation in mainstream literature. As Ontario's political and cultural climate changes, schools are tasked with preparing judicious leaders that can achieve school improvement initiatives and reflect students' diverse needs (Hope, 2002; Wiley, 2016). An endeavour that is shaped before principals enter their positions, continues well into their careers, and requires an interrogation of the role that their race-and-gendered identities play in the development of their professional identities (see Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Mponguse, 2010; Santaella, 2020).

An examination of the avenues, such as school leader preparation programs, that share responsibility for fostering principals' professional identity development reveals that notable leadership frameworks and competency standards used in the field (e.g. The National Policy Board for Educational Administration's Professional Standards for Educational Leaders [National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015], and the Ontario Leadership Framework [OLF; The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013]) demonstrate racial and/or gendered blindness (Armstrong & McMahon, 2013; Farley et al., 2019). While a race and/or gender-blind discourse may illuminate the technical components of leadership, it "[curtails] the value of the professional, including their motivation or commitment in improving schools" (Murakami & Törnsen, 2017, p. 807). Suggesting that this omission highlights a lack of understanding and appreciation for the confluence of race and gender in ELA praxis in a Canadian context. Further, this deficit is problematic as it may serve to create challenges and barriers for the career advancement of existing and aspiring Black administrators whose career trajectories and leadership practices are appraised by these frameworks. This study aims to address this gap by examining how seven Black women principals construct their professional

identities in Ontario schools.

This chapter is designed to introduce the study and outline the theoretical and methodological contributions that frame the inquiry on Black women principals' professional identity construction in Ontario schools. Discussion begins with the context of the study which situates the significance and complexities of race-and-gendered school leadership. Given the study's focus on professional identity, pertinent attention is given to defining the term and how it is operationalized in contemporary discourse. Next, the statement of the problem is presented to contextualize the study and lay the foundation for understanding the developments of literature on Black principals and leadership theorizing. Discussion continues by detailing the purpose of the study and the four research questions that guide the investigation. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's significance, the conceptual framework that guides the inquiry, and provides the reader with a synthesis of how the remaining chapters are organized.

Context of the Study

The experiences of principals have long been examined and scrutinized in leadership research. Efforts to identify school-level actors responsible for enacting education reform initiatives have positioned principals as a central unit of analysis in educational leadership studies (Hall, 2013; Pollock et al., 2015). While observing the top-down hierarchy in which schools operate, studies have identified principals as possessing positional power which affords them discernment in the decision-making process of leading schools (Hasinoff & Mandzuk, 2018). The outcomes of their decision-making, however, are often critiqued in literature with the understanding that favourable outcomes correlate to successful leadership while unfavourable outcomes correlate to unsuccessful leadership. Although much literature is available on school leadership, diverse perspectives among scholars on the characteristics that define successful

leadership, shed light on the divergences that exist in the field of education (Dantley, 2010; Day & Sammons, 2013; Leithwood, 2011; Shields, 2014). Particularly, studies that co-opt a race-and-gender neutral or one-size-fits-all approach to understanding leadership identity, inadvertently promote a hegemonic White male perspective of leadership (Armstrong & McMahon, 2013; Diem & Carpenter, 2012) which in turn negates the experiences of racialized principals in general, and Black women principals in particular.

While enduring the consequences of racism, Black women also face social exclusion from obtaining leadership positions due to gendered assumptions and practices (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Davis, 2012). Discourse on women leadership has historically been obscured by patriarchal values that silence and oppress women's contributions to leadership (Hill Collins, 1989, 2015; Edwards, 2016). Although the field of education has arguably included depictions of women in teaching and principalship, research on women continues to be underrepresented (Heck & Hallinger, 2005). Of the studies that are conducted on women, focus is predominately placed on the experiences of White women (Waring, 2003; Williams, 2013; Williams & Wiggins, 2010), further rendering Black women as "voiceless and invisible when they are characterized and classified solely under race-based or gender-based analyses" (Brown, 2016, p. 27).

While local recruitment initiatives in Ontario have been undertaken to increase the representation of racialized principals (e.g. Action item 3: enhanced diversity in hiring and promotion- school and system leaders in *Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan, 2017* and the Peel District School Board's *Focused Recruitment of Black and Indigenous Educators Initiative: Strategy, 2021*), these efforts present unintended consequences for Black women principals due to the pervasive effects of sexism that gatekeep their retention in the field. Referencing the work

of Pigford and Tonnsen (1993), Scinto (2006) concedes that while in the role, Black women administrators endure "hostility from males, resentment from females, and increased responsibility" (p. 41) when they achieve successful outcomes. Echoing the deficit sentiment problematized by Doughty (1977) that "women staff public school systems and men run them" (p. 2), Harris et al. (2002) explain that men have traditionally been perceived to possess leadership traits that are congruent with leadership while their counterparts possess traits deemed suitable for teaching. The juxtaposition then of increased representation and research on Black leaders is that findings at times still render the intersectional identity of Black women as immaterial. Writing in the American context, hooks (1981) notes that:

> No other group in America has so had their identity socialized out of existence as have black women. We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from black men, or as a present part of the larger group 'women' in this culture. When black people are talked about, sexism militates against the acknowledgement of the interests of black women; when women are talked about racism militates against a recognition of black female interests. When black people are talked about, the focus tends to be on black *men*; and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on *white* women. (p. 7)

hooks' (1981) remark illustrates the contentions present in existing ELA research where developments of racialized leadership paint the narrative of Black leadership as a monolithic group. Notably, as scholars continue to identify the contexts in which successful leadership occurs, the omission of Black women's experiences from ELA research present implications for how their professional identities are understood in all contexts.

While this study intends to make contributions to the study of school leadership at large, with findings that are transferable to different contexts, it makes a distinct identification of its focus on the Ontario context. Thus, this section aims to provide readers with a foundational understanding of school leadership in Ontario. In regard to education, section 93 of the *1867 Constitution Act* stipulates that each province in Canada is responsible for the laws governing public education (People for Education, n.d.). Consequently, there are comparable similarities

and differences between each province and territories' organizational structures, educator preparation programs, and the frameworks that guide school leaders' practices. Below is a brief description of Ontario's public education system.

Governance. Ontario has 72 publicly funded K-12 school boards which are divided into 4 categories: English public (31), English Catholic (29), French public (4), and French Catholic (8) (Ontario Ministry of Education; OME, 2024a). As well as 10 school authorities, provincial schools, and demonstrations schools. The latter two providing education for students who are deaf and/or heard of hearing (OME, 2024b). The governance of these schools is overseen by various stakeholders who report to the Ministry of Education. At the school level, principals' leadership practices are further supported by three voluntary professional associations who provide professional services and represent the practices of practicing vice-principals and principals in the province (OME, 2023). These associations include, the OPC, the Catholic Principals Council of Ontario (CPCO), and the Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes (ADFO). Of the many services offered by these associations, the PQP is a key service that contributes to principals' professional identity construction.

The Principals' Qualification Program. Given that education is provincially governed, school leader preparation is province and territory specific. In Ontario, the PQP is one of the five requirements an educator must complete prior to becoming a principal in a publicly funded school. The five requirements include: a) an undergraduate degree, b) five years of teaching experience, c) certification in three school divisions (primary, junior, intermediate, and/or senior) d) two specialist or honour specialist additional qualifications or a master's degree, and finally e) complete the PQP (OME, 2023). The PQP is a two-part program that prepares Ontario educators to serve in leadership roles and can be accessed through teachers' federations, principals'

associations such as the OPC, CPCP, and ADFO, and Ontario universities (OME, 2023).

Notably, modules offered in the PQP are guided by the OLF's five-domains of school-level

leadership which support leaders to exercise "influence on organizational members and diverse

stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organization's vision and goals"

(OME, 2023; The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013, pp. 12-13). A goal that is carried

forward in both the Catholic and system-level frameworks in the OLF.

Leadership Frameworks and Strategies. In 2005, the OME announced its commitment to

developing and supporting quality leadership through the development of the Ontario Leadership

Strategy (OLS). After holding consultations with various education stakeholders, the OLS was

designed as a three-year plan of action to "support student achievement and well-being through a

coordinated and strategic approach to leadership development" (OME, 2013, p. 1). Primarily, the

strategy aims to strengthen school leadership in Ontario through two goals; a) support principals

and vice-principals to become strong instructional leaders and b) attract the "right" individuals to

principalship. Additionally, the strategy addresses the performance appraisal for vice-principals

and principals, mentorship for newly appointed vice-principals and principals in their first two-

years of practice, succession planning, and talent development in Ontario (OME, 2010).

Considering the intentions mentioned above, a few initiatives that emanated from the OLS that

have informed Ontario's K-12 leadership include:

- Board leadership development strategy

- Executive programs for supervisory officers and directors

- Principal performance appraisal

- Mentoring for newly appointed school and system leaders

- Institute for Education Leadership

- Principal congress

- Minister's principal reference group (OME, 2011a)

As a key support to the OLS, the Institute for Education Leadership was created to influence leadership policy and practices through the conduction and dissemination of research on district effectiveness (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013). To support the goals of the OLS, the Institute for Education leadership, led by Dr. Kenneth Leithwood and supported by the Council of Directors of Education, designed the OLF as an evidence-based guide that outlines organizational expectations for school and system leaders. Although initially launched in 2006, the OLF was revised in 2013 to include amendments to system-level leadership, district effectiveness, and notably a discussion of the personal leadership resources (PLR) that map effective practices of successful leadership (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013). Definitively, the OLF was designed to:

- Facilitate a shared vision of leadership in schools and districts

- Promote a common language that fosters an understanding of leadership and what it means to be a school or system leader

- Identify the practices, actions and traits or personal characteristics that describe effective leadership

- Guide the design and implementation of professional learning and development for school and system leaders

- Identify the characteristics of highly performing schools and systems - K-12 School Effectiveness Framework and District Effectiveness Framework

- Aid in the recruitment, development, selection and retention of school and system leaders (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013, p. 5)

The strength of the OLF and its wide use in the PQP in part, lies in its delineation of seven

leadership framework that have been tailored to the practices of school and system leaders.

These frameworks include:

- K-12 School Effectiveness Framework

- School-level Leadership

- Catholic School-level Leadership

- District Effectiveness Framework

- System-level Leadership

- Catholic System-level Leadership

- Personal Leadership Resources (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013, p. 9)

Working in tandem, these frameworks outline effective leadership practices and highlight the

organizational expectations, resources, and values that inform K-12 education in Ontario.

This study intends to provide an analysis of principalship in Ontario. While the participant

recruitment process detailed in Chapter 3 did not restrict the type of school boards, principals

who chose to partake in this study were concentrated in English public schools. Thus,

substantiating the study's emphasis on the practices, organizational supports, and experiences of

principals in English public school boards.

Defining Professional Identity

The feat to becoming a principal entails the acquisition of profession specific knowledge

and skills that contribute to the formation of a professional identity (Mponguse, 2010). Although

the former is prescriptive in nature with principal candidates partaking in formalized instruction

through school leader preparation programs, the latter is an individual process that can be

categorized as a product of interactions with language, people, and/or aspects of a socio-culture

(Tan et al., 2017), rendering it relational in nature. An extensive body of literature from

disciplines such as psychology has provided various definitions of professional identity, some of

which have contributed to how professional identity is conceptualized in the field of education.

Among the varying iterations, there is a consensus in the field that the formation of one's

professional identity necessitates the negotiation of shared meaning by others in the same

position or role (Iranzo-García et al., 2020; Monrouxe, 2010; Tan et al., 2017; Tomlinson &

Jackson, 2021; Trede et al., 2012). Adding to the discussion of professional identity, Tan et al.,

(2017) explain that professional identity is:

> The self that has been developed with the commitment to perform competently and
> legitimately in the context of the profession, and its development can continue over the
> course of the individuals' careers. A person with such identifies with the profession, its
> role and values. He or she finds meaning in the work. (p. 1505)

While Jackson (2018) concurs that professional identity "refers to individuals internalising

professional values, beliefs, and attributes finding meaning in their work, and connecting with

the conduct and practices associated with professional role" (p. 245).

 While in their role, principals make decisions that affect how they perform their duties,

and these performances may not always align with the expectations prescribed by their roles.

Principals' decisions are influenced by their professional identity, which is constructed and

developed over a defined period of time (Mponguse, 2010). For racialized principals, the

understanding of their professional identity is further compounded by the ways in which the

hegemonic norms of their profession may inform how they view their roles and shared values

(Aaron, 2020; Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017), and consequently, lead their schools (Jean-Marie,

2013). Particularly, Black women principals experience what Aaron (2020) refers to as a "double

jeopardy"—experiences of both racism and sexism that are imposed by their non-Black

counterparts. Given the nuanced understanding of professional identity and its varying definitions, it may be beneficial for researchers examining how principals lead schools to expand their discussion to include professional identity as a central unit of analysis.

Statement of the Problem

Contemporary literature on principal professional identity construction is largely dominated by narratives of White male school leaders who have traditionally sat at the decision-making table of the K-12 landscape (Johnson & Baptiste, 2017; Murakami & Törnsen, 2017; Whiteman et al., 2015). This essentialist perspective of leadership is problematic as current leadership frameworks used in the field, specifically in school leader preparation programs such as the PQP in Ontario and recruitment and retention practices, highlight racial and/or gendered blindness. This blindness challenges and creates barriers for the career advancement of existing and aspiring Black administrators in a Canadian context. Black women principals have continuously faced race and gender related barriers in their efforts to lead schools and this is reflected in their underrepresentation in school administrative positions and the lack of access to tailored organizational supports (Brown, 2005; Lomotey, 2019; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Smith, 2008; Wiley, 2016; Williams, 2013).

Theorizing Leadership Identity

Traditionally, leadership models reflected scientific management approaches and research conducted in the context of the military, government, and business and largely examined the experiences of White men leaders as a central unit of analysis. As such, leadership stereotypes presented in these studies were often from the lens of White, heterosexual, middle-class males (Coleman, 2012; Showunmi et al., 2016). By focusing on the hegemonic identities of the dominant group as the benchmark for understanding leadership traits and experiences, these

studies "suppressed and neutralised 'difference', including considerations of how gender and racial dimensions may impact leadership" (Showunmi et al., 2016, p. 918). The field of education has integrated contributions from scientific management approaches to inform leadership research, however, notable developments in the field have established a niche of leadership theorizing that has expanded the understanding of leadership identities (Carpenter et al., 2015; Crow et al., 2016; Cruz-González et al., 2021; Hérnandez & Murakami, 2016; Mifsud, 2015). Although developments in leadership theorizing continue to be made (Day & Leithwood, 2007), discourse is largely dominated by White, heterosexual, middle-class narratives that determine what constitutes as knowledge (Johnson & Baptiste, 2017), thus perpetuating the exclusion of diverse experiences.

Given the predominately one-sided historical and hegemonic portrayal of leadership research, it is not unlikely that organizational and leadership theorists have neglected the experiences of racialized individuals as factors that contribute to leadership models (Brown, 2005; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Wiley, 2016). Traditionally, scholars perceived and portrayed theories of school administration as "a neutral science without taking into consideration changes in the political arena between majority and minority groups' members such as Blacks and Whites" (Brown, 2005, p. 587). For example, Showunmi et al.'s (2016) study on how ethnicity and gender influence women's leadership experiences, revealed that White women associated gender and class identity categories as predominant factors for influencing their leadership behaviour, while ethnicity and religion took precedence in minority women's discussions. Further, differences emerged between majority and minority women's perceptions of how others "enabled or constrained their progression into leadership positions" (Showunmi et al., 2016, p. 925). A difference that is often omitted from contemporary discourse in fields like

education even though it privileges majority groups in salient ways. Moreover, an analysis of Leithwood et al.'s (2020) "seven strong claims" of successful school leadership reveals that personal leadership resources (research-based qualities of effective leaders presented in the OLF) do not account for race and gender identity markers, despite the scholarship identifying organizational hierarchies as existing in classed, racialized, and gendered arenas (Acker, 2006).

This deficit in literature minimizes the impact that racialized scholars and educators have made in the field of education and negates the contextual nature of leadership. Consequently, the work and experiences of racialized individuals in positions of leadership, such as Black principals, remains an underdeveloped, under-researched, and undervalued topic in educational leadership (Tillman, 2004; Wiley, 2016). Of the studies that are conducted on Black leaders, the intersection of principals' identity markers is not adequately addressed, if at all (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Nickens & Washington, 2017). These studies often see policy role prescription and experience as influencing principals' abilities and/or capacities to perform (Mpungose, 2010) with scarce discussion of how policies and organizational practices impact professional identity. Indeed, insufficient attention has been placed on conceptualizing the complexities of how leaders' social identities influence leadership outcomes (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). Although racialized women may define their leadership in ways that embrace their intersectional identities, they continue to face leadership expectations that are defined by a hegemonic institutional culture that may directly and indirectly influence their professional identity (Showunmi et al., 2016).

Armstrong and Mitchell (2017) add to the discussion of school leadership to explain that the normative leadership practices evident in contemporary societies reflect stereotypical identity constructions of heterosexual, middle class, White males. Arguably, all leaders who aim to

satisfy the status quo encounter challenges in projecting this socially accepted persona, however Black women experience additional barriers as a result of the negative stereotypes associated with structural racism and sexism (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017). The interplay between gendered racism and professional identity construction "makes it difficult for [Black women principals] to determine which facet of their identities is being targeted and what response is appropriate as they traverse the complicated pathways of their administrative lives" (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017, p. 827). While there is a growing presence of Black administrators in predominately White school communities, the increased traction in symbolic representation is cautioned to not obscure the reality that there is little knowledge related to their professional identity construction as the voices of Black women principals are continuously silenced and placed in the margins of ELA (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Gooden, 2012; Wiley, 2016).

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore how seven Black women principals in Ontario construct their professional identities given the lack of tailored theoretical and practical supports, mentorship opportunities, and scholarship on how their intersectional identity informs their principalship. Further, this study identifies and critically analyzes the challenges and successes that contribute to Black women principals' sensemaking as they lead schools. Given the underdevelopment of literature on Black women principals in Canada, this study intends to bridge the knowledge gap, provide opportunities to bring Black voices that have been historically neglected to the fore of contemporary literature, and contribute to existing scholarship on K-12 ELA in a Canadian context. To address this inquiry, I ask the following questions:

1. How do Black women principals in Ontario construct their professional identities?

2. What organizational practices support and/or hinder the construction of Black women principals' professional identities?

    a. How do Black women principals perceive the influence of these practices?

3. How do Black women principals negotiate their gendered and/or racialized identities?

Significance

    By examining the intersection of race and gender as a multifaceted concept and its implications for informing school leadership and professional identity construction, findings from this study contribute to an emerging body of research that centers the intersectional identities of principals as key mechanisms for understanding school leadership. More specifically, the present study provides new insights and proposes novel strategies for advancing leadership theorizing, school leader preparation programs, and ELA mentorship within a Canadian context.

Leadership Theorizing

    This study offers further insights to expand existing leadership frameworks used in school leader preparation programs, professional development workshops, and ELA research. In particular, an acknowledgement of the race-and-gendered identity markers that inform leadership practices may improve an understanding of women principals in general, and Black women principals in particular. Achieving congruence between leadership theorizing and the resulting frameworks used in the aforementioned avenues may contribute to remedying the principalship pipeline. A more coherent framework, may provide attainable opportunities for advancing the recruitment, retention, and support of Black women principals while in their roles.

    As noted by Tillman (2002; 2006), research on the experiences of Black individuals tend

to be categorized with other minority groups or deemed to have merit when written in relation to narratives. This study delineates itself from other existing research on principalship by positioning the narratives of Black woman principals to the fore of contemporary discourse and methodologically achieves this aim by using a life history approach. This positioning is of significance for leadership theorizing considering the developments made in ELA research and provincial policies (e.g. *PPM 119: Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools*) to increase the representation of Black, Indigenous, and racialized women in positions of leadership. While developments for equitable representation and leadership practices continue to be made in research and practice, this study does not take these developments in vain. Rather, it aims to amplify the voices of those that are now invited to sit at the decision-making table, yet still silenced by institutional power structures that exclude their contributions.

School Leader Preparation Programs

As the demographics of Ontario schools change, there is a growing need to recruit and retain Black principals. Statistically, Canadian and U.S. schools will educate more racialized students than previously recorded in history (Wiley, 2016). In Canada, the newly immigrated population is projected to be 24.5% to 30.0% by 2036 and 34.7% to 39.9% of that population will be from visible minority groups (Statistics, 2018). The increase of heterogenous student populations has consequently increased the need for racialized leaders (Ryan et al., 2007; Ryan, 2010). For example, previous studies in the U.S. context have indicated that "there is still a great injustice and an insidious line of thinking in the current practice of educational leadership with regard to how African American principals are selected and placed" (Wiley, 2016, p. 44). While this sentiment is evident in the Canadian context, Campbell (2021) contends that there is a

divergent perception of diversity and difference in America compared to Canada that warrants

closer attention. Campbell (2021) notes:

> in contrast to the US metaphor of a 'melting pot' implying cultural assimilation, the oft used Canadian metaphor is of a 'cultural mosaic' where people integrate into Canadian society but retain, celebrate and value the diversity of their identities, cultures, ethnicities, histories, and experiences. This approach became enshrined in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, established in 1971, and formalised in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, established as law in 1988. (p. 410)

Campbell's (2021) view is of significance considering the study's distinct focus on race-and-

gendered identity and the location specific meanings that terms such as "Black" convey.

Given that most studies conducted on Black principalship are conducted in the U.S., the

present study contributes to an emerging knowledge base of Canadian principalship and

intentionally stands apart from American studies by situating the nuances of being Black and a

woman in Canada, a socio-culturally divergent experience that cannot be taken for granted as

being comparable to American lived experiences. Consequently, findings from this study

contribute to the critical analysis of leadership frameworks and practices deployed in school

leader preparation programs that inform how principals construct their professional identities and

exercise leadership in Canadian schools (Armstrong & McMahon, 2013; Armstrong & Mitchell,

2017)—which in turn influences principal attrition rates (Levin & Bradley, 2019; Snodgrass

Rangel, 2018). Indeed, the precarious status of high levels of turnover (DeAngelis & White,

2011; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Gates et al., 2006; Mascall & Leithwood, 2010; Podgursky et al.,

2016; Snodgrass Rangel, 2018) and lack of Black representation in principalship (Brown, 2005)

has implications for recruitment and retention rates, presenting both financial and structural

challenges for school boards.

Black Women Mentorship

As principals are tasked with meeting diverse school improvement goals and

responsibilities, increased attention has been placed on the mentorship of school leaders to meet these aims (Duncan, 2011; Hansford & Ehrich, 2006; Pariente & Tubin, 2021; Parylo et al., 2012; Sciarappa & Mason, 2014). While the study of mentorship presents an array of contentious and often contrasting definitions, scholars concur that the "distinct interpersonal idiosyncrasies and exchanges that can define and shape the relationship" (Wells, 2013, p. 18) cannot be used to characterize each relationship. Despite this acknowledgment, mainstream scholarship on mentorship tends to focus on the experiences of White and/or male leaders to define mentorship norms and practices. The examination of Black mentorship is of particular significance because Black school leaders "experience difficulty finding mentors who are accepting of their cultural difference and the nature of their scholarship" (Tillman, 2001, p. 299), while Black women are further neglected due to the perception of lacking leadership qualities (Grant & Ghee, 2015; Morris-Washington, 2023; Noe, 1988). Given the underrepresentation of Black women school leaders in Canadian schools (Lomotey, 2019) and the "boys club" culture that exists in the field (Johnson, 2017), the individualized needs of Black women principals are often neglected in mentor relationships. By situating mentorship as a contributor to professional identity construction, the present study further emphasizes the significance of cultivating mentorship opportunities that account for the intersecting identities of Black women principals.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study centers on the tenets of intersectionality. Celebrated as the heir to critical legal studies, civil rights scholarship, and feminist theories (Hill Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1991), intersectionality is an analytical tool that claims space for understanding women's lives as being constructed by intersecting systems of oppression

(Carastathis, 2014; Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 1998; Hill Collins, 2019). Intersectionality arose in the 1990s following the decline in the social advances of the civil rights era of the 1960s seen by legal scholars in America (Pasque & Nicholson, 2011). Early writers such as Crenshaw (1991) and Hill Collins (1998) recognized that innovative strategies and theories were needed to address the forms of oppression that were rapidly re-emerging and the shortcomings of feminist theories to remedy inadequacies in public policy that neglected social injustices. The concept of intersectionality emanated from the U.S. court system's failure to acknowledge Black women's experiences of discrimination as a product of racism and sexism. Crenshaw (1989) asserts that when addressing anti-discrimination law, courts used the experiences of White women and Black men to rationalize experiences of sexism and racism respectively. At that time, feminist theories omitted experiences that were unique to Black women by validating White women's experiences as the benchmark for all women's experiences. As well, anti-racist theories recognized the racial struggles faced by Black men but neglected to acknowledge racism experienced by Black women. Thus, intersectionality was advantageous in creating a space that acknowledged Black women's existence as a product of both race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989, Hill Collins, 1998, Burgess-Proctor, 2006). Albeit discussion of intersectionality began in law, the concept has increasingly dispersed to other disciplines, with educational theorists and practitioners using its tenets to understand school related dilemmas (Bešić, 2020; Bitton & Jones, 2021).

Initially, intersectionality was perceived as a "single axis framework" that identified individuals as possessing distinct markers, however ongoing developments have broadened its understanding to address how multiple markers such as class, sex, gender, and race converge to shape distinct experiences of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244). Crenshaw (1991) cautions that intersectionality is not intended to be used as "totalizing theory of identity" (p.

1244) but rather a tool for interrogating and understanding how the social world is constructed

by accounting for multiple identities. In Hancock's (2013) view, intersectionality is readily used

to analyze how power dynamics inform socially constructed manifestations of oppression such as

sexism, racism, and classism. As an analytical tool, education researchers have used

intersectionality to interrogate educational injustices while highlighting the relational dimensions

of humans and society (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Cho et al., 2013). The notion of a multiple-axis

approach is taken up further in Crenshaw's (1991) discussion of three necessary dimensions of

intersectionality that encompass individuals' social experiences: (a) structural, (b) political, and

(c) representative. It is within the tenets of these dimensions that intersectionality's contributions

to this study and the understanding of racialized leaders' socially constructed and subjugated

identities may be realized. Each dimension is briefly discussed.

To begin, structural intersectionality explains that "where systems of race, gender, and

class domination converge. . . intervention strategies based solely on the experiences of women

who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help to women who

because of race and class face different obstacles" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1246). Second, political

intersectionality purports that Black woman are, "situated within at least two subordinated

groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1252). The

complexity of this "double jeopardy" (Aaron, 2020) lies in the limitations for both anti-racism

and feminism to completely capture an all-encompassing understanding of racism and sexism

given that their conceptualizations depict solitary experiences. Consequently, the representation

and advance of one group's interest implicitly denies the validation of another group, further

reinforcing what Crenshaw (1991) asserts is the subordination of racialized people. The final

dimension, representation intersectionality, is concerned with how racialized women are

culturally represented. In particular, "the production of images of women of color and contestations over those images tend to ignore the intersectional interests of women of colour" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1283). These cultural images inform and perpetuate race-and-gendered hierarchies that further marginalize racialized women. When used in tandem, the three dimensions illustrate the overlapping patterns and structures of subordination that help understand negative stereotypes and identity constructions that invalidate marginalized experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). As well as provide a rationale for understanding educational dilemmas that center on equity and social justice at both the organizational and individual level of school governance.

The use of intersectionality in ELA research offers several significant contributions. First, the multifaceted understanding of intersectionality presents opportunities for researchers to better interrogate the relationship between identity markers and school leadership. Second, intersectionality provides a generalizable framework for delineating how terms associated with the study of ELA (e.g. neoliberalism, school improvement, policy analysis, equity, social justice, governance) are operationalized in studies that address racialized leaders. In Chapter 2, I continue this discussion further by outlining why the connection between Black women principals' intersectional identities and their professional practice is significant. As well, I highlight the leadership barriers Black women principals traditionally face as a result of how their identities are perceived by students, teachers, parents, and the school community at large. Finally, Crenshaw's (1991) three-dimensional view of intersectionality is beneficial for conceptualizing the phenomenon of Black women principals in studies that situate identity as a key driver for successful leadership outcomes. As researchers interested in ELA continue to investigate principalship, serious attention to the significance of intersectionality in addressing

leadership experience is needed. Indeed, of the studies that examine the relationship between intersectionality and school leadership, a robust analysis of oppression in relation to power structures is missing. For example, in their critical review of literature on intersectionality and educational leadership, Agosto and Roland (2018) note that several studies omit discussions of how individual experiences and identities are shaped by structural systems of power and offer toned-down critiques of oppression. Suggesting an underrepresentation of racialized leaders' intersectional identities and its impact on leaders' professional practices and agency. An essential conversation that this study aims to address.

Looking Forward

This study is structured into five additional chapters. Chapter 2 offers a critical review of relevant literature on how Black women principals' professional identities is represented in K-12 scholarship. The discussion provides a historical foundation for understanding professional identity as a theoretical construct and highlights its intersection, or lack thereof, with literature on gender and race in education leadership discourse.

Chapter 3 explicates the use of a life history methodology. Discussion begins by mapping the research design and purposeful recruitment strategy that was deployed, followed by the data collection and analysis processes. As well as my commitment to maintain trustworthiness and conduct sound and ethical research.

Chapter 4 presents the findings that emerged from the data collection and analysis processes. As each life story unfolded, specs of the "shared authority" (Yow, 2014) established between the participants and I during the data collection for crafting their professional experience are woven into the narratives, reflecting a dance between cultivation and the

processes of support. This is reflected as a combination of participant excerpts and my narratives.

Chapter 5 offers a rich discussion of the three themes that emerged: 1) superhero in the morning, martyr by lunch: race-and-gender negotiations; 2) principals are in the people business: micropolitics and relationship discourses, and 3) Black leadership can be lonely leadership: mentorship networks and support. Drawing on the conceptual framework of intersectionality, new analytical perspectives are presented that texture how professional identity is operationalized given participants' understanding of school leadership. The final chapter, Chapter 6, provides a synthesis of the dissertation to re-orient the reader to how the study addressed the four research questions. This is followed by a discussion of possible directions for future research.

Chapter Two: A Scoping Literature Review

I bring something to the table as a woman of color….if it's the only thing you focus on, then it's a danger, and if you never talk about it then it's a danger.

—Kerry Washington

The extant literature on Black women principals demonstrates a predominantly unified—yet at times divergent—perspective of the sensemaking, dilemmas, organizational supports, and boundaries of exercising leadership that Black women principals encounter while constructing their professional identity. Studies contend that in their tenure, Black women principals' experiences are situated in socially, culturally, and politically contentious contexts (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Brown, 2016) as a result of their racialized and gendered experiences, challenging them to renegotiate their identities and find innovative strategies for navigating boundaries of exclusion. This chapter builds on this discussion by presenting a scoping review of literature that examines how Black women principals and the concept of professional identity are represented in K-12 education literature. Recognized for its ability to capture a "broader conceptual range" of literature, scoping reviews provide a "wide-angle lens" that maps the breadth and depth of literature in a given field (Davis et al., 2009; Godfrey, 2020; Levac et al., 2010; Peterson et al., 2017), all while maintaining the approach of traditional systematic reviews.

The review begins by delineating the political and socio-cultural histories of Black school leadership in the Canadian and U.S. landscape. This section also situates existing literature on the significance of school leadership and aims to provide clarity to the depiction of Black women principals in prevalent literature. Next, the second section synthesizes research on how professional identity is conceptualized while highlighting how emerging discourse has identified a collectivist culture and spirituality as key drivers that may inform why and how Black women

lead schools in varying contexts. Following this, the third section explores the theoretical and methodological underpinnings that shape existing studies on Black women given the growing need to examine the empirical conception of race-and-gendered identity constructions. The fourth section reviews the academic literature on intracultural challenges faced by Black women leaders and calls attention to the process of shifting identities and negotiations deployed by Black women to obtain mentorship, career advancement, and achieve favourable school outcomes. The final section of this chapter addresses the literature on school leader preparation programs and their implications for the recruitment and retention of principals. By interrogating how professional identity and Black women principals are represented in K-12 education scholarship, this review seeks to highlight literature that recommends novel perspectives for scholars undertaking research in ELA generally, and on principalship specifically.

Black School Leadership in the Canadian and U.S. Context

While this section provides a broad view of Black school leadership in Canada and the U.S., it would be remiss of me to advance this section without presenting a reminder of how the terms Canada and the U.S. are operationalized in this study. Given that the definitions section that precedes Chapter 1 already identified the similarities and differences between the two countries, I want to draw attention to how the K-12 education system in Canada is structured. Particularly, I want to caution that although I map the historical accounts of Black school leadership in Canada, this discussion is not intended to portray a federal governance of the country's various education systems as education is provincially governed. Consequently, the policies, organizational structures, school leader preparation programs, and professional associations of each province and territory differ. Rather, the comparisons drawn and

explanations presented are for the purpose of highlighting the socio-cultural and historical implications that have created or are a byproduct of systemic effects.

Gender-and-Racial Significance to School Leadership

The omission of Black women principals' experiences in organizational and leadership models, highlights the theoretical assumption that leadership models are race and/or gender neutral and that what works for the majority (i.e. White men or women) will work for the minority (i.e. Black men or women). Tillman (2006), writing within the U.S. context, claims that Blacks and racialized scholars are increasingly conducting insider research in their own communities due to a lack of research conducted on their experiences. Black experiences tend to be lumped into the same group of umbrella terms such as 'minority' and 'racialized' without consideration for intra-cultural differences and experiences (Tillman, 2006). The cultural standpoint for Black people possesses social, political, and cultural experiences that are embedded in the histories of racial tensions (Tillman, 2006). A standpoint which adds to, rather than subtracts from, the understanding school leadership as a multifaceted concept, and has implications for the development of leadership theorizing. For example, in their well-known review of educational leadership literature, Leithwood et al. (2008) assert that successful school leadership rests on "seven strong claims" which, according to them, have been supported by robust empirical evidence:

1. School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.

2. Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices.

3. The ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices-not the practices themselves-demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work.

4. School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions.

5. School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed.

6. Some patterns of distribution are more effective than others.

7. A small handful of personal traits explains a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness.

Of the seven claims, two claims illustrate the absence of the experiences of Black school leaders conventional accounts of successful leadership. For instance, in the second claim, Leithwood et al. (2008) assert that almost all leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices. Specifically, four core practices or leadership qualities are identified as contributing to successful leadership. These practices are (a) building vision and setting directions, (b) understanding and developing people, (c) redesigning the organization, and (d) managing the teaching and learning programme. While these practices seem evidently related to leadership practice, scholars (e.g. Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Lumby & Morrison, 2010; Mponguse, 2010) have argued for a deeper interrogation of the relationship between principal practices and professional identity construction to understand the repertoire of school leader practices. In particular, the perpetuation of normative practices of school administration has implications for the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion that racialized leaders must navigate to exercise leadership (Lumby & Morrison, 2010)—which may not be realized in the prescriptive repertoire presented above. To this effect, Leithwood et al.'s (2008) second claim perpetuates a narrative where "the normalizing power of patriarchy and whiteness interacts with the hidden curriculum of administration and leadership to marginalize and exclude different identities and to control and

contain administrative practices" (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017, p. 836).

Leithwood et al.'s (2008) seventh claim goes beyond the discussion of leadership practices to examine the personal traits of leaders through the introduction of personal leadership resources (PLRs). In a revisited discussion of the seven strong claims, Leithwood et al. (2020) explain that PLRs focus on the non-behavioural and non-practical traits of leadership with attention placed on the cognitive, social, and psychological resources that leaders tap into (Leithwood et al., 2020). This examination perceives the effectiveness of practices implemented by school leaders solely as a product of the interaction between each PLR. Since PLRs provide an individualist understanding of the traits that separate a leader from a non-leader, leadership frameworks using PLRs may neglect to illustrate leadership practices as relational endeavours that surpass the individual. Showunmi et al. (2016) explain that although contemporary leadership approaches such as transformational and distributed leadership place significance on leaders' impact on followers, studies continue to discount how the leader-to-follower relationship may be influenced by hegemonic identity imbalances.

Embedded in the relationships formed by leaders are the biases, stereotypes, and discriminations that pose as a barrier to exercising leadership (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Showunmi et al., 2016), which may explain the "high proportion of variation in practices enacted by school leaders" (Leithwood et al., 2020, p. 15). Specifically, the PLRs do not account for race and gender identity markers which, pose implications for a school leaders' ability, or lack thereof, to make decisions, access resources and professional networks, and enact policies in their schools. A salient theme that follows the assertion of claims two and seven is the notion that successful leaders in all contexts follow a linear path towards successful practice without consideration for the role that social and organizational structures have on the experiences of

individuals situated at different intersections of social identity.

As leadership research has developed, scholars have called for a deeper interrogation into the relationship between leadership research and diversity. Specifically, these scholars refute the assumption that leadership is inherently gender and culture neutral as studies have evidenced that both gender and culture present implications for leaders' behaviours and effectiveness (See Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Cruz-González et al., 2021; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015; Showunmi et al., 2016). Indeed, insufficient attention has been placed on identifying and understanding the complexities of how "gender combined with other social identities (such as ethnic and cultural identities) influences leadership" (Showunmi et al., 2016, p. 919), yet organizational hierarchies exist in classed, racialized, and gendered arenas (Acker, 2006).

Black Leadership in the U.S. Context

A recurring theme in studies examining the intersection of race and leadership is the perception that organizational approaches enacted by racialized leaders represent inadequate knowledge and are inferior to approaches enacted by White leaders (Jones, 2002; Nickens & Washington, 2017; Tillman, 2004, 2005). This section situates the historical and racial tensions that have shaped the access to education, acceptance of, or lack thereof, and presence of Black school leaders in the U.S. and Canada. Scholarship on the experiences of Black principals' role in education became prevalent after the end of Black enslavement in the U.S. in what is termed as the pre-*Brown vs. Board of Education* era (pre-Brown era; Richardson, 2014; Tillman, 2004). The pre-Brown era was a period of time defined by the segregation of Blacks from participation in social institutions that were built to service Whites (Crenshaw, 1988). As such, the responsibility for constructing and maintaining schools in the U.S. for Black children fell upon Blacks who assumed the positions necessary for leading schools (Tillman, 2004). Although

schools were segregated, the Black community valued and respected the opportunities for social

mobility that schools provided to Black children, which consequently placed value for the role of

the Black principal (Richardson, 2014; Siddle Walker, 2000).

From a cultural standpoint, Black principals were regarded as gatekeepers whose "ethos

of service" obliged them to transfer their knowledge and cultural capital to the Black community,

thus opening more doors of access to education for others (Richardson, 2014). The collective

belief of Black communities was that education was a vital tool for creating opportunities for

future enhancement for their children (Richardson, 2014). In their principalship, principals

operationalized their agency to develop resources (e.g. funding and materials) that advanced the

success of schools, established the school as a cultural symbol of the Black community, and

enacted school district level policies and curricula (Savage, 2001). The establishment of agency

in a segregated school system provided opportunities for fostering a sense of self-reliance among

Blacks and an understanding that their progression in the field had implications for the social,

political, and economic advancement of Black communities (Richardson, 2014; Savage, 2001;

Siddle Walker, 2000; Siddle Walker & Archung, 2003).

The feat to obtaining a position in education was not always smooth nor linear as "Blacks

gained access to education under a different set of circumstances than Whites, for whom

education was an entitlement" (Richardson, 2014, p. 19). Despite the agency possessed by Black

principals at the local level, the value of their position at a district level was perceived as inferior

to their White counterparts (Crenshaw, 1988). The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme

Court decision—which occurred during the American Civil Rights movement—ruled against the

racial segregation of public schools in the U.S. and intended to diminish race-based inequities in

schools, however the White backlash to the ruling resulted in the drastic termination of Black

teachers and principals (Lutz, 2017; Richardson, 2014; Wiley, 2016). The backlash conveyed the

message that White administrators viewed racialized educational leaders as inferior. Due to the

value that Black communities placed on schools, the termination of Black leaders at the school

level possessed significant meaning for parents, students, and teachers of local Black

communities (Brown, 2005; Tillman, 2004).

Black Leadership in the Canadian Context

Although considerable scholarship on Black principals and Black education has been

written in the context of the U.S., the incongruence between the American experiences reported

and those of Canada's Black history shed light on misrepresented accounts of Black individuals.

Mainstream literature of Canada's history narrates Ontario as a province defined by British

accomplishments while negating the injustices and neglect of racialized people, including

Indigenous peoples, in its formation (McLaren, 2004). In the pre-Brown era, superintendent of

education Egerton Ryerson built Canada's public education system on the foundation of "moral

superiority and universality" that focused on maintaining loyalty to Britain (McLaren, 2004).

The blueprint for public education rested on the promise of moral education to all Canadians

without discrimination—a virtue that was advanced in 1849 by Member of Parliament Malcom

Cameron's School Bill which introduced segregated schools. Demystifying the lore that Canada

was a safe haven from racism, McLaren (2004) notes that:

> British settlers believed that Canada, as part of the British Empire, was a moral example
> to all nations on earth. The abolition of slavery was seen as a moral victory for the
> Empire over the United States, and the fact that thousands of fugitive slaves fled to
> Canada via the Underground Railroad to live in freedom reinforced a sense of superiority
> among white citizens whose myths presented Canada as a land of freedom and equal
> opportunity by virtue of its British character. (p. 29)

In response to Canada's favourable perception as a free country, Blacks sought migration to

Canada as a refuge from the widespread discrimination faced in the U.S. However, the perceived

promises of integration did not match the realities of racism that existed in Canada. Much like the U.S., Blacks were excluded from participation in social institutions such as schools and churches, yet these experiences have traditionally been ignored or misrepresented in historical recounts (McLaren, 2004). Whites were apprehensive of Blacks and opposed their integration into White communities and public schools.

The increasing pressures of segregation prompted Black teachers to start their own schools, receiving assistance from American philanthropists and missionaries. It is worth noting that private schools developed by and/or for Blacks were also open to White and Indigenous students to attend as the notion of segregated schools was not a favoured concept in Black communities. These actions, although not voluntarily made, are preferentially perceived in prevalent scholarship as Blacks' efforts to promote and maintain segregated schools out of comfort and security (McLaren, 2004). The realities of discrimination and racism are silenced by literature that perpetuates the assumption that the Black community was segregationist and opposed desegregated schools. McLaren (2004) reminds us that although recounts of Canada's Black history reveal a skewed understanding of Blacks' experiences of racism in segregated schools, narratives portrayed in most literature on pro-segregation by the Black community have not been adequately questioned in historical scholarship. When examining contemporary studies on the intersection of race and school leadership, it may be beneficial to understand the similarities and divergences of racism in the U.S. and Canada as the tenets of segregation and Canada's Black history has implications for the inclusion and exclusion of Black school leaders in the post-Brown era.

Post-Brown Era

The *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, although seen as an opportunity for hope,

presented problematic implications for Blacks in the teaching profession with aftershock effects

of underrepresentation still felt decades later (Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017). Desegregation

resulted in patterns of displacement for Black educators where schools were physically mixed

but remained, and still remain to this day, as symbolically White (Bybee, 2016; Fultz, 2004;

Tillman, 2004; Winings, 2019). Whiteness as an ideology in practice can be manifested in

various ways at the school level. A few include: (a) how White leadership is portrayed in

physical spaces by displaying pictures of past White principals and Queen Elizabeth

(Nyereyemhuka, 2019), (b) how cultural texts such as school yearbooks and reading lists

represent role appropriation and Eurocentric shared values (Antrop-Gonzalez et al., 2006; Bybee,

2016; Winings, 2019), and (c) the overrepresentation of Black students in special education

programs (Jordan, 2005) given the existing historical myth that Whites are more competent than

non-Whites (Pollock, 2008). These symbolic manifestations provide a glimpse of how the school

is constructed as a site that continues to perpetuate and uphold the values of "White normativity"

(Bybee, 2016). Consequently, the profession of principalship has historically been dominated by

White men and women (Lomotey, 2019). The residual impact of school segregation, and the

resulting consequences of Black displacement, have shaped the boundaries of inclusion and

exclusion of Black principals in the profession in the post-Brown era. For example, in a review

of literature on Black women principals, Lomotey (2019) notes that of the principals who are

Black, a considerable number are women. Further when racialized women move into positions of

school leadership, White men become less supportive of the racialized leader. By maintaining

the hegemonic status quo of leadership that privileges White narratives, Black principals,

specifically women, continue to be oppressed by the systems that perpetuate sexism, misogyny,

and racism (Hill Collins, 2004; Lomotey, 2019; Shorter-Gooden, 2004).

To this end, the historical background of Black experiences in principalship presented above seeks to situate the nuances of race and leadership that are problematized in this study. It would be remiss of me to discuss the significance of Black school leadership without an understanding of the challenges and histories that mapped contemporary practices, leadership theorizing, and perspectives.

The Role of Black Women Principals

As cultural symbols for the Black community, Black principals occupy a unique space of significance that unifies students, parents, and the school community (Davis & Madsend, 2009). In particular, "Black principals make a difference for Black students" (Lomotey, 2019, p. 335), with a significant number of Black principals identifying as women. For a long time, women had been the object of research studies, yet public policy and research that focused on women did not grant space for them, as a group, to be producers of knowledge. In other words, neither research nor policy truly represented the interests of women (Harding, 2004; Landau, 2014; Longino, 1993). Despite the developments in research on women, efforts to integrate the perspectives of Black women specifically are yet to gain successful traction in the social sciences (Simien, 2004). In Lenz' (2004) perspective, instead of preserving the status quo, marginalized groups occupy a distinct position that enables a powerful and unique view of the culture from which they are marginalized. Further, this standpoint represents an outsider-within position, where groups are included in the dominant cultural practices of the social context they inhabit, but are unable to fully participate in the practices for various reasons (Lenz, 2004).

These outsider-within positionings present challenges for Black women principals when constructing, understanding, and negotiating their professional identities. For example, while attempting to have their experiences legitimized as sources of knowledge, Black women cannot

choose to fight only one battle. They must contend to multiple struggles as their layered

experiences have distinct and interrelated components, including gender, race, socio economic

status, among many other intersections (Simien, 2004). Aside from facing many forms of "isms",

Black women are challenged with the complexities of gendered racism. In addition to

experiencing marginalization in historically White institutions, the issue of gender inequality for

Black women also occurs in Black communities (Hill Collins, 2000, 2004; hooks, 1984; Simien,

2004) in part because of the patriarchal nature of Black man-woman relationships that were

shaped during the civil rights movement (Simien, 2004). During the civil rights movement,

women were excluded from leadership positions as these positions were strictly reserved for

men. Consequently, "black women were not recognized for their numerous political activities,

such as behind-the-scenes organizing, mobilizing, and fundraising" (Simien, 2004, p. 84). This

exclusion has also been perpetuated in the Black church through biblical teachings and the

restriction of Black women from key decisions (Harris, 1999; Simien, 2004).

Education research indicates that Black principals generally, and Black women in

particular, construct their professional identities in ways that differ from their counterparts

(Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017). For instance, Armstrong and Mitchell's (2017) study on

professional identity, highlighted that Black women principals have less access to mentoring,

support, power, and avenues to promotion, which are factors that "influence how they construct

and negotiate their professional identities and how they administer their schools" (p. 826).

Similarly, in the U.S. context, it has been reported that in order to overcome the racial and

gender-based barriers they face, Black principals adjust their beliefs and personality in order to

attain appointment to principalship (Cruz-González et al., 2021; Nickens & Washington, 2017).

In Lomotey's (2019) perspective, the ways in which the intersection of race and gender are

perceived by the dominant group in historically White institutions, presents challenges for racialized individuals exercising leadership. When working in a male-dominated setting with restrictive social, cultural, and political norms (Cruz-González et al., 2019), women principals, particularly racialized women, are subjected to gendered racism. This leads them to reconstruct their professional identities in order to lead their schools successfully, specifically in situations where racist stereotypes held by students, staff, parents, and colleagues work to undermine the respect and trust in racialized principals' professional abilities (Cruz-González et al., 2019).

While coming to the conclusion of this section, one might notice that a substantive review of literature on women leadership in education is omitted—this is intentional. This study deployed a scoping review to examine broad topics, address questions of what knowledge is available (Godfrey, 2020; Peterson et al., 2017), and contextualize knowledge in regard to "identifying the current state of understanding, [and] identifying the sorts of things we know and do not know" (Anderson et al., 2008, p. 10). Additionally, Hallinger (2013) reminds us that "well-crafted reviews identify blind spots, blank spots and intellectual 'dry wells' in the landscape of theory and empirical research" (p. 127). While the area of women leadership in education is developing, substantial discourse on this topic emerged in select areas such as teacher education, higher education, adult education, and counselling. Within this discourse, specific attention to the experiences of Black women tend to be neglected (Smith & Nkomo., 2001). This chapter aims to counter the focus on hegemonic structures for knowledge creation and illuminate "blank spots" through a narrowed focus on the race-and-gendered identities of school leaders. Particularly, this study centers the argument of studying Black women principals as legitimate sources on their own without comparisons to its counterparts to obtain an identity. Consequently, this argument is reflected in the review of literature and carried forward in the

remaining chapters. I caution that the ways in which the discussion of Black women school leaders is taken-up in this chapter should not be perceived as a reflection of or in contrast to foci which have historically purported a racially blind view of leadership theory.

By deploying a scoping review and a narrowed focus on the intersection of race and gender, this review of literature: a) delineates itself from traditional reviews of leadership that reflect a hegemonic perspective of leadership and b) emphasizes the significance of building an independent body of literature that addresses "intellectual dry wells" without responding to questions raised in other areas of inquiry.

In examining how Black women principals' professional identities are represented in literature, the social, cultural, and political histories that shape how identity markers are stratified need to be better understood in ELA research. In the next section, this discussion is taken up further as I explicate the significance of this inquiry in relation to organizational and leadership models used in the field.

Conceptualizing Professional Identity in Relation to Black Women Principals

The extant literature on professional identity generally defines the concept as "associated with one's occupation and its ascribed social meaning, and internalizing a professional identity allows individuals and groups to self-regulate, act ethically and confidently, and convince others of their expertise and competence" (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017, p. 827). Brown (2016) maintains that there are seven themes which explicate the professional identity:

1. Professional identity construction is a process

2. Professional identity development includes an ongoing integration of internal and external factors

3. Professional identity is evolving

4. Professional identity is a developmental process that evolves through one's life and starts at childhood

5. Professional identity is adaptive

6. Professional identity is highly correlated to personal identity

7. Professional identity is a learned phenomenon

All seven themes indicate that professional identity is developed through the understanding of the world in which we are situated. For principals, their response to the cultural and socio-political environment supports the development of their professional identity that is then negotiated through interactions with students, teachers, parents, superiors, and stakeholders (Brown, 2016). When conducting a review of literature, the term professional identity is presented in select studies as non-mutually exclusive to race-and-gendered identity. Although studies contain discussion of professional identity, only Armstrong and Mitchell's (2017) contributions, identify the term as part of the keywords. In lieu of professional identity, studies have used the terms racial identity and leadership identity. Highlighting that how the term is conceptualized within the field may vary depending on the context in which it is applied. Studies do not explicate the role of a principal using traditional terms of administration and governance, but instead allude to these concepts through narrations of their intersectional experiences. Although some role related values may be shared by both Black and non-Black principals, narratives presented do not illustrate intergroup values. Rather, values that are shared within the groups of being a woman, Black, and the unique space where those markers intersect are discussed.

For Black women principals, their professional identity is composed of two different yet

co-existing identities: (a) institutional identity and (b) "shadow identity". The institutional

identity is framed around objectivity; administrative competencies, roles, and behaviours, while

the "shadow identity" is constructed by racial and gender expectations that Black women do not

fit (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017). The incongruence to the race-and-gendered expectations is a

result of the norms centered on White and male privilege that dominate role behaviour in

principalship. Contributing to the discussion on professional identity, Brown (2016) explains that

a crucial component of professional identity is how individuals see themselves in relation to their

experiences. Findings note that in addition to formal learning environments such as school leader

preparation programs, informal settings such as family and community have shaped Black

women's role association. It is within this understanding that we can begin to map out the values

of mental toughness, perseverance, communal leadership, care, and spirituality as foundational

building blocks of Black women principals' professional identity. Among the values identified,

care and spirituality stand out as distinct to Black women's experiences and warrant a deeper

examination.

Identity Shifts, Pivots, and Negotiations

The feat to countering negative stereotypes associated with being Black and a woman is a

burden that Black women principals carry to prove their competence and build trust with their

school community (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017). Armstrong and Mitchell (2017) maintain that

for principals, this endeavour involves, "suppressing or erasing aspects of their salient identities

that conflicted with dominant administrative identities, and it varied depending on different

stakeholder groups and situational contexts" (p. 831). Specifically, Black women principals aim

to avoid being labelled as the "Angry Black Woman" when they raise their voice to advocate for

their school or as incompetent when they underperform in comparison to their counterparts

(Aaron, 2020; Brown, 2016). This shift or pivot, results in Black women principals presenting different identities that meet the needs of others while compromising their identity. Brown (2016) asserts that some principals go to the extent of needing to remind themselves to react as a principal rather than a Black woman, in fear of being perceived as threatening. By choosing to negotiate their identities, Black women principals inadvertently uphold the hegemonic structures and schooling traditions that aim to minimize their identities. In instances where shifting and negotiation is not a preferred choice, Black women principals deploy their coercive, legitimate, reward, information, expert, and referent power to navigate their positions and lead their schools (Johnson, 2017). Although, this is an act of resistance to shifting identities, the strategic use of positional power in this context may also be perceived as an act of shifting in one's leadership style for the means of persevering in a historically White institution.

Intracultural Challenges and Men Leadership

Sexism and gender politics within the Black community are constructs that exist to marginalize and limit the social mobility of Black women. In McClellan's (2012) view, most literature has interrogated Black women leaders' narratives of oppression in relation to White patriarchal systems while simultaneously omitting the experiences of gendered discrimination from same-race groups. Historically, women have been excluded from administrative positions within the field of education. The male exclusive status of the National Education Association in the 1800s and preference for male experiences in textbooks, illustrate a prejudicial attitude towards women's access to leadership positions in the formative year of education administration (Williams, 2013). This pattern of exclusion, what Williams (2013) defines as a culture of male leadership, continues to privilege Black men on the basis of gender. The deployment of sexism, antagonism, and the lack of support from Black men towards Black women is argued to be

"misdirected hostilities" that stem from a loss of power due to racism (McClellan, 2012). Aaron (2020) contends that, while in positions of leadership, Black women principals encounter antagonism from same race colleagues who challenge their Blackness, competence, as well as parents who discriminate against the choice of braided hairstyles. Consequently, traditional constructions of leadership are rooted in masculinity that purport qualities of aggression, risk-taking, and intelligence as the norm for acquiring control. This construction has implications for; Black women principals' experiences and enactment of leadership, how this is perceived by members of their school community, and how they view their role identity as a principal (Aaron, 2020; McClellan, 2012; Williams, 2013). For example, Williams' (2013) study of African American women principals noted that some principals understood and modeled their professional identity from the "good" and "extremely calm" Black male administrators from their childhood. Suggesting that role identity construction and emulation for Black women may begin prior to their participation in formalized school leader preparation programs.

Although there is extensive scholarship that addresses negative experiences of intracultural discrimination, McClellan (2012) cautions us not to position women against men. Historically, Black women's struggles for civil rights were acts of resistance for group survival, not individual gain. Given the collectivist nature of the Black community, it should be noted that "to confront issues affecting Black women without including Black men and vice versa is problematic because it weakens the communal fight against oppression" (McClellan, 2012, p. 97). Lastly, McClellan (2012) argues for allyship between Black men and women in the fight for Black liberation—emancipation from both sexism and racism and uniting Black men and women as partners.

Othermothers: Embracing the Collectivist Culture

Echoing the sentiment of the Ubuntu philosophy "I am because we are. We are because I am", critical scholarship on Black communities has identified the Black culture as one that is rooted in collectivism (McClellan, 2012). During Black enslavement, Blacks created and maintained communal relationships where caretaking of all children became the responsibility of Black women. Post-enslavement, collectivist practices have become a staple feature of the Black culture and have informed Black educators' responsibility for educating and nurturing Black children (Aaron, 2020). These educators, whom Hill Collins (2000) refers to as "othermothers", teach and lead Black children as "deliberate acts of love, nurturance, guidance, and community rebuilding" (Aaron, 2020, p. 148). While also using their own experiences as aunts, caregivers, and mothers to guide their enactment of care for their community. This sense of shared responsibility and relationship informs Black women principals' leadership styles and centres their professional identity on the role of caretaking; of students, teachers, and parents in relation to students' success and needs (Aaron, 2020). Often choosing to serve in urban communities and enact social justice leadership in hopes of restoring "losses" faced by the Black community resulting from the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. To this end, to be a Black women principal is to be an othermother.

Spirituality and the Call to Service

Given that principals work in public facing institutions, discourse on maintaining accountability to superiors, the school board, and the community is well developed in mainstream literature. However, when examining the experiences of Black women principals, accountability is also rendered to a higher power—God. Johnson (2017) explains that a central tenet of Black women principals' professional identity is rooted in spirituality. Particularly, a call to serve urban schools with the task of improving schools and communities for Black children. In

writing about spirituality, McClellan (2012) reminds us that Black women are not a monolithic group nor are their spiritual practices, therefore discussion in this section is inclusive of both religious and non-religious contexts of spirituality.

Understanding the connection to spirituality not only helps to reflect on the motivators for Black women entering principalship but also rationalize their commitment to servicing schools and communities in the face of barriers that marginalize their identity in the profession. For the Black community, the church is a symbol of autonomy, communal identity (Cozart, 2010), and a site where "strict patterns of behavior for Black women and Black men are reinforced" (McClellan, 2012, p. 92). The shared value of perseverance in principalship may at times challenge the mental toughness of a Black women principal, thus spiritual integrity and moral leadership demonstrate how Black women perceive their role as a principal and how this informs their practices (Aaron, 2020). Although discussion of Black women's spirituality has been written under the framework of womanist theology, it is minimally explored in scholarship of education leadership. Emanating from the Black Christian spiritual discourse of the 1980s, womanist theology provides a theoretical lens that challenges the traditions of patriarchy and sexism in the Black Christian experience by examining women's religious meanings with the intent to provide political power and economic liberation (McClellan, 2012). McClellan (2012) argues that this omission neglects the understanding of how Black women principals perceive the purpose of their role, make meaning of shared values, and enact their leadership. As well as opportunities to understand how spirituality in practice may be reflected as physical Bibles on principals' desks or reciting prayers before entering the physical space of a school (Wells, 2013).

The Pathway to Principalship

Two fundamental discussions that have been vaguely addressed in the selected scholarship of Black women principals are: (1) the role that school leader preparation programs play on professional identity construction and (2) the implications of understanding professional identity construction for school board recruitment and retention purposes. Before I entertain additional literature into this review, I must preface that my aim is not to minimize the significant contributions that are addressed in the selected studies, rather I aim to bring attention to a nuanced perspective of the complexity of these topics into the discussion.

Mentorship and Career Ascension

The provision and maintenance of mentorship relationships is a necessary contributing factor to Black women principals' success in breaking the glass ceiling (Wells, 2013). The transition to leadership is a challenging path given the "boys club" culture that exists in the field, privileging White and Black men to higher chances for promotion and support within the school community (Johnson, 2017). Although Black men may be privileged on the basis of gender, this acceptance is limited in comparison to White men given the effects of racism. Black women principals are then excluded from mentorship opportunities, access to information, and insights from collegial relationships that provide guidance for career progression. The mentorship dilemma for Black women principals is two-fold: (1) a lack of strategic mentorship, and (2) the neglect of mentees' individualized needs. In Well's (2013) perspective, access to mentorship relationships must be strategic since creating mentee-mentor relationships is a tedious endeavour. However, there can be a shortage of authentic mentors, resulting in connections developed from convenience rather than compatibility. When authentic relationships are inhibited, mentors may not acknowledge, understand, nor meet the specific individual needs of mentees (Wells, 2013).

This gap may result in mentorship where surveillance to meet accountability measures, deadlines, and administrative tasks take precedence. Even in instances where Black women mentors are available, Black women are still challenged with overcoming judgements of receiving preferential treatment and/or difficulty in viewing Black women as authority figures, furthering inhibiting the success and effectiveness of existing mentorship structures for Black women (Wells, 2013).

In spite of these dilemmas, Black women principals initiate their own networks of support. Metaphorically, these groups are the "sisterhood of Black women leaders" (Johnson, 2017) consisting of women within and beyond the school community. Particularly, social groups such as academic associations, sororities, and friendships. The relationships fostered within this sisterhood create unique spaces for emotional and professional support that is tailored to the race-and-gendered experiences of Black women (Johnson, 2017). In their tenure, Black women principals often rely on mentorship from other Black leaders in advanced leadership positions who are willing to take them under their wing—providing leadership opportunities and experiences that would have otherwise not been available. Johnson (2017) maintains that this positive experience also serves as encouragement for current Black women principals to mentor aspiring Black women leaders. It is important to note that Black women principals' mentorship dilemma presents implications that surpass principalship and are carried forward into superintendency, creating an uphill battle for Black women principals in their career progression (Edwards, 2016).

Principal Recruitment Processes

Among the challenges faced by urban schools are increasing rates of principal turnover (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). Principal turnover has received

considerable attention in leadership literature as school boards have struggled to manage the number of principals who change positions and schools or leave the profession during their tenure (DeAngelis & White, 2011; Gates et al., 2006; Podgursky et al., 2016; Snodgrass Rangel, 2018). Each year, approximately 22% to 30% of principals in urban areas leave their schools (Béteille et al., 2012). Mascall & Leithwood (2010) assert that principal turnover occurs when job descriptions become more managerial, accountability and reform agendas intensify, and baby boomer principals approach retirement. In addition, the increased work intensification, and reported experiences of decreased well-being in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly contributed to current turnover rates in considerable ways (Pollock, 2020; Wang et al., 2018; Wang & Pollock, 2020).

In Canada and the U.S., principal turnover tends to be concentrated in urban boards more than non-urban boards, in part due to the negative biases and implications of leading schools with diverse students (Beckett, 2018; Béteille et al., 2012). For example, in a study examining the school-level factors that influence principal turnover, Gates et al. (2006) found that the "racial composition of the students in a school is a significant predictor of the probability that a principal changes jobs or changes schools" (Beckett, 2018, p. 7). Consequently, schools with higher percentages of racialized students experience more principal turnover than schools with lower percentages—suggesting that the percentage of racialized students in a school or board may be a predictor of urban principal turnover specifically (Beckett, 2018; Levin & Bradley, 2019).

Urban schools traditionally have low attendance rates, low student achievement, and high dropout rates, which presents challenges for principals tasked with increasing student achievement and with enacting policies that aim towards school improvement (Beckett, 2018;

Snodgrass Rangel, 2018). As well, urban schools often have insufficient resources, a concerning number of uncertified teachers, and are underfunded (Brown, 2005). In the U.S., the patterns of displacement following the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling resulted in significant numbers of Black educators and principals working in urban school boards (Tillman, 2004), making urban boards the focal point of research on the diversification of principalship. It is important to note, that although principal turnover has financial implications for urban boards (Levin & Bradley, 2019) Black principal turnover in particular, is concerning because of the instrumental role that Black principals play for the success of Black students and the mentoring of Black teachers (Brown, 2005; Davis & Madsend, 2009; Tillman, 2004).

It would be remiss to discuss the organizational and structural challenges presented by urban principal turnover, without acknowledgement of the inequitable recruitment practices at the school level that influence principal attrition. Arguably, increasing the recruitment rates of principals may appear as a plausible solution for managing high turnover, however a growing body of research indicates that the recruitment process in Canadian school boards, which relies on teachers to self-select and declare their interest in principal preparation, does not ensure that all qualified candidates are appointed to principal positions (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015; Schleicher, 2012). The self-selection element to principalship can be perceived as an individual choice of whether or not to pursue leadership. This perception obscures how constructs such as racism and sexism may limit a candidate's ability to build an adequate portfolio for application, consequently, delaying or potentially obstructing their leadership endeavours. Bailes and Guthery (2020) assert that, "a lack of role models and mentors of color, compressed pay, challenging working conditions, and poor retention rates among teachers of color" (p. 3) are a few conditions that may limit a candidate's ability to self-select.

School Leader Preparation Programs

In the U.S., Black candidates continue to be underrepresented in school leader preparation programs and administrative positions (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Berry & Reardon, 2021). Viewed as cultural symbols that unify students, parents, and the school community in urban areas (Davis & Madsend, 2009), Black leaders' recounts of leadership efforts are too often narrated as experiences of resilience, hardships, and strength (Leffler, 2014). Brown (2005) asserts that:

> the shortage of African American leaders can be directly linked to several factors including shortages of African American teachers who will enter the leadership pipeline, a lack of mentoring of African American teachers for leadership positions, recruitment and retention of African Americans into leadership preparation programs, and the preparation and appointment of African American leaders. (pp. 586-587)

The tenets of Brown's (2005) argument are carried forward by Sanchez et al. (2008) who explain that specific social and cultural barriers exist that prevent Black individuals from fully participating in the education system. These barriers include:

a) Lower career aspirations if minoritized individuals perceive that the values of the educational system are ignoring, or conflicting with, their community

b) High percentages of minoritized individuals major in education, but their aspirations are not encouraged by the educational environment

c) Minoritized individuals need more support for aspirations, but often receive less

d) Minoritized individuals aspiring for the principalship face conscious or unconscious resistance from the educational system

e) Few role models and mentors exist

f) Negative stereotypes

g) Lack of research on minoritized principals and their career aspirations.

Given the historical displacement of Black educators and the discriminatory socio-

cultural landscape in which Black educators work, Beckett (2018) reminds us that the disconnect between interest in attaining principalship and the promotion or recruitment to the principal position is not a dilemma that should be solely critiqued at the school board level, but rather should be a strategic focus of school leader preparation programs. For instance, Beckett (2018) calls for universities to analyze current programming and assess its adequacy in preparing principals to work in schools with high percentages of racialized students and to provide tangible skills for navigating the complexities therein. Adding to the discussion on school leader preparation programs, Haynes (2015) suggests that these programs need to shift their focus from attracting education graduates, towards graduates with teacher certifications and degrees in other fields. The assumption is that by expanding the pool or sources of attracting candidates, school boards may be deterred from unintentionally selecting a homogenous staff of teachers and principals while "neglecting to recognize others who may have experiences that better prepare them to lead schools and significantly accelerate student motivation and achievement" (Haynes, 2015, p. 9).

Since teaching is a prerequisite for principalship in Ontario and in most states in the U.S. (Haynes, 2015; OME, 2023), the shortage of racialized teachers implies that the pool of principal candidates that school boards select from will also represent this racial and ethnic shortage (Haynes, 2015). Literature focused on the diversification of principalship indicate that even in circumstances were qualified Black teachers exist, there is a lack of interest in pursuing principalship (Jackson, 2018) in part due to the changing nature of principalship, feelings of isolation, racial battle fatigue (RBF; Arnold et al., 2016), and misalignment between principals' professional identity and job description (Call-Cummings & Martinez, 2017; Franklin et al., 2014; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015; Winton & Pollock, 2013).

The critical analysis of leadership frameworks and practices deployed in school leader preparation programs is of significance because of the programs' role in informing how principals construct their professional identity and exercise leadership in their schools (Armstrong & McMahon, 2013; Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017), which in turn influences attrition rates (Levin & Bradley, 2019; Snodgrass Rangel, 2018). Leadership frameworks used in select school leader preparation programs continue to be dominated by White narratives that exclude the lived experiences, knowledge creation, and beliefs of racialized individuals (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Rusch, 2004). Without an understanding of the leadership ideologies that inform school policy and principal practices, leadership frameworks used in school leadership preparation programs may remain racially blind and perpetuate Black principals' exclusion for participation in the field.

Principal Retention

While a response to the challenges presented above may be to hire more Black principals, studies have indicated that the ways in which the intersection of race and gender are perceived by the dominant group in historically White institutions, presents challenges for racialized individuals exercising leadership. When working in a male-dominated setting with restrictive social, cultural, and political norms (Cruz-González et al., 2019), women principals, particularly racialized women, are subjected to gendered racism. This leads them to reconstruct their professional identities in order to lead their schools successfully, specifically in situations where racist stereotypes held by students, staff, parents, and colleagues work to undermine the respect and trust in racialized principals' professional abilities (Cruz-González et al., 2019). In contrast to other racial groups, even when Black women enter leadership positions, the legitimacy of their career advancement is minimized as an easy journey and is often questioned as not being "Black

enough" (Nickens & Washington, 2017).

A study conducted by Essence Magazine surveying Black women in the workplace revealed that 80% of respondents felt compelled to adjust their professional personality to succeed at work (Nickens & Washington, 2017). Black women are increasingly censoring their behaviours to avoid the stereotypical label of an "Angry Black Woman" and enact behaviours that portray them as professionals who are unthreatening and flexible. This adopted persona has been termed by Holmes (2015) as the "Acculturated Girl Next Door". Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003), add to the discussion on Black women in the workplace to explain that Black women suppress their authentic selves to make their perceived Blackness less apparent. Black women shift their perceivable identities to make their counterparts feel comfortable, all while minimizing foreseeable obstacles to career advancement (Nickens & Washington, 2017). This phenomenon of shifting, highlights that "school leaders often exhibit a variety of behaviours that both align and conflict with stereotypes about African American women and their inherent traits. They present different personas at different times" (Nickens & Washington, 2017, p. 246). It is important to note the continual and intentional use of the word "perception" by Nickens and Washington (2017) and Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) as it alludes to a misunderstanding of how Black women in positions of leadership enact their leadership.

In addition to identity shifting, Black individuals have long used the strategy of codeswitching to satisfy the status quo that precedes historically White institutions (McCluney et al., 2021). McCluney et al. (2021) explain that racial codeswitching is the process of adjusting one's behaviours to "optimize the comfort of others in exchange for a desired outcome" (p. 1). Studies on Black professionalism identify that career outcomes and work-related well-being are enhanced when individuals present their authentic self, however, members of marginalized

groups often adjust their behaviour and present a "White voice" to circumvent the stereotypical identities that exclude them from career advancement and exercising professionalism (McCluney et al., 2021). In White cultural spaces, racial codeswitching enables Black people to be perceived as professionals who possess the specialized knowledge, capacity, and social norms to perform in their profession (McCluney et al., 2021).

Although self-adjustment is beneficial for Blacks' entrance, acceptance, and advancement in a profession, the persistent efforts (i.e. professional identity shifting and racial codeswitching) taken to mask one's authentic self in White cultural spaces can possess negative consequences for the well-being of Black professionals and manifest as RBF. RBF is the "social-psychological stress responses (e.g., frustration, anger, exhaustion, physical avoidance, psychological or emotional withdrawal, escapism, acceptance of racial attributions) associated with being a racialized person and the repeated target of racism" (Arnold et al., 2016, p. 895). Further, experiences of RBF may be displayed as insomnia, frequent illness, fatigue, anxiety, helplessness, frustration, and defensiveness. In their tenure, Black principals are subjected to racism and racial microaggressions as White colleagues have historically viewed Black principals as possessing leadership roles that are insignificant (Jones, 2002). For example, in a study on the experiences of Black school principals who self-identified as recipients of racial microaggressions, Krull and Robicheau (2020) explain that 87.9% of principals experienced psychological stress, while 54.4% reported physiological stress in the workplace. Principals used self-silencing as a coping mechanism for navigating their unsupportive environment and meet the demands of their profession. Bivens (2005) explains that individuals are often:

> not aware of how systems in place trump personal power and make people vulnerable to policies, practices and procedures that violate their deepest values. After this, what is needed are organizational and institutional efforts to create environments where racial disparities are acknowledged and addressed and where there is a lived commitment to

creating shared ownership, leadership, and benefit across difference. (p. 48)

Bivens' (2005) perspective clarifies that Black school leaders experience internalized racism where they develop beliefs and behaviours that support existing racist attitudes.

Methodological Approaches to the Study of Black Women

The theoretical and methodological frameworks deployed in the studies for this review focused on a few selections. Methodologically, all studies were qualitative, deployed interviews as the primary data collection instrument, and ranged from the use of a case study to narrative life history—with a few occurrences of autoethnographies. Of the studies identified, majority were dissertations. This significant percentage (87.5%) indicates that studies of Black women principalship tend to remain in doctoral dissertations and are not disseminated in journal and book publications. In the review of research on Black women leaders, Lomotey (2019) concurs that a large majority of studies are found in dissertations. This revelation not only incites questions of the contexts in which research on race and gender are mobilized and why Black women principalship discourse remains at the margins of peer-reviewed literature, but also highlights a lack of strategies for addressing this knowledge mobilization gap. Given the understanding of where Black women research appears, the use of autoethnography to examine Black women principalship no longer appears as an anomaly as one may have assumed in the beginning of this section. Tillman (2006) reminds us that Blacks and racialized scholars are increasingly conducting insider research in their own communities due to a lack of research conducted on their own experiences. To this end, it is plausible that Black educational scholars would conduct autoethnographic studies of their experiences to provide solutions that are two-fold: (1) to add to the database of existing literature on Black women principals and (2) as an act of "creative resistance" (McClellan, 2012). McClellan (2012) asserts that autoethnography

"challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially just and socially conscious act" (p. 92). This assertation of resistance in relation to autoethnographies highlights the on-going debate in the field that problematizes the potential for dominant methodologies to be operationalized to perpetuate a Eurocentric view of research and gatekeep the sources of knowledge creation (McClellan, 2012). Although substantial inferences warrant further examination, the contentious use of methodologies such as autoethnography, may suggest one of many possible reasons why scholarship on Black women principals remain in dissertations.

Participant sample size for these studies did not surpass eight. It may be inferred that the time restrictions of a doctoral program may have contributed to the number of participants recruited. However, a lower participant sample size in some cases limited opportunities for generalizability. As well, half of the studies identified that successful recruitment occurred through the use of snowballing and personal connections.

The theoretical frameworks that guided the methodologies used were concentrated on five frameworks: Black feminist theory, intersectionality, critical race feminism, womanist theology, and critical race theory. Each study, with the exception of one (Brown, 2016), relied on the guidance of multiple theoretical frameworks. By using more than one framework, these studies provided insight into the complexities of understanding the experiences of Black women principals and the intricate lenses in which identity construction can be perceived. The rationale for utilizing multiple frameworks was construed to the reader as an advantageous choice when studies explicated how specific concepts complimented one another while simultaneously acknowledging how developments in one theoretical framework provided resolve for criticisms identified in another framework. This discussion however was not apparent in all studies.

Chapter Summary

   This chapter interrogated how Black women principals' professional identity is represented in K-12 literature. The locus of extant literature within the field deeply examines how Black women principals' intersectional identities largely inform their role association and enactment of leadership. Deploying a care-centered approach, principals' motivation and source of encouragement for their profession emanates from the collectivist practices in Black communities. This is demonstrated in their shared responsibility for children and the community, as well as spiritual convictions for pursuing principalship. Within these roles however, Black women principals face discrimination and antagonism from non-Black colleagues as well as Black men. It is within this space of marginalization that research on intracultural challenges and mentorship dilemmas requires a shift in its understanding of professional identity. Given the limited amount of research on Black women principals in general, and their professional identities in particular, it would be premature and difficult to pinpoint a definitive definition or conceptualization of Black women principals' professional identity in all contexts. Rather a thematic approach to understanding the impact of race-and-gender on the formation of their professional identity may highlight nuances that tend to be omitted from mainstream literature. Researchers interested in exploring professional identity in relation to Black women principals are encouraged to take into consideration the fluidity of professional identity and the socio-political contexts in which principals lead.

Chapter Three: Methodological Underpinnings

If methodologies have been used to silence and marginalize People of Color, then methodologies

can also give voice and turn the margins into places of transformative resistance

—Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 38

This study explored how Black women principals in Ontario construct their professional identities. In this chapter, I explicate how a life history approach was deployed to critically examine the lived experiences, opinions, and practices of seven principals in relation to their professional identities. The discussion begins with a brief introduction of the study's research design. The chapter continues with a delineation of the historical conception of life history, its criticisms, and trajectory as a methodology. I situate its use in the field of education by highlighting its conceptualization in studies centered on emancipating silenced identities and exposing hegemonic power constructions in social institutions. I then present the factors that contributed to the participant and site selection, data collection, and data analysis procedures, followed by the methodological assumptions and limitations. Next, my commitment to maintaining credibility is synthesized in the sections on trustworthiness and ethical considerations. The chapter concludes with a summary and lays the foundation for the expected discussion in Chapter 4.

Research Design

The present study was conducted using a life history approach. Considering my intention to examine how Black women principals in Ontario construct their professional identities, this study undertook a narrative analysis that was rooted in a qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research has a long and contested history with scholars presenting varying iterations

of how it is defined based on the contexts in which it has been applied. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5). Notably, it is the study of the self and others and the nuanced relationships that occur among, within, and between people and groups (Leavy, 2014). As humans navigate their lives, they engage in experiences and interactions with the social world which create moments that unfold through time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Moen, 2006; Polkinghorne, 1988). When combined, these moments portray a complex picture of human experiences which carry varying significance and meaning to education researchers (Moen, 2006; Xu & Connelly, 2010). One way of organizing these experiences is through story—a narrative that structures and makes order of human lives (Bell, 2002; Clandinin, 2020; Moen, 2006). The interpretive perspective that frames this qualitative approach asserts that reality is not fixed, thus researchers undertaking this approach aim to make meaning of the social and political ways in which individuals experience their world in specific contexts at a particular time. Among the variegated approaches in qualitative research, narrative inquiry and life history have been widely adopted in contemporary studies of the self and identity while being purported as key drivers for studying the experiences of education actors.

Though narrative forms of representation such as storytelling, observing, living alongside another, and interpreting texts have a long history in sociology, anthropology, history, and education scholarship, a number of scholars have noted that narrative inquiry is a relatively new concept in the social sciences (Bell, 2002; Clandinin, 2007; Lieblich et al., 1998; Xu & Connelly, 2010). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) define narrative inquiry as:

> a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with

milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people's lives, both individual and social. (p. 20)

In short, it is an approach deployed to study lived experience as a source of knowledge and understanding of the broader social world (Clandinin, 2020), while giving insight into the process of knowledge transfer. On the other hand, life history is defined by Goodson and Gill (2011) is an:

Account of a life based on interviews and conversations. The life history is based on the collection of written or transcribed oral accounts requested by a researcher. The life story is subsequently edited, interpreted and presented in one of a number of ways, often in conjunction with other sources. Life histories may be topical, focusing on only one segmented portion of a life, or complete, attempting to tell the full details of a life as it is recollected. (p. 22)

In short, life history is the recount of a string of events. It invites the opportunity for researchers to collect data about how the participants interpret their subjective experiences and the social constructions in which they are embedded (Abubakar et al., 2008; Sosulski et al., 2010). A notable distinction between the two approaches is that researchers using a narrative inquiry approach meet participants in the midst of their experience, while the use of life history challenges researchers to obtain a progressive blueprint of a life—irrespective of when a researcher encounters their participant. Goodson and Gill (2011) assert that with life history, there is an entanglement in the research process between the narratives of the research participant's experiences and those of the researcher as they both participate in narrative construction and re-construction, enabling multifaceted layers of meaning to understand the social world. While detailing the benefits of using life history as the methodology of choice for this study, I do not aim to respond to questions of which methodological approach is correct or incorrect, as doing so may be subscribing to an empiricist dichotomy of knowledge. Rather, the discussion highlights the virtues of life history, critically examines its criticisms, and its

significance to the study of ELA in general and Black women principals in particular.

Narrative Life History

As discussions of the complexity of qualitative research have evolved to reflect the growth in the field, scholars have increasingly used life history to examine the interconnected and layered components of lived experiences (Sugrue 2005; 2015). Although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment when life history was integrated into the social sciences and used by scholars in general, there is an agreement among prominent scholars such as Hagemaster (1992), Dhunpath (2000), and Goodson (2001) of its emergence in sociological research at the turn of the 20th century. Goodson (2001) explains that when "conducted successfully, the [deployment of] life history forces a confrontation with other people's subjective perceptions" (p. 131). A confrontation that can be avoided in the social sciences when quantitative and/or mixed methods are favoured. The strategic word choice of force implicates social scientific methods of willfully negating subjectivity as the basis for understanding experience and reality. By subscribing to reductionist and statistical approaches for understanding patterns of behaviour, "powerful constituencies within the social and economic order" (Goodson, 2001, p. 131) are maintained. Further, "inquiring into life narratives combines a modern interest in learning, understanding and a concern for agency and human action with postmodern concerns such as discourse and power, 'forc(ing) the social sciences to develop new theories and new methods and new ways for talking about the self and society'" (Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 20). Highlighting the constructs of human subjectivity is not simply an issue of modernism versus postmodernism, old school versus new school waves of thought, or the polarization of reality. Rather, the complexity of human subjectivity brings to light the tumultuous struggle of power and economic order (Goodson, 2001). This approach does not advocate for one truth, rather a series of subjective views or

multiple truths that are embedded and represented in individuals' narratives (Dhunpath, 2000).

 Application to the field: Traditional studies. In Dhunpath's (2000) view, "the life history approach is probably the only authentic means of understanding how motives and practices reflect the intimate intersection of institutional and individual experience in the postmodern world" (p. 544). Dhunpath (2000) urges that as a field, education must place focus on the self as "living contradiction". In doing so, the fallibility of humans becomes acknowledged, and individuals are empowered to make meaning of their professional practice. This proclamation of life history's authenticity as an approach is significant as the statement came at a time when alternative qualitative approaches such as case study and narrative inquiry were thriving. Albeit Dhunpath's (2000) work aims to normalize the use of life history in the field of education as a means to progress from reductionist explanations to contextual ones, the words of encouragement are specifically directed towards the practice of educators and teacher education research and negate school leaders. For example, Dhunpath (2000) states that "if we are to accept that our insight into education is best achieved by trying to understand how life is seen by those living it rather than by accepting uncritically perspectives of those administering the system, we have to begin listening more systematically to teachers, teacher educators and children" (p. 550). The notion of marginal in this case relates to social power and leaves the remaining intersectional layers that define marginal groups unrealized. An area that has increasingly been explored in contemporary studies. Life history is not simply an approach to convey a life story. Sugrue (2015) is explicit in identifying that the transition from a life story to a life history necessitates a reconstruction of participants' life stories "within the cultural and policy environments in which their narrative identities have been constructed and buffeted" (p. 17). Specifically, researchers are afforded the ability to situate the narratives within the shifts and

"cultural embeddedness" of everyday life, all while accounting for the historical context

(Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Sugrue 2005; 2015)

       Application to the field: Contemporary studies. There remain several unresolved

tensions and minimally explored areas on the use of life histories in educational contexts. One of

the tensions proposed above is the omission of life history analysis in ELA compared to teacher

education (Sugrue, 2015), specifically research that explores principalship and intersectional

identity markers. This minimally explored area is problematic for actors who belong to marginal

groups—groups that have influence and are tasked with informing school improvement

initiatives and school level policies. Consequently, there is a methodological gap in ELA

literature that scholars using traditionally vetted qualitative approaches have aimed to close. A

gap that this study sought to address and fill. In Becker's (1970) view, life history "enables the

research to build up a mosaic-like picture of the individuals and the events and people

surrounding them so that relations, influences and patterns can be observed" (quoted in Goodson

& Gill, 2011, p. 23). Of the studies available on principalship and professional identity, two

notable studies present a "mosaic-like picture" of its research participants through a generic

qualitative approach. In the first study, Mponguse (2010) examines the use of life history to

construct principals' professional identities. In the second study, Armstrong and Mitchell (2017)

use a critical intersectional lens to explore the intersections of race and gender in administrative

contexts. A comparison of the studies reveals a number of similarities and stark differences,

namely the impact that life history as an approach has on research in ELA. By incorporating life

history as the methodology of choice, Mponguse's (2010) study is able to capture the biography

of its participants which contributed significantly to both describing and understanding the

interests, personal values, and beliefs that inform their practices—a component that Armstrong

and Mitchell's (2017) study is limited in capturing in its entirety.

As the findings of this study will reveal, there are a number of benefits to using life history to examine the construction of professional identity in the field of education. First, life history transcends the outcomes of narrative inquiry by capturing the culture embedded in the communities that participants in this study inhabited, both past and present. Second, the use of life history illuminated the socio-political, professional, and personal layers of participants' identities by positioning the research boundaries to the fore of the data analysis process. Finally, the approach provided opportunities to texturize the data collected while facilitating a confrontation with the participant's subjective perceptions. Ultimately, illuminating a key question that is commonly interrogated in ELA studies; who am I as a professional?

Limitations. It would be naïve of me to purport the benefits of life history without mention of its criticisms. The motivation for understanding human behaviour on the basis of situation rather than biography challenges scholars' interpretations of life history's legitimacy and rigour as a methodology in relation to empiricist traditions (Dhunpath, 2000). Specifically, "The qualitative approach used in life history is often criticized for failing to pass tests of methodological rigour" (Hagemaster, 1992, p. 1124) as it can be seen to be only telling tales (Goodson, 2001). However, the merits of life history are contained in its ability to counter the fetishization of the pursuit of universal truths and objectivity of knowledge (Dhunpath, 2000). Individual experiences are political and reflect the inherent relations of power in which they are embedded. This understanding is not acknowledged in positivist social science epistemology and thus has been overtly ignored (Dhunpath, 2000).

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Participants were purposefully recruited through a recruitment partner organization, the Administrators Black Caucus of Ontario and publicly available school board email addresses. Purposive sampling, widely used in qualitative research, aims to "select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). When deployed in a narrative study, the meticulous selection of participants welcomes a deeper understanding of the phenomena of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2002). In purposive sampling, the sources are knowledgeable individuals with the ability to narrate their experiences in a reflective way (Bernard, 2002). First, an informational flyer detailing the study was provided to the recruitment partner organization to disseminate to their network of Black principals. The intention was for the association to "act as guarantors of the researcher's legitimacy…and, ultimately, they may save the researcher time and resources" (McAreavey & Das, 2013, p. 116). Next, I used publicly available school board email addresses to invite principals to participate. This study sought to recruit participants that were Ontario College of Teachers certified with a minimum of 1-year administrative experience as principals who self-identified as Black in race and woman in gender, irrespective of their visible identity markers. While the vice-principal position provides a formative understanding of school leadership, this study focused on the role of principalship to maintain consistency when articulating the job duties and accountability measures outlined in the OME documents and the *Education Act*. In comparison to the case study methodology, life history is not bound to the focus of one school board nor geographic location. Rather, this study intended to focus on multiple school boards to capture the nuanced professional experiences of Black women principals in Ontario, while maintaining credibility. These steps resulted in the recruitment of seven Black women principals.

A table outlining the participants' professional backgrounds is included in Chapter 4.

Data Collection

Researchers conducting a qualitative study are often inclined to use interviews as a method for data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gill et al., 2008; Given, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Life history as a methodology, has historically used multiple methods of collecting data. The approach conveys a multidimensional account of experience, utilizing multiple sources of data to investigate the social, political, and cultural contexts in which participants are situated (Goodson & Gill, 2011; Goodson & Sikes, 2017). Keeping in line with the advances in both methodology and life history discourse, the data collection process for this study was conducted through two methods: (a) the analysis of provincial level documents and (b) semi-structured participant interviews.

Provincial Level Documents

I began the data collection process by gaining a deeper understanding of the provincial-level documents that inform and define principalship in Ontario. Since the Canadian education system is governed provincially, the relevant documents addressed the job descriptions, professional development initiatives, and policy directives that were unique to Ontario principals. Indeed, the training and practices of Ontario school leaders are informed by a combination of provincial-level documents. When interconnected, these documents highlight the multifaceted dimensions of the system's organizational structures. Dimensions that: a) contribute to understanding the role of school and system leaders, b) govern leaders' practices, c) inform accountability measures, and d) shape professional identity construction. While a plethora of documents exist, I explicitly examined the following documents: the OLS, the OLF (detailed in

Chapter 1), the Board Leadership Development Strategy (BLDS), *the Education Act* R.S.O.

1990, c. E.2, and policy/ program memorandums (PPM) developed by the OME—particularly,

PPM No. 152: Terms and Conditions of Employment of Principals and Vice-principals. The

particular document above provided insight into the leadership standards and principles that

governed school-level practices. As well as the contexts that shaped principals' professional

identities. Consequently, these documents guided the creation of the interview protocol by

providing familiarity with the context-specific vocabulary that participants used to relay their

experiences.

Semi-Structured Interview

Highly revered for its ability to "amplify individual actors' voices and privilege their

insights on historical events in tandem with those of the researcher and other relevant sources"

(Jessee, 2018, p. 2), the life history interview plays a pivotal role in presenting the public and

private narratives surrounding a given topic and how they have adapted over time. The notion of

tandem or co-creation referred to by Jessee (2018) is advantageous over other data collection

methods as it enables "shared authority" between the researcher and participant (Yow, 2014).

The meticulous processes scholars take to conduct a life history interview are framed to

acknowledge the power imbalance between the researcher and participant and aim to ensure

participants maintain agency during the meaning-making process. Given the nature of this study

and its intent to highlight, amplify, and support the historically silenced voices of Black women

principals, interviews were the primary form of data collection.

Participants were invited to partake in one semi-structured interview that lasted

approximately 60-minutes and was audio recorded on a digital recorder. In response to the in-

person restrictions that emerged with COVID-19, interviews were conducted using video call via

the video conferencing platform Zoom. Since discourse on the efficacy of distinctive

interviewing methods is limited, the development of the interview protocol was informed by

Yow's (2014) interpretations from a "consensus of experienced interviewers" (p. xviii). This

approach was advantageous for providing tangible examples, excerpts, and sample interview

protocols to address common dilemmas encountered in the interview process. Once interviews

were completed and transcribed, participants were asked to review the accuracy of the data

collected and raise any questions, points of contention, or clarifications as part of the member-

checking process.

Data Analysis

      The merit and significance of a narrative study focused on life history is not solely rooted

in the mere depiction of narrated stories, but rather the technique and extent to which the stories

are analyzed. Reissman (2008) notes that the significance of narrative analysis occurs when:

> Attention shifts to the details—how and why a particular event is storied, perhaps, or
> what a narrator accomplishes by developing the story that way, and effects on the reader
> or listener. Who elicits the story, for what purpose, how does the audience affect what is
> told, and what cannot be spoken? In narrative study, particularities and context come to
> the fore. Human agency and imagination of storytellers (and listeners and readers) can be
> interrogated, allowing research to include many voices and subjectivities. (pp. 12-13)

Merriam and Grenier (2019) concur that the endeavour to systemically evaluate a qualitative

study involves careful consideration of the study's research design and its positioning within the

methodological developments in its field. Heeding Reissman's (2008) directive that researchers

should be explicit of how they analyze their data, this section details the analytic methods that

were employed in the narrative analysis. Of the four methods outlined by Reissman (2008);

thematic, structural, dialogic/performance, and visual, thematic analysis best articulates the

research design and rigour of this study while maintaining qualitative research traditions.

Scholars such as Polkinghorne (1995) and Ojermark (2007) encourage researchers to use

multiple methods for analyzing narrative research to interrogate the mosaic of voices and

meaning-making that emerge in the data collection. Ojermark (2007) explains that although

readers may find life histories appealing when presented with a beginning, middle, and end, the

narration and reconstruction of events from collected data may not always be conveyed in a

linear manner and may benefit from the use of different approaches. For this reason, the data

analysis process was two-tiered focusing on two of Reissman's (2008) four analytic methods: a)

dialogic/performance and b) thematic analysis. Firstly, interview transcripts were categorized in

alphabetical order using participants' pseudonyms and analyzed through the computer-aided

qualitative data analysis software NVivo. Next, an initial read-through using

dialogic/performance analysis was conducted, followed by a thematic analysis. Finally,

provincial-level documents were examined using document analysis. Each process is described

below.

Dialogic/Performance Analysis

First, dialogic/performance analysis was used to gain insight on how narratives obtained

from the interviews were "coproduced in a complex choreography—in spaces between teller and

listener, speaker and setting, text and reader, history and culture" (Reissman, 2008, p. 105). In

comparison to the macro perspective offered in thematic analysis, dialogic/performance centers

focus on context and examines the "who", "when", and "why" of a narrative. In particular, the

implication of this analytic method is that stories do not emanate from the self but are developed

and conveyed in historical, interactional, and institutional contexts that shed light on the culture

and identity of a person or group (Reissman, 2008). While reviewing participant transcripts, I

used reflective memoing (Given, 2008) to record my understanding of how participants made meaning of their stories through the language used and how it was situated in the context of their intersectional identities.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis followed the dialogic/performance analysis. Thematic analysis focuses on the "what" question of the content (Reissman, 2008) and was beneficial for developing codes that identified recurring patterns and themes. In qualitative research, coding is the process of eliciting a word or phrase that "symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 3). Values coding was used to interrogate the attitudes, values, and beliefs of participants in relation to the research questions and to develop themes that unpacked the findings.

Document Analysis

Finally, provincial-level documents were analyzed as supplemental texts that provided insight into the prescriptive mandates informing the participants' leadership practices and sensemaking, as well as how those actions informed their professional identities. Document analysis presents a systemic approach for a researcher to "elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge" (Bowen, 2009, p. 27) of documents containing text. As a means of triangulation, I engaged in document analysis by first skimming through the documents to obtain a "superficial examination" (Bowen, 2009) of its contents and applicability to the study. Next, I organized the relevant information into categories in accordance with the study's research questions. Using the same codes from the interview transcripts, pertinent information from the provincial-level documents was then applied to the thematic analysis of the findings to supplement the synthesis of information presented. It is important to note that while conducting

the document analysis, I considered the intended purpose of each document and the educational actors they target as necessary factors for contextualizing their significance.

The deployment of three analytical methods was beneficial for creating a space whereby marginalized voices that are often excluded from contemporary research approaches, could be amplified through the reconstruction of participant stories.

Trustworthiness and Rigour

Critics of qualitative inquiry have argued that qualitative research is too subjective (Patton, 2015). In a similar vein, life history has been criticized as a methodology that only tells tales and lacks methodological rigour (Goodson, 2001; Hagemaster, 1992). To counter claims of this nature, Clandinin and Caine (2012) recommend the deployment of 12 touchstones, as a guide for assessing the trustworthiness of a study. Akin to quality markers, the 12 touchstones guide researchers to produce research that is twofold; adaptable to the readers' subjective understanding and ensures validity. A brief description of each touchstone is provided below, to texture its applicability to this study:

1. Relational responsibilities: The understanding of narrative inquiry spaces as "spaces of belonging for both researchers and participants; spaces that are always marked by ethics and attitudes of openness, mutual vulnerability, reciprocity, and care" (p. 169);

2. In the midst: The process of acknowledging that research relationships are exercised while researchers are in the midst of ongoing professional and personal lives, while participants are "always in the midst of their lives and their lives are shaped by attending to past, present, and unfolding social, cultural, institutional, linguistic, and familial narratives" (p. 170). Therefore "as participants' and researchers' lives meet in the midst of each of our unfolding complex and multiple experiences, we begin to shape time, places, and spaces where we come together and negotiate ways of being together and ways of giving an account of our work together" (p. 170);

3. Negotiation of relationships: The notion that "narrative inquirers also negotiate ways they can be helpful to participant(s) both in, and following, the research. In the moments of negotiating ways to be helpful narrative inquirers often call on, and are called, to live out

professional responsibilities and to express personal practical knowledge and social positioning" (p. 170);

4. Narrative beginnings: The understanding that "because narrative inquiry is an ongoing reflexive and reflective methodology, narrative inquirers need to continually inquire into their experiences before, during, and after each inquiry" (p. 171);

5. Negotiating entry to the field: The process of determining how to engage in relational inquiry. Specifically, "there are two starting points for narrative inquiry: listening to individuals tell their stories and living alongside participants as they live and tell their stories. The most frequently used starting point is with telling stories and the methods most commonly used are conversations, or interviews as conversations" (p. 171);

6. Moving from field-to-field texts: A negotiation whereby "as we co-compose the relational three-dimensional narrative inquiry space with participants, narrative inquirers begin to compose or co-compose field texts. Field texts, commonly called data, are composed from conversations, interviews, participant observations, as well as artifacts" (p. 172);

7. Moving from fields texts to interim and final research texts: The understanding that "narrative inquirers continue to live in relational ways with participants throughout the process of making their findings public. This means that field, interim, and final research texts are negotiated with participants, as well as with those who have become part of the research journey. As part of interim research texts, researchers, or researchers and participants, may write narrative accounts of the experience as it relates to the initial research puzzle" (p. 172);

8. Representing narratives of experiences in ways that show temporality, sociality, and place: The careful consideration of ensuring the final research text reflects temporality, sociality, and place. In particular, "it is often when we attend to all of the dimensions that we begin to see disruptions, fragmentations, or silences in participants' and our own lives. The inquiry space opens up a space to see the knots that live within each of our lives' fabrics, and how these are interwoven into the experiences understudy" (p. 173);

9. Relational response communities: The participation within a response community, knowing that "response communities are critical elements within the inquiry, as they help inquirers recognize how they shape both the experiences of their participants and their research puzzles. These communities often consist of people the researcher values and trusts to provide responsive and responsible dialogue about his/her unfolding inquiry. Response communities, marked by diversity, can enrich the research, particularly if they are composed of interdisciplinary, intergenerational, cross-cultural, academic, and nonacademic members" (p. 173);

10. Justifications-personal, practical, and social: The reminder that "as we begin to imagine and design narrative inquiries, it is important to hold in mind the need narrative inquirers share with all social science researchers, that is, the need to be able to justify the research

through responding to the questions of "so what?" and "who cares?" As narrative inquirers we need to be able to justify narrative inquiries in three ways: personally, practically, and socially" (p. 174);

11. Attentive to audience: The process of addressing "the questions of how larger social, institutional, and cultural narratives inform our understanding and shape the researchers' and participants' stories to live by" (p. 175); and

12. Commitment to understanding lives in motion: The recognition and commitment to "understanding lives in motion, a commitment to seeing, and representing lives always in the making" (p. 176).

In addition to the 12 touchstones, attention to enhancing the trustworthiness of the study was placed on the achievement of confirmability, transferability, credibility, and dependability—markers that qualitative researchers concur as improving a study's rigour (Gay et al., 2012; Guba, 1981; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Suter, 2012). The present study sought to achieve all four, as detailed below.

Confirmability

Maintaining confirmability in qualitative research tasks researchers to uphold participants' views while simultaneously taking steps to reduce researcher bias (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Shenton, 2004). Unlike quantitative research, achieving objectivity in qualitative studies can be difficult (Patton, 2002, 2014); however, Miles and Huberman (1994) assert that the endeavour possesses distinct significance for qualitative studies. In this study, I provided admission of my beliefs, assumptions, and the limitations of this work. I made the conscious effort to review and consider my positionality as a Black woman during the data collection and analysis processes through critical reflexivity (Cohen et al., 2018; Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By journaling my thoughts, experiences, and biases as they emerged, I was able to identify and rectify key moments where my voice may have overshadowed participants' views. Given the emancipatory nature of this study, I deployed additional steps such as an audit trail, triangulation, and a thick methodological description to

ensure that the narratives shared by participants guided the conclusions drawn. Triangulation, the deployment of multiple sources of data about a specific phenomenon (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999; Stake, 2000), was particularly beneficial for illuminating data convergence and strengthening the objectivity of data methods.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research is obtained when findings can be generalized and applied to other studies and contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). While life histories do not intend to be generalizable, transferability was strengthened in this study by providing a rich and thick description of the participants, inviting the reader to assess whether the findings and their meanings could be transferred to other settings "because of shared characteristics" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 32).

Credibility

According to Shenton (2004), credibility is the depiction of the authenticity and accuracy of the findings. The truth-value or credibility of the study was achieved in the member-checking process of participant interviews. In Lincoln and Guba's (1985) view, member-checking is "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). I provided participants with an opportunity to verify the accuracy of data collected which in turn mitigated researcher bias when developing themes. As well, the use of peer-review and the triangulation of multiple methods and sources of data systematically mapped the justification for the thematic coding process used in this study.

Dependability

In qualitative research, dependability enables "a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results" (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). Possessing close ties to

credibility, dependability is obtained through a detailed report of the study such that a reader can "develop a thorough understanding of the methods and their effectiveness" (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). I enhanced dependability in this study through an audit trail where a concise record of the study from its conception to the dissemination of findings was articulated. Doing so provides the reader with an opportunity to assess the consistency of the data analysis process employed in relation to scholarship on the research design chosen (Gibbs, 2007).

Overall, the deployment of the 12 touchstones, while heeding the recommended strategies for attaining trustworthiness, enabled me to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study in a transparent manner. Further engaging the reader into agreement or disagreement of the findings while highlighting the study's rigour (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Suter, 2012).

Ethical Considerations

All studies conducted with human participants have ethical considerations and this study was no exception. Clandinin (2013) explains that ethical considerations are "responsibilities negotiated by participants at all phases of the inquiry" (p. 199). Given the "shared authority" that participants and researchers share in life history research, researchers have to take measures to ensure that a good design guided by ethical principles is deployed (Labaree, 2006). Atkinson (2012) concurs that the "interviewer's primary job is to be a sensitive, respectful listener in guiding the life storyteller's narration (p. 116). Since life histories interrogate the personal and often private parts of an individual's life, diligence in maintaining transparent relationships with participants built on care was a task that I fulfilled at all stages of the study. In this section, I detail how my commitment to sensitivity, empathic listening, and respect was beneficial for

maintaining informed consent and confidentiality, minimizing the privacy risk of violating the privacy of the participants. Each is discussed in turn.

Confidentiality

As a result of the personal details that emerge in life history interviews (Jessee, 2018), this study used data collection methods that could not guarantee the anonymity of participants, thus a number of steps were taken to maintain confidentiality. First, video interviews were audio-recorded with a digital audio recorder and labelled using pseudonyms. Second, with the exception of race, gender, and years of administrative experience, personal identifiers collected to obtain a better understanding of the participants were not expounded in the findings and were kept on an electronic master list. Third, to minimize risks and provide protection of privacy, hard copies of signed documents were secured in a file folder that was accessible only to the researchers. As well, all electronic documents and files were encrypted and stored in a password-protected external hard drive. Finally, for the instances where direct quotes were used, de-identified descriptors were provided to diminish the connection between the participant and colloquial terms or phrases used that may allude reference to a specific school and/or school board.

Pseudonyms

The use of pseudonyms ensured that participants' narratives remained confidential. Prior to the conduction of each interview, participants were assigned a pseudonym and notified that the name of their school and/or respective school board would be replaced with a general identifier. As well, the discussion of findings omitted traceable descriptors. Since this study centers on the experiences of Black women principals, identity markers of race and gender were explicitly used as a means to contextualize the life stories. As a result, the risk associated with

maintaining confidentiality was minimized as all participants possessed the same identity

markers and thus are untraceable.

Benefits

Participation in this study provided participants with the opportunity to convey their

successes and identify provincial and school-level areas that, at the time of the study, needed to

improve to better support their endeavours as Black women principals. As well, participants

benefitted from opportunities to reflect on their career and principal practices in light of the

research questions. According to Labaree (2006), researchers using life history are encouraged to

structure the design of the study to generate new knowledge and meaning. Thus, participants

contributed relevant information to literature in the areas of principal's professional identity and

educational administration at large within a Canadian context.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explicated the qualitative methodology that was undertaken to conduct a

rigorous and meaningful study. Discussions of life history presented a blueprint for the research

methods, data collection, and data analysis processes that substantiated the purpose of the study

and research questions. The commitment to maintaining credibility and trustworthiness was

conveyed while shedding light on the ethical considerations and foreseen methodological

limitations of the study. The next chapter thematically weaves and narrates the life stories of the

seven participants. Themes that emerged from the data analysis process helped to unpack the

findings by bringing to the fore the multifaceted contexts that participants inhabited and how

those contexts informed their professional and personal practices as Black women principals.

Chapter Four: Findings

We may all have come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now

—Rev Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Whether new to principalship or seasoned in their career, the feat of leading K-12 schools for Black women principals is an endeavour that is met with challenges, further compounded by the complexities of their intersectional identities (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Mpungose, 2010). Historically used as tools of social division (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 1986), race and gender provide a unique perspective in this study that draws the nuanced experiences of Black women to the fore of leadership discourse. Regardless of the varying paths that have led Black women principals to the role, the continuous barriers to acknowledging their legitimacy and the pursuit to receive a seat at the decision-making table, place them in the same boat now.

In this chapter, I share the voices and experiences of seven Black women principals in Ontario, detailing how they make sense of and construct their professional identities. Each narrative, although focusing on a specific period in their career, provides a window into the entanglement of participants' personal beliefs, values, knowledge, skills, and perceptions of their roles as principals. Further inviting us momentarily into the distinct moments that encapsulated their professional identities not only as principals, but more importantly as Black women principals. As each narrative unfolds, I labour over the thematic threads that pull each perspective into concentrated view, anchoring race and gender as the backbone that breathes life into the counter-stories. Invoking Goodson's (2001) view of life history, I situate the social contexts, shifting patterns, and silences of each narrative while acknowledging the "truism that individual experiences are inherently political and embedded in relations of power" (Dhunpath, 2000, p. 3). While the narrations in this chapter provide rich accounts of participants'

professional careers, there is significance in examining their career progression through a

numerical representation (see Table 1).

Table 1 Participants' Experience in Education

Pseudonym	Years as educator before entering leadership	Years served as a vice-principal	Years served as a principal (at time of study)	Number of schools served	Total years in the field
Ruby	15.5	2.5	2	7	20
Michelle	24	3.5	2	9	29.5
Shirley	22	5	2	6	29
Harriet	7	4	2	6	13
Wangari	23	6	1.5	4	30.5
Rosa	11	11	3	5	25
Ida	20	3	1.5	6	24.5

While navigating this chapter, I encourage the use of Table 1 as a point of reference to map

patterns of similarities and differences in participants' experiences. Below, I introduce Ruby,

Michelle, Shirley, Harriet, Wangari, Rosa, and Ida.

Ruby's Story

Ruby's journey to principalship began 19 years ago. Working at seven different schools

within the same school board, Ruby had a love for teaching and being in the classroom. While

completing her first post-secondary degree at an Ontario university, she became involved in a

university outreach program from the second to fourth year of her studies. Soon after, she

worked full-time with the same outreach program before returning to the university as a master's

student. Equipped with both a master's and a Bachelor of Education degree, she was hired by a

school board in central Ontario upon graduation. After teaching for approximately 15.5 years,

Ruby began to feel the constraint and limits of the impact she could yield in the classroom. In

particular, Ruby shared,

> I was seeing things around me that were frustrating me but recognized that in my current
> position as a classroom teacher, it might be a little bit more difficult to affect change. So,

I think that was the major sort of motivation.

Harnessing that motivation into action, Ruby served two and a half years as a vice-principal before entering her role as a principal which she has held for the past two years.

Ruby's Perceptions of Leadership and her Role as a Principal

Ruby believed that the definition of a school leader and/or principal had different meanings in different contexts and time. At the time of the interview, her perception of school leadership was centered on addressing the needs of students and educational actors such as parents, staff, and colleagues. Elaborating on how she viewed her role, she explained that,

> As [principals are] centering student needs and of course their families and helping to ensure that they are provided with all possible access to the success that they are entitled to, then part of the responsibility of the school leader is to help others sort of catch that same vision […and] doing whatever needs to happen for that to occur. And I think [that is] what I mean, centering students while also recognizing and responding to the needs of everyone else. Because if [you are] not able to do that, then [it is] going to be very difficult for [the school community] to […] buy into the vision [you are] selling.

The process of enacting the vision that Ruby expressed was not void of challenges. As she transitioned into her role—two years prior to the start of this study, her school board also underwent organizational changes that had an impact on board operations. This fundamental shift "incited a great deal of uncertainty for some [and] fragility for others", coupled with a lack of supports for administrators. Ruby noted that there was a relation between the absence of supports and the restructuring of her board, highlighting the OME's organizational review of board activities as a probable catalyst. It was at this stage in our conversation that Ruby's perception of her role as a Black principal in relation to challenges inherent to leadership began to unfold. She added,

> I think as a Black administrator, [there are] added obstacles no matter what. Moreso, because our board is under scrutiny for consistent display of anti-Black racism [which has] brought up added challenges, for sure.

Ruby's journey to principalship and her understanding of leadership in a school setting was informed by her race-and gendered identity. In her view,

> [leadership involves] a lot of heavy lifting […] because [we are] leading, but [we are] also expected to solve a lot of the problems that have occurred and are continuing to exist without any sort of recognition of the fact that we ourselves are also impacted by these same issues.

Further adding to the discussion, Ruby delineated her perception by stating,

> […] while [we are] trying to be the face of the board and follow through on everything that is expected, [we are] still very much considered experiencing the insult and hurt and harm that we are expected to then interrupt and disrupt. […] that has been difficult. […] how has that shaped my leadership, I think was the question? I think it has made me very aware of the fact that at times [I am] on my own and that unless I have a very strong sort of guiding philosophy or moral compass or whatever it might be, it can be very difficult to consistently…It can make it very difficult to show up day in and day out and to be able to give 150% despite a consistent hurt and harm.

The understanding presented above points towards a perception that was two-fold; one that fulfilled job-specific tasks and the other whereby one's visible identity markers informed how they experienced leadership.

Ruby's Perceptions of Organizational Supports and Barriers to Principalship

While in her role, Ruby was tasked with enacting policies and exercising professional judgement in complex situations. When asked to describe the organizational supports made available through her school board, she made the following clarification,

> In the role of principal? None. I mean, there are specific […] standard training modules that all administrators have to go through in order to ensure that there is an understanding of the policy and procedures. […] I think this is more of a legal requirement than anything else, but in terms of specific support for a new principal, there [is not] any. There [has not] been any. I think [they are] looking to perhaps start something. There has been in the past, but this is what I was saying when we went to ministry review. All of those programs fell away and the board, […] again under scrutiny, recognized they maybe should [consider] hiring racialized administrators. And so they did, and then they left us pretty much to fend for ourselves.

Ruby's recount emphasizes a perception whereby the supports were minimal at best.

The Ontario Principal's Qualification Program. As we continued the conversation on

organizational supports, we examined how the PQP in Ontario could better prepare Black

women for school leadership. Ruby shared her conviction,

> Maybe they need to start telling the truth. […] I think [it is] so much deeper than what
> they can do. I think these courses, the courses are offered by institutions that are steeped
> in White supremacy, [they are] not even recognizing that they are shuffling out constantly
> a lot of garbage that many people are drinking up, like Kool-Aid. And until these
> institutions, universities, [the] OPC, the Ontario College of Teachers, actually stop and
> interrogate where their stance is and how they project their perspective on education;
> until [that is] interrogated and changed, […] I [do not] know what else to say. I [cannot]
> say they need a unit on anti-Black racism in education. What they need to look at is how
> has the system of education succeeded at continuously oppressing those who are already
> oppressed within society? Right, and [they are] not going to get to that point, so [I am]
> not quite sure what they can do.

Ruby's conviction not only discusses the inadequacies of Ontario's existing PQP, but illuminates

the systemic complexities of how the PQP is structured and the influence that school leadership

preparation educators have on reinforcing inequities.

Policy Enactment. In light of the organizational supports discussed, Ruby proceeded to

discuss how these supports, or lack thereof contributed to her policy enactment practices. Ruby

expressed that her experience enacting policies had been met with both challenges and successes.

The challenges she faced were in part due to staff resistance. She explained,

> Well, my teachers […] have a special level of resentment towards us doing the exact
> same thing that their White administrators have always done. […] if anything, for me to
> be able to act or enact policy, I have to ensure that I got every I and cross every T
> because they will challenge. […] that is something that [I have] learned and [it is] fine. I
> think [it is] probably just the way in which we as Black professionals have to operate in
> every space. Whether [you are] an administrator or [you are] in a health system or
> whatever it might be, [you are] always held to a higher standard and [that is] no different.
> […] even to this day, and I have a really great school.

For her successes, she shared the following,

> […] I think [I have] been lucky that in terms of implementing policy, the implementation
> has been something that eventually is received, and is received well. Implementation of
> policy for me has required looking at the operations that are needed to implement that

policy and ensuring that those operations are anti-oppressive. And I think in doing that, [it has] required more energy, but in doing that, those policies have landed in a better way than they have traditionally.

Ruby's recount highlighted a need for improving organizational supports provided by her school board to support current principals and better prepare aspiring principals for school leadership.

Ruby's Perceptions of Mentorship and Networks of Support

When asked to explain the role that mentorship played on her entrance to principalship, Ruby shared a brief yet pleasant experience. She expressed,

I was very lucky I think, to have developed relationships prior to entering in that were not supported by the organization at large necessarily, of other Black female administrators. And those relationships have been crucial and have provided a great deal of mentorship. But again, those were not as a result of the organization being explicit in wanting to provide support for their young, racialized administrators.

Although recognizing that her experience may have differed from others, Ruby believed that mentorship was an absolute necessity for principals, particularly Black women who aspire to be principals.

Ruby's Perceptions and Negotiations of her Race-and-Gendered Identity

Ruby's visible identity was a contributing factor for how she navigated her role and the negotiations therein. Ruby's belief that her race possessed more significance as a principal than her gender, was made clear when asked how her identity informed her role. She replied,

Well, I think greatly, maybe more race than gender identity. And that of course could be because of my particular time and place in history right now, being a part of the school [and] this board. But a great deal it informs who I am as a principal, consistently, all parts of the day, in every decision. In my response to every outcome of every decision, in every conversation. And the pre-thinking that has to go into every conversation. [It is] consistent, [it is] all the time… Race is salient right now, maybe all the time but even more so in education and even more so in each local school, and it plays a role in every single thing.

She elaborated on this perception further by sharing two defining moments in her principalship where it became apparent that her identity was perceived and received in ways that

were specific to being Black. Both centered on parent interactions. In the first experience, Ruby

had to justify the steps she took to remedy a situation where a racial slur for Black people was

expressed by one student to another.

> Last year I had a situation in which one child, a student, called a Black student the N word. […] The teacher of these children thought that she was doing the right thing and tried to resolve it and sent both of them on a walk together. [She] sent the person who was harming on a walk with the person who had been harmed to try and work it out. […] The parent of the Black boy, of course, was upset and expressed that…And [the] mum called me. [She is] also an educator in our board, [she is] a teacher, and said she expects more from me as a Black woman. And I thought it was interesting because I went above and beyond in terms of dealing with the situation. My predecessor, a White man, probably [would not] have even acknowledged that it occurred. […] I know for a fact he [would not] have. And I also am pretty sure that that [would not] have been her response to him. So, it was interesting because [there is] an expectation of some sort of superhero response, even though [I am] dealing with the exact same constraints that my White colleagues are dealing with, or maybe even more so. That somehow, I can save the world and I can be able to fight and eradicate racism because I am Black.

This experience helped to highlight that race and gender specific expectations for Black

women principals were not limited to students, parents, nor community members unfamiliar with

educational policies and procedures but were also enforced by educators working alongside

principals. In the second experience, Ruby felt, heard, and witnessed a clear distinction between

the reception of her leadership as a Black principal and that of her White counterparts.

> [I have] had something similar happen already this year where [I was] dealing with a family from [an African country]. [… it was a] really difficult situation as [we were] working to meet the needs of the child. And my vice-principal is a White woman and many of the staff in the building are White. My superintendent is White, and I see it very clearly the reverence that this family [had] for my White counterparts. Yet in a meeting [with the family from an African country, they cursed] my children. I was told [by the family that I am] racist […]. And then when my vice-principal spoke, the impact of colonialism was so clear; the level of reverence that they had. And I thought this is hilarious. And I [do not] even think that there is an awareness on their part. So anyways, there is definitely a different standard for me as a Black female administrator.

In both situations, it was apparent to Ruby that possessing the title of a principal did not afford

her with the same authority as her counterparts given the perceptions held about her race-and-

gendered identity.

Ruby's Advice for Black Women Entering Principalship

Ruby's experiences led her to determine that Black women entering principalship need to

have an honest evaluation of their preparedness to undertake the continuous challenges that are

not only inherent to the professional duties of a principal, but of a Black women principal. She

explained,

> Being an administrator, [you are] a middleman to the board. [You are] stuck between everyone, all the stakeholders and every single stakeholder does expect miracles from you. So, [that is] difficult. But the added challenge is race and you are expected to be a martyr for the Black families, the Black children, […] of dismantling racism. And [you are] just expected to fix it all. And [you are] not just expected to fix education, but as I said, [you are] expected to fix racism as well. As if [it is] not something [that is] systemic, [it is] just [she is] going to be the person who can do it.

While presenting the notion of being a martyr, she cautioned that aspiring principals need to

decide if the challenges are worth the sacrifices to one's mental health, personal relationships,

and the value individuals afford themselves.

Michelle's Story

Michelle became trained as a teacher in the Caribbean. Following four years of teaching in two schools, she immigrated to Canada and continued to teach at seven schools for 20 years in a school board in central Ontario. Michelle did not pursue leadership positions until later in her career because she knew that being a school leader was demanding and required time that she needed to pour into her children. At that time, a mother to two young Black children, Michelle was aware of the unique needs of raising Black children in a Canadian society and purposefully postponed her pursuit of leadership until her children began university. Once her youngest child started university, Michelle enrolled in additional qualification courses and a master's program before she had time to change her mind. Her post-graduate research was informed by the school-level inequities and student barriers that she had witnessed in her career. It was through the findings of her research that Michelle was encouraged to go into leadership. Specifically with the aim of bridging the gap between a racialized parent community and the school as a liaison. Michelle candidly explained that she did not know what she was embarking on when she took the steps to become a school leader. She believed that once she stepped into the role, she would be able to successfully make systemic changes. If she obtained more positional power as a principal, then she could build meaningful relationships. This guiding principle led Michelle to become a vice-principal for 3.5 years before transitioning to the role of a principal which she had held for the past 2 years (at the time of the study) in the same board.

Michelle's Perceptions of Leadership and her Role as a Principal

Michelle understood leadership to be an evolving concept that had changed for principals over the past 5 years. In her view leadership was centered on,

> Building relationships and building relationships with my students, my staff, and my parent community. If I can have synergy among those three stakeholders, I think we can

realize the vision because the vision is always student success, for me at least. So, leadership for me is the dance that we do to ensure that these three competing stakeholders somehow have synergy so that we can all move together to this vision of student success. Now, what does that look like is different for different people and in different buildings and in different parts of the city, I might add.

It was not until Michelle transitioned into the role of a principal that she truly understood what it meant to be a principal. She openly expressed,

Understanding the job [does not] happen until [you are] in the role, period. So, I [do not] know that I have to overcome many obstacles to get here, but once [I am] here, the obstacles certainly present themselves.

Michelle acknowledged that certain structures and policies were established in schools to protect principals and remedy the disadvantages previously experienced by others, however the need to make decisions under time constraints while trying to adhere to the bureaucratic procedures in place, presented her with challenges. This need to act in a swift manner to address student needs and fulfill her leadership vision was referred to as the urgency of the now, an urgency that was specific to dealing with the aforementioned three stakeholders that informed the cultivation of relationships as a leader.

Michelle's Perceptions of Organizational Supports and Barriers to Principalship

Reflecting on her experience as a principal, Michelle recounted that her school board provided a variety of organizational supports which included a mentor-mentee program where aspiring leaders were matched with existing school leaders, learning networks where leaders in similar geographic locations met bi-weekly, school board meetings, workshops, conferences, and support from a board-level professional association for administrators. When describing the organizational supports made available, she highlighted,

Well, I think [I am] very lucky to be part of [this] at such a time as this. The awareness of injustice is front and center for our board and they have put in structures in place and workshops and ways of doing things to sort of break down barriers. So, [here is] the thing. This house was built at a time when one group of people thought they were

superior to another group of people. So as a result of that, there are systems in place that still hold true to that. In order to address those systems, we really have to address the builder of the house… And really, if all we're doing is slapping some new paint on the house, then [that is] a problem. So even though the board as its priority or as one of its priorities is anti-Black racism, for example, and they throw resources at you and workshops and they talk the talk, it is very difficult to change the single story that had existed when the house was built. And that story says that you are less than. Therefore, the resources that… the expectations of you are less than. Resources that are thrown at you are less than. Outcomes are less than. So, as I try to position myself as a Black female in this dynamic, [it is] not without its challenges.

Elaborating on her experience, she noted,

I recognize and I operate from the premise as a Black female in this board that I have power and privilege too, because [I am] a principal and I earn a certain amount of money and I live in a certain place and believe me, I recognize my power and my privilege even though [I am] operating in this system.

In this discussion, Michelle particularly acknowledged that being a Black women principal in the dynamic mentioned above also privileged her in certain ways because of her positional power.

The Ontario Principal's Qualification Program. In considering the next steps for providing aspiring Black women principals with support, Michelle stated that the PQP in Ontario would benefit from developing a leadership matching program where current principals are matched with retired principals. Specifically, within the first 6 months of principalship. Her recommendation was rationalized by the following thought,

I do not think that being a [vice-principal] prepares [one] to be a [principal]. I really [do not]. Because the [vice-principal] reports to you, the buck stops with you, right? […] Organizationally, I think we should be paired with a retired principal. Because even though I have said that relationship is so important, the technical piece is important as well. The policies and procedures that you have to follow, [that is] important as well. And you need to have somebody to guide you.

Michelle recalled that in her first year of principalship she reached out to seasoned principals to guide her in making pertinent decisions and believed that a partnership for all principals would be beneficial.

Policy Enactment. As our conversation progressed, Michelle and I discussed the

challenges and successes she faced while enacting board and school-level policies in light of the

organizational structures we discussed. Michelle expressed frustration with having to enact

policies without consultation from the board, in part because of the resistance to change that staff

relayed when policy changes occurred. Michelle shared the following thoughts,

> Policy, [… is] really is a two-edged sword. [It is] here to protect you, but then there is tension between you and what the policy says, and [it is] largely because I find that policies are made by people who are far removed from the situation. [There is] no consultation to get your input. What do you think? [You are] on the ground, [you are] there with the kids, [you are] there. What do you think? Nobody asks you that.

Michelle's most notable success with policy enactment involved a policy change that she

initiated right on "the heels of George Floyd" when the timing was "ripe for a change". Michelle

was the principal for a school with a specialized program. As a result, students had to meet

specific academic criteria to attend the school and historically only White students were meeting

those requirements.

> The message to me at least, is that only White kids are smart, right. When I was appointed to come to the school, I knew exactly what I wanted to do. I wanted to change the admissions' policy. I wanted the admissions' policy to be more equitable. As soon as I got into this chair, I started that process. And [it is] bureaucratic, you have to apply to this, apply to that. There were two things I was asking for. Actually, it was three things I was asking for….So I wanted a) that they removed the [academic criteria], which was easy to do because I came in during COVID. There was no way we could have [the in-person component occur] because there was no physical contact. That was easy. But secondly, I wanted them to withhold 15% of my spots for students from historically marginalized groups. And for that to happen, I wanted to change my application form for a box for people to check, say, if [you are] Black, Indigenous, Latina [etc]. And I got all three.

Michelle's experience showcased that even when policy enactment was geared towards

improving the system, barriers to enactment and race-based resistance stood to undermine her

autonomy to enact. As well, upheld White ideologies because in Michelle's view, "the danger of

a single story is that White is right and other means less than". In spite of the pushback,

Michelle's perseverance led to a school board-wide decision to remove the specific academic

criteria in question from schools with specialized programs, and a commitment to allocate 20%

of spots for students from equity deserving groups.

Michelle's Perceptions of Mentorship and Networks of Support

For the most part, Michelle had a positive experience receiving mentorship to support her

transition into principalship. After her children had departed for university, Michelle decided to

enroll in the PQP for the purpose of obtaining the qualifications and then later decide what her

plans would be. Since Michelle had worked at one school for the duration of her Canadian

teaching career, she had a good relationship with her successive administrator, with whom she

leaned on for support while taking PQP courses. Upon completion of part one of the program,

her principal reached out and encouraged her to progress to PQP two under his guidance.

Michelle had mixed feelings and relayed her thoughts at that time as the following,

> Well, that was not a plan. Like I [was not] ready anyway. He mentored me, he really did, and showed me that [it is] now or never, just do it. And I felt comfortable because I had him to lean on, to be honest. And then many of the assignments I got in the PQP two around school improvement plan and so on and so forth, I was sort of communicating with him a lot and so he was guiding me and so on and so forth. So, I got good mentorship, to be honest.

Given the positive mentorship Michelle received, she felt that mentorship for Black women

principals was particularly important as she believed only 10% of the role entailed theoretical

understanding that could be learned through the school board database. Michelle expressed,

> 90% of our job has to do with relationships, has to do with navigating the system, has to do with how do I handle people? I am in the people business. How do I react to a parent who thinks that their child deserves 98 when he got a 95 and insists that I raise the mark? And if I say no then they go over my head to my superintendent and then to my trustee and then to the director.

Outside of the prescribed job duties, Michelle brought forth the notion of mental health

and racial representation to supplement the discussion of relationships.

One of the reasons why mentorship, particularly for Black people in the system, is

important is so that you can be whole at the end of the day. You can be whole or else [you will] be fractured. [I am] telling you, it comes into you fast and furious and you can take it personal or you can say, listen, [here is] a parent who has too much privilege and too much power. Has never been told no in her life and has suddenly heard the word no from you, a Black person— [does not] know what to do with [that realization]. So, mentorship is important because […] the rules that apply for the White administrator is not the same rules for the Black administrator. [You are] under scrutiny and [it is] a microcosm for life. Remember, if I go out there and I hit somebody, [it is] not Michelle hitting somebody, [it is] that Black woman. [I am] representing my race, [I am] representing my race doing this and [it is] important.

At this point in our conversation, Michelle began to peel back the layers of her understanding of the complexity of why mentorship for Black principals had a unique level of significance compared to mentorship that was inclusive of non-Black principals. A significance that could be attributed to the cultural presentations of what it means to be Black. She explained,

It is so important because your mental health and wellness is always under siege. We are competing against our cultural upbringing, which in many cases say to us, you can do it. […] You are strong. I [do not] know what that means, strong. But we interpret that however we want. [We are] competing with that narrative that [we have] been told all our lives. And that means that if [you are] strong, you [cannot] be weak. And that means that you [cannot] have a bad day. You [cannot mentally say] I [cannot] do this anymore, so forth. So of course, support is so necessary. Mentorship is so necessary.

Although Michelle's school board did not have mentorship opportunities that were specific to Black women principals, she acknowledged that she belonged to a Whatsapp group for Black women principals in her board. This organic network of support sought newly appointed administrators to join the group, converse, and provide leadership support when needed—often in addition to and sometimes in lieu of school board support.

Michelle's Perceptions and Negotiations of her Race-and-Gendered Identity

Being a Black woman principal was an identity that Michelle embodied with pride. In her view,

My gender and my race are always on show, I cannot hide it I [do not] want to hide it. [I am] proud of who I am, [I am] proud of what [I have] accomplished. [I am] proud that I have been lucky in my upbringing to have parents who believed in me, siblings who believed in me, and then [I am] equally lucky to have fallen in love with a man who

believes in me as well. So, my identity is secure. Principaling is not who I am is what I do.

The security and surety she exuded in describing how her race-and-gendered identity informed her role was evident when she explained that she presented herself in places as a Black woman. Indicating that her visible identity markers could not be hidden but were also aspects of who she was that she did not want to hide. As a principal, she recalled,

> People interpret me based on their narrative of what [that is] supposed to look like, what this person's Black body is supposed to exude. [I am] always mindful of breaking down those stereotypes. [I am] always mindful of ensuring that [I am] representing Black and female to the best of my ability.

> Despite Michelle's attempts to provide a palatable presentation, her identity was still questioned and challenged as it related to her leadership abilities. As she recalled her experiences, she shared that,

> In my role as principal at this high school, I have had to defend overtly or otherwise who I am and that [I am] just as capable as the other five, six, seven principals, White principals who came before me. And it really came to a head when I decided to change admissions' policy. [I] actually had a townhall meeting or an open house is what we call it, an open house. And they were just White parents who were just angry at me that [I am] not [upholding the pre-existing academic criteria]. [What is] the school going to look like? What are you trying to do? It was visceral. They got to the microphone and they were angry. They were angry because as a Black female, I dare to believe that non-Whites can be successful and therefore wanted to provide an opportunity for them… I know [I am] always on show. I know [they are] always just waiting for me to fall.

Michelle's experiences centered on the perception and heightened expectations of the parent community for her to have served in ways that reflected their notion of leadership. Even in times where it privileged White ideologies irrespective of her identity as a Black person.

Michelle's Advice for Black Women Entering Principalship

When asked to provide advice for aspiring Black women principals, Michelle centered her response on three key principles; (a) having a philosophy of education, (b) knowing your identity, and (c) maintaining a work-life balance. Michelle explained that understanding and

enacting a philosophy of education had to be evident at all times as it helped to break down the

barriers that students face. Echoing a sentiment of assurance, Michelle explained that although

Black individuals have historically had to work twice as hard to be acknowledged as half as good

as their counterparts, Black women have a right to be in principalship. She advised prospective

principals that "[you have] got to know who you are, you [cannot] be vacillating. Your identity

has to be so clear, and you have to be so sure of who you are and what you believe in". Michelle

emphasized a notion of unwavering understanding of oneself, specifying that placing personal

attachments to the challenges faced while in the role would impact a principal's mental health

and well-being. She made references to the increase of principals that were on mental health and

stress leave as a result of the challenges presented while in the role. When considering how

Black women could navigate the challenges presented, she cautioned that principalship is,

> A job that eats at you. It can. So apart from your identity and then knowing who you are and your philosophy of education, you have to have a life outside of work. You have to have your church group your whatever. You have to have a life outside of work.

Michelle's caution provided a reminder for principals to develop a work-life balance that is

specific to both their needs and identity, two necessary factors for supporting their well-being

goals.

Shirley's Story

Shirley's journey to education began 24 years prior to this study. After becoming a teacher in 1999 with a school board in central Ontario, Shirley taught at the same school for 17 years. During that time, she received an opportunity to lead a science program at an international school in the U.S. for two years, followed by a three-year secondment to teach at a faculty of education at an Ontario university. Early in her career, Shirley aspired to retire as a teacher and had purposed to never enter an administrative role despite being scouted for various roles by recruiters after completing the PQP. She explained,

> I actually took the qualifications to be a principal because I had worked with so many new principals and administrators, and I wanted to know what they knew. I wanted to be able to empower myself as a teacher, to have conversations with them, and that was the only reason I took the courses. I had no interest in actually doing the job.

Sixteen years into teaching, Shirley faced a family emergency which prompted her to reconsider administration and the flexibility that the role provided in comparison to teaching. After careful consideration, Shirley submitted an application for a vice-principal position and progressed smoothly through the recruitment process. After five years of experience as a vice-principal and two years as a principal, Shirley found her own rhythm as an administrator and embraced the role.

Shirley's Perceptions of Leadership and her Role as a Principal

Shirley had a strong conviction that one does not need to be an administrator to be a school leader and gave the example of identifying as a leader when she was a teacher. She justified her view by distinguishing the differences between the positional power that affords administrators with the ability to lead and the actions an educator can take to be a leader.

> Sometimes a teacher can have a stronger voice in certain contexts than an administrator. You have authority as an administrator, but in terms of leadership, leadership is not just about title and authority. I think a school leader is someone who is willing to take

initiative, willing to vision for how to make things better, willing to challenge the norms, willing to support good work. I think it involves all of that.

Shirley further explained that her guiding philosophy as a principal was centered on the understanding that "a school leader is someone who, when things are not going well, steps forward, and when things are going well, steps back". In her practice, she also enabled teachers and staff to step into the leadership position and work alongside her in taking ownership of the success occurring at the school.

As Shirley transitioned into her role as a principal, she faced an internal struggle of having to leave the classroom behind to fulfill certain role duties that required her to be in an office and complete reports. As our conversation progressed, Shirley began to make mention of the impact that her identity as a Black women had on understanding her role as a school leader.

> I think my joy [came to me very specifically] when I started to get to know [the] kids in the school communities I was joining. And I would say that I saw the impact before I understood it. It came to me of what it meant to have a Black administrator in a building for the Black students and families. I was the first Black administrator in every school that I was an administrator, except for the one I just returned to… And I realized that there was a purpose in me being in the spaces that I was in.

Shirley's understanding of her role included her race-and-gendered identity as it was something she embodied in every context and situation she faced. Adding personal examples into her response, Shirley explained,

> From the time I was a small child, and many Caribbean children who are first generation heard, you have to work twice as hard to get half as far. And so, I was always used to having to do more and be better. That was just something you understood was part of being a Black racialized person in Canada, Ontario, southern Ontario; [that is] just what the reality was. Excellence has always been something very important to me, and [I have] always tried to embody that, and I do expect that from those around me. And I have always had high expectations for children, especially Black children, which is its own conversation, because I think that [that is] one of the reasons that our kids have not done well—because not everybody has held that.

This notion of excellence was carried forward in Shirley's responses as she attributed this perspective as having created a path of opportunity for future Black administrators that would

follow.

Shirley's Perceptions of Organizational Supports and Barriers to Principalship

While in her role, Shirley was fortunate to work with supportive superintendents and an administrators' association that helped her navigate the challenges of principalship. In instances where concerns arose, the association would reach out to Shirley and provide guidance as deemed fit. Shirley candidly expressed, "I will firmly and solidly critique the organizational structure we have beyond that, because I think administrators at this moment do not collectively have the support that they need, especially if [they are]t racialized". She emphasized that at the time of the interview, there was an acute crisis of administrators' declining well-being and the highest rate of administrators on leave-of-absence. Particularly, there was a heightened burden of addressing school dilemmas centered on safety, violence, and mental health as job demands at the time of the study had increased. The lack of organizational support coupled with the expectations and responsibilities of principalship left Shirley desiring more support from the school board.

The Ontario Principal's Qualification Program. When asked to explain how the PQP in Ontario could better prepare Black Women for leadership. Shirley replied,

> I can say hands down that the principal courses that I took were the least effective of all the courses [I have] ever taken in my academic or professional career… I think that the Ontario Principals' Council, I understand why they have a philosophy, but I think [it is] wrong. They believe that a principal is a principal, and it [does not] matter if [you are] elementary or secondary. I vehemently disagree with that. The experience of a secondary principal is vastly different than the experience of an elementary principal. We have different challenges, we have different concerns, we have different structures. We have different…there are so many things that are different, and to pretend that those [do not] exist does a disservice for our preparation into the roles.

Shirley felt that in order for instructors to provide examples that support leaders in all contexts, the OPC had to first recognize and explicitly state the differences between the

elementary and secondary panels. In her view, until these changes were implemented, the preparation for principals would continue to be subpar.

Policy Enactment. Continuing the conversation on challenges faced, I transitioned our discussion to Shirley's experience with enacting policies at the school-level. Having grown up in a small Ontario town with a predominately White population, Shirley was used to navigating environments as the only racialized person. She explained that southern Ontario had a significant population that did not reflect the lived experiences of marginalized communities and thus posed as a barrier to the acceptance of policies that aimed to dismantle oppression. She further qualified her response by noting,

> I think as a system—and when I say system, I mean broadly across boards, across panels, across everything—we still are predominantly middle class, female, White. I think when [we are] bringing in real work on anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, [there is] a real fragility and sensitivity. I think [that is] probably the biggest barrier. I think that for me, I [did not] feel really impacted by that because I felt like I knew how to approach it in a way that I could be very clear and direct, but also keep them moving forward as opposed to shutting down.

Shirley was able to use this understanding to develop a space for the successful enactment of policies in her first year as a principal. Shirley was placed in a school that did not have a significant population of Black children. She internally questioned why her strengths were chosen to lead that school when another school could have benefited from her identity as a Black principal. Paying homage to Gloria Ladson-Billings, Shirley loosely paraphrased that the quote "White students have equal or greater need to having Black administrators or leadership as Black children, because they need to see Black people who are confident and in positions of power" helped her to understand why she would be of benefit at any school. In her experience, Shirley had learned the importance of observing a school's dynamics, culture, and "artificial leaders" prior to implementing a plan of change and used this approach at the school she was placed.

While conducting her observation, she had a conversation with a teacher who had taught at the school for over 20 years. The teacher made it clear that Shirley would love being at that school because there were not any race and equity issues she would have to address. Keeping the conversation in her mind, Shirley continued her observations and after a year concluded that that school had the most overt and blatant displays of acts of racism that she had witnessed. Given her role as an instructional leader, Shirley launched a three-hour professional development workshop and strategically started the workshop by deploying an activity on Kahoot!, a game-based learning platform. The following is her recount,

> I did a Kahoot! And I had twelve questions, and the first two questions were nice. Is Shirley happy to be at this school? True or false? 99% of people got it right. And then [I am] like, who said that otherwise? You know, made it nice and light and fun, and everybody's engaged and everybody's participating…And then I started the next ten questions and they included: True or false, did an adult refer to a Black student as a monkey twice in my office? How many students, Black students in one week of different grades who are not friends, asked to leave this school? True or false, in my initial tour of the building, I found one image of a Black female, was it a) Oprah, b) Michelle Jean, c) Michelle Obama, or d) a pamphlet on teen pregnancy? This one cut them to the core because they prided themselves on being an academic school. […] This school had kids going to ivy league schools in the states, Yale and Harvard and Princeton. So, they walked around with their head high because this was who they were […] Imagine this question, what percentage of our Black boy graduating from this school were pursuing post-secondary? Notice I [did not] say university […] or college. 100%, 75%, 50% or 0%. Just so you know, the answer is zero… When I brought these things to their attention, I cannot tell you how many red faces. When I finished my ten questions, half of the room was balling.

Shirley continued the workshop by providing staff with statistics from the school and quotes from their Black students to bring clarity to the anti-Black racism that was occurring. Empowered with the need to improve their practices, the school actively worked towards dismantling barriers for marginalized students. The proactive efforts of the school made for a smooth enactment of school-level policies focused on addressing anti-Black racism. Shirley expressed,

> A lot of schools were scrambling, oh, we now need to look at this. We [were not scrambling]. We were literally in a place where we had already identified this as a real issue. We had already started the work of how do we do this? So, that they were better prepared to support students and the whole school community as we navigated something so ugly socially, historically, culturally. I would say that that was probably one of my successes in my administrative journey.

It is important to note that the actions taken at Shirley's school aligned with the aftermath that ensued with the death of George Floyd, which occurred approximately seven months after Shirley's professional development workshop.

Shirley's Perceptions of Mentorship and Networks of Support

Shirley had a supportive transition into her role in part because of the women mentors that were in her network of support. In the first five years of her career, she had a Black woman superintendent in her board who made the conscious effort to review the positions and schools in which Shirley was placed. When a new superintendent was joining the board, Shirley was concerned about losing the critical friend and mentor relationship she had established.

> I was leery because [I had] always had this Black woman who I could go to, I could talk to, I could be honest with, who would drape me up if I stepped in line. [That is] important to me too. I want to be better. When [you are] striving for excellence, you need to know you have somebody who can say, no, you need to proceed this way or you need to check yourself in this way.

Fortunately, Shirley received a racialized woman superintendent who provided her with immense guidance. In our interview, she chose to mention that the superintendent was racialized because she felt that having a racialized mentor or an individual who had lived experiences from a marginalized community was important to her leadership. Although Shirley emphasized the significance of having "strong women superintendents", she also spoke to the gratitude she had for the mentorship of a White male principal in her first year as a principal. Shirley explained,

> […] I had these superintendents who were supportive of me, and that made a big impact, and they definitely were mentors. But I also had this man who I knew as a new principal starting out, I could call anytime for any reason operationally, because the

superintendents are there providing me this holistic macro-level of support. But for operational things, when [you are] new in a job, and again, all eyes are on you. [You are] the first Black administrator. Not just principal, Black administrator, [you are] type A, [you have] got all these things. So, when you want to know how to do something operationally, you need someone that you can call and trust. And he was a very experienced principal.

Shirley's response pointed towards the need to not only have mentors available for principals but a strategic understanding of the capacity in which each mentor could provide guidance for the array of tasks that principals undertake. She referred to the principal-to-principal mentorship as micro-level mentorship.

In addition to the professional mentorship Shirley received from seasoned principals and superintendents, she received informal support from the Black women friendships she made while completing the PQP and beginning her role as a principal. She shared the following,

[There] was five of us that all started at the same time. And actually, I say five of us, but there were seven of us, two that were not racialized, and so we were tremendous support to each other because if I learned something or got information, I would share it. If they got information, they would share it. We supported each other in the journey in terms of where we were, and then we all had people we could tap. I had a couple of friends who were one year ahead of us, ahead of me and our group. And we actually have formed a little group. [We are] now up to ten because [we have] added a couple of colleagues that have joined the year after us. And so, we are huge supports to each other because [we are] in the same place… [you will] notice, again, [I am] not talking about anything via the board itself. This is all relationship based, but I would not have survived the transition or the entry into the role without those things.

Shirley highlighted the significance of creating networks of support that were specific to the needs of Black women principals by sharing an example where the affinity group she belonged to was sought after. She recalled that a superintendent had contacted her after receiving news that there was a Black principal in a school board that needed support. This principal was the only Black principal in the secondary panel in her respective school board. Although this principal had access to a superintendent, Shirley affirmed that the superintendent could not understand the complexities and challenges the principal faced as a result of her identity, but fortunately the

superintendent had the foresight to recognize that she needed to connect with other Black principals. Once the principal connected with Shirley and her group, conversations reinforced the reality that being the only Black principal was a hard and lonely role.

Shirley's Perceptions and Negotiations of her Race-and-Gendered Identity

Shirley understood her race-and-gendered identity as an aspect of who she was as a teacher and a principal. While her role changed, Shirly maintained the same perception. Given her self-identified maternal position, she noted that her gender afforded her the ability to hug a child faster than a man could. As well as the ability to share quotes with new and returning teachers about the nuance of perception and reception in regard to their racial identities. To add to her experience, Shirley shared that while in her first year as a principal, a parent walked into the school and asked Shirley to direct them to the main office. Once at the office, they wanted to speak with the principal. Although Shirley wore a full suit to work, it did not occur to the parent that she could be the principal. She shared,

> But in a full suit, I had parents mistake me for the safety monitor, trades people mistake me for the safety monitor. […] I understand that especially parents and adults— I know that they will walk in, and I have to navigate the fact that I am not what they expected. Now, for Black families I also know, because remember it depends on who [we are] talking about. For Black families, they come in and [there is] a sense of relief and a sense of trust because they feel like I will understand or I will give their child a chance or I will see their child and the good that they have. So, it depends on who [we are] talking about. It depends on context. But definitely I am not the face and/or gender of what people think of when they think of a principal. And I am aware of that and I know that my race and gender serve me well in some situations and I know that it is something that could be an obstacle for others in some situations.

Shirley justified that the ways in which parents perceived her role were specific to her identity markers as her predecessor, who was a White man, often dressed in casual attire and was not mistaken for the safety monitor. Further, she added that the misinterpretation not only occurred at the administrative level but was a feat that Black educators faced in other roles.

As a teacher, [you are] seen to be the [educational assistant] or the [special needs assistant]. As somebody holding a walkie talkie in a full suit, you clearly would have to be the safety monitor because you [would not] even be a vice-principal. So, [it is] that sense of always thinking that you are lesser than and not expecting that [you are] holding a position like that.

I continued our conversation by asking Shirley to elaborate on an experience where her identity as a Black woman was perceived or received differently than her counterparts. She explained that while she was a vice-principal, her principal who was a White man, heard that an upset Black mother planned to visit the school for a meeting. Although the meeting did not require Shirley to be in attendance due to her leadership position, she was asked to join the meeting. In that moment, Shirley knew that her identity as a Black woman was needed to help remedy the dilemma that was unfolding. She recalled that once the mother saw Shirley, her demeanor became calm, ultimately changing the "tone and tenor of the conversation". Reflecting on the ways in which her identity was perceived and received, Shirley was dismayed at the fact that she was the first Black administrator in the three schools she led in the past five years. This realization was troubling as she felt that students still did not have opportunities to see people who looked like them in leadership positions. More importantly, she noted that as Black administrators were being accepted into leadership roles, they were "worked harder" and "typically they [were] put into schools that either [had] a lot of equity needs because there [was not] any, or that [had] very high needs and high Black populations". Shirley's perception highlights a silo effect, resulting in the inequitable expectation for Black women and men administrators to perform at levels that are higher than those of their counterparts.

Shirley's Advice for Black Women Entering Principalship

Reflecting on over 24 years of experience in education, Shirley advised aspiring Black women principals to make connections with other Black women principals. She explained,

> I think if somebody wants to go into this role, they need to find other Black women to connect with who can, at minimum, be a listening ear, who will understand what [they are] talking about. But greater than that, would be able to give some great mentorship and advice and guidance to navigate the world of leadership in institutions that are predominantly White and predominantly not reflective of our community.

Shirley had immense appreciation for the group of Black administrators who supported her through her leadership journey and felt that those connections were significant for Black women principals.

Harriet's Story

When Harriet immigrated to Canada as a 19-year-old international university student, she did not know her journey would lead her to a career in education. Harriet had her eyes set on completing a Ph.D. and teaching in higher education as a professor. She completed her undergraduate degree in sociology and Latin American and Caribbean studies before progressing to a master's degree in politics and international development. Upon graduation, she worked for 1 year in the insurance industry and taught a weekend program from young students in a non-profit community organization. Noticing a pattern of enjoyment for teaching, she enrolled in teachers college in a university in central Ontario. Equipped with her degrees and teaching experience as a tutor and teaching assistant, Harriet gained employment for 2 years as a co-ordinator of an organization that specialized in helping students obtain a general educational development certification and enhance literacy skills. In that time, Harriet was also a supply teacher in the secondary panel waiting to receive a permanent position. Her supply experience brought her to a variety of school boards in central Ontario, including Catholic boards and experience teaching at alternative education schools. She recalled her thoughts around her career in 2008,

> And then I got a [long-term occasional contract; LTO], and I kept getting LTOs and I said, you know one day [I will] get something permanent. So, it happened. I had a lot of patience back then. It was hard to get a permanent job. [it is] like who you knew, right? And I [did not] really know too many people in the board at that point but, I just built connections as I went through schools.

Harriet recalled a rather quick journey to leadership. She taught full-time for approximately 5 years before becoming a vice-principal, a role she held for 4 years before becoming a principal. At the time of our interview, Harriet had entered her second year of principalship in the secondary panel in the same school board she had taught in for several years.

Harriet's Perceptions of Leadership and her Role as a Principal

In Harriet's view, a school leader was an individual who collaborated and maintained the priority of being a teacher at heart. She believed in an open-door policy of communication and created an environment where both students and staff felt a delineated hierarchy. She explained,

> I think to be a good leader, you have to build those relationships and not every person has that mindset. But growing up in the Caribbean, the education system was very British, very hardcore, very different. I know if I took that approach, [there is] no way my students would relate to me; the experiences are very different. I had to deal with… we had no social media, Instagram, cell phone, none of these things back then. So, my approach is… student voice is what sort of direct managership I talk to my students all the time for everyone in my office.

As a principal in a school that serves students from low socio-economic neighbourhoods, Harriet played the role of an advocate. For Harriet,

> The advocacy piece [had] been really important for my leadership. You [cannot] be shy in certain schools, you got to ask for what you want. The most they can tell you is no. And then you keep trying right. At some point, we reached a position where we can meet halfway.

She also viewed the role of a principal as one that wore many hats. She was comfortable with students mistaking her for the safety monitor because her leadership was evident in all facets of the school.

> But I also [do not] wear my position on my shoulders, where [I am] the principal you have to do what I say. Nope, [I will] listen. And for me, when I first came to [this school] I wanted to get a feel of the school before I made certain changes and decisions. Every principal has their own way, so I did a lot of listening and then I thought about what works and what [does not] and what approaches I wanted to do differently.

As our conversation progressed, Harriet shared that,

> Not everyone wants to be in our school. And most of my students are Black and they need to see Black administrators or Black people in positions of power. So, they [do not] have the privilege of many of the other students and [I am] here to support them.

For Harriet, it was important that she intentionally worked in a high needs school as she felt that her identity as a Black women principal was necessary.

Harriet's Perceptions of Organizational Supports and Barriers to Principalship

When asked to describe the organizational supports that Harriet had received from her school board, she had a few items that came to mind. She explained that her school board partnered new principals with seasoned principals as mentors however, she was not assigned one. She attributed the potential reason for non-assignment to the changes brought forth by COVID-19. In lieu of not being assigned a mentor, Harriet relied on the principals and superintendents she had built relationships with to be her network of support. As Harriet worked in schools that serviced students from low socio-economic neighbourhoods, she found the lack of organizational supports as barrier to her leadership. She shared,

> One of my challenges is that I know as a board, [we are] working towards creating an inclusive education system, but the reality is that we have a long way to go. [For example, a school board in central Ontario] is still the most diverse board. When you look at the senior team, the director is Black and so forth. Yes, that is there compared to many other boards. However, [there is] a lot of systemic elements that is still embedded. [For] the schools like ours, [it is] always a struggle to get things always been cut from us. Teachers are taken from us because our numbers may not be where it needs to be in terms of the school, everything. The way the Ministry of Education works is like, the more students in the building the more teachers you have. [I am] in a school where a lot of my students have [individualized education plans] and so we need to be using a different method. We [cannot] be using a blanketed formula to staff schools based on the fact that [it is] a number's game.

To meet the needs of her students, Harriet adopted an advocacy perspective whereby she communicated with her superintendent about her school's needs and the lack of funding— especially in situations where she could witness the differences in parent involvement and funding from schools that serviced affluent neighbourhoods.

The Ontario Principal's Qualification Program. Given the limited organizational supports that were available to Harriet, we transitioned our conversation to discuss the supports that could be implemented to enhance the experience of principals, specifically through the PQP. Harriet stated,

I think in terms of leadership, one of the things the programs need to focus on is advocacy […]. [You are] going to have to advocate, but you [do not] want to come across as an angry Black woman, right? And so [that is] also not my impression. Same way [I am] talking to you is the same way [I will] talk to others even when [I am] not angry, rarely do you see me raising my voice. And so, I think sometimes [we are] afraid to advocate because [we think], what will people think? Will that mess up my career? Even as a [vice-principal], I was advocating and my principal was like you [do not] care do you? I was like nope, once [it is] for my students the most somebody can tell me is no. And because of [my advocacy] I got so many donors to donate [funds] and they still donate to the school, right. I said the most somebody can tell me is no and [I am] okay with no.

Harriet continued her response by cautioning,

This systemic bias is real. So, people [should not] be delusional because they are Black, they need to hire more racialized admin, that things are now easy and so on… What most boards will do, they will create a mess and then they will send the Black administrators to try to clean it up instead of initially just listening … [There is] a lot of heavy lifting as Black educators and you can get pegged. I can get pegged to be only for all my career in these sort of high need schools…But a lot of the times they will create a mess and… promote Black educators to try to clean up that mess.

Her use of the word mess was to denote school level inequities and dilemmas that racialized administrators are expected to remedy.

Policy Enactment. Enacting policies at the school level had been a challenge for Harriet. She shared that her school had a specialized race-based program, however the teaching staff did not visibly reflect the racialized identities that were needed for the program. Harriet acknowledged that although the teachers were allies, she found it challenging to instill the message that representation matters.

I need more Black [teachers], this is a predominately Black school…I have four and I brought them in. Well one I met with and the three others I hired, like I was intentional in my hiring, just like other groups hire their people, I was very intentional when I have vacancies, I was very intentional. I look at all the applications but if I have strong Black applicants [I am] going to take them instead of some of my counterparts… [I have] hired all staff but I recognize that this is a school that has a [specialized program] and we have two teachers.

When a vacancy occurred for a department head position, Harriet wanted to promote one of the

Black teachers at the school but could not because the teacher fell 2 months short of meeting the 3 years of teaching experience requirement. The teacher had a master's degree in equity, was a Black woman, and had a good rapport with students; however, the hiring procedures that were put in place restricted Harriet from promoting the teacher without bringing the concern to the attention of her superintendent. Earlier in our conversation Harriet mentioned that her school board had been moving in a direction of strengthening its equitable practices. She found that the intent to become more equitable often conflicted with pre-existing hiring policies and labour union procedures. This paradox left Harriet with the following perception,

> These are some of the challenges, the systemic piece like when teachers are taken from me, when [there is] no representation. [It is] always a fight to keep teachers because many of our Black teachers are also junior, right? Because it took a long time for them to get hired from permanently. [They are] also junior in terms of their contract and the union is pretty strong. Every time teachers are surplused our school numbers get smaller, it tends to be over young Black, racialized teachers. You lose them and then you have this group of older teachers who some of them are great but some of them need to retire. So, for me, staffing is a challenge and really staffing at school with effective teachers because you have to deal with the union who will grieve you for anything but you also want to have more inclusivity. For me, that has been my major challenge.

Harriet's successes with policy enactment were centered on the development of programs and conferences that supported student activism. For example, her school developed a queer students' alliance group, a mental health and wellness room, and a Black Brilliance Conference. At the core of Harriet's leadership was relationship building and listening to student voice. In her role, she translated the mandates of policies to incorporate the needs of her students and was intentional with ensuring that her school transitioned from focusing on trauma towards "the joys and the brilliance". She emphasized that as a principal she chose to be intentional as this was not always the case with other leaders in her board. When discussing the Black Brilliance Conference, she shared,

> Everybody wants to get in because a lot of principals have to do their checklist. Oh, one

> Black conference, yep I promoted anti-Black racism. [I am] just being real. [I am] proud of my students…when I see them do greatness, because the media [does not] show that. It just shows a group of students at the school fighting and [they are] like, oh, the school is wild. But that [is not] really the case. I think a lot of the times we [do not] allow our students to talk and discuss their concerns. The school [does not] just get wild right, [it is] the staff that are here and so forth.

Harriet accredited her successes with enacting policies to the relationships she had built in her professional career. In her view, "if you [do not] have the relationship piece with your students as well as staff, this job is going to be very miserable". Her words were a reminder for those entering administration that the development and maintenance of relationships with multiple stakeholders is a necessary component that cannot be forgotten.

Harriet's Perceptions of Mentorship and Networks of Support

At the time of the interview, Harriet had been a principal for 2 years and began her leadership experience at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, her board did not provide any mentorship programs due to an influx of retirements that required the recruitment of close to 20 principals. It is through this group of newly hired principals that Harriet found the four to five other Black principals to lean on. Harriet noted that the death of George Floyd provided an opportunity for the recruitment of every Black applicant to a leadership position, particularly as her school board wanted to address anti-Black racism and promote inclusivity. She further qualified her response by stating that she would have appreciated mentorship for the role, however the work intensification brought on by the pandemic did not leave time for mentorship. Instead, Harriet relied on the relationships she had with her previous principal, superintendent, and the colleagues made in her education career to ask questions and obtain insight from their experiences. On difficult days when Harriet needed support, she connected with the five principals with whom she shared the journey to become a vice-principal and principal. She noted that most of the women were Black with the exception of one principal who

was White.

After Harriet mentioned that her affinity group consisted of Black women administrators,

I followed up and asked if mentorship was necessary for Black women principals. She

responded,

> I think so, I think [it is] really important. And because [it is] so important, my girlfriend
> and I, a few, maybe about 3 years back, we created a WhatsApp chat for Black
> administrators. But Black, so new teachers who had just become [vice-principals]
> because we knew when we were going through that we [did not] really have a network.
> So that chat must have had like five. Right now, [it is] at forty…All Black administrators
> and even people in the board know about it, and they will refer to my girlfriend and
> myself to add people.

Harriet emphasized that the WhatsApp group was a safe space for Black administrators to

ask questions and receive guidance on navigating school dilemmas, praising the convenience of

its virtual access for why it was a successful mentorship tool. She explained,

> I know in the board [there is] various learning networks and the board offers it right. [I
> have] seen all the emails and so forth. But first off, [I am] going in a busy school. I [do
> not] really have the time to leave the school to go in. If [it is] virtual, [it is] different.

She appreciated that she was placed in a predominately Black school with two Black

principals as it relieved her from navigating anti-Black racism and White privilege. Although

Harriet knew she could rely on her network of support for the future, specifically when she

would move to a school that is less racially diverse, she insisted that the organizational supports

made available to principals need to be increased. She mentioned that informal groups such as

the WhatsApp group grew through word of mouth, however some informal network groups were

less receptive to newcomers. In her view, "not all folk is skinfolk". Simply being a Black

principal did not afford everyone with an invitation or acceptance into the group, especially as

confidential opinions and thoughts are shared in the groups.

> You have to find a way to network with individuals. [That is] the only way [you are]
> going to learn, because [there is] no manual to be a principal or vice-principal. The OPC
> course, the PQP courses that you do are just a course, I [have not] used anything really

from the course, right. [It is] just a way to get there. Yeah, [it is] important to build those relationships.

Recognizing the importance of mentorship, Harriet ended her response by explaining that she made it a point in her role to mentor and support the vice-principals at her school. She reminisced on how other principals encouraged her to pursue leadership and passed on that vote of confidence onto her vice-principals.

Harriet's Perceptions and Negotiations of her Race-and-Gendered Identity

Harriet's transition into her first year of principalship was met with hesitance from colleagues who cautioned that "[she is] going to be really scary", however her identity as a Black woman working in a predominately Black school enabled her to build relationships that were instrumental to her leadership approach. While in her role, she quickly learned the significance of first impressions, monitoring a school's progress prior to making changes, and building a relationship with the union president as key components to how she would lead her school. Regardless of the leadership approach enacted, Harriet was cognizant that her race-and-gendered identity played a role in both the perception and reception of her practices. While she entered her school space as a Black woman, the intersection of her age added an additional layer of judgement. She shared the following,

> A lot of the things [you will] learn while [you are] on the job, but you definitely kind of go in and say, oh, this is the type of leader [I am] going to be, and so forth, because your leadership is going to change…Even today, when people come and say they are looking for the principal, and I go yep how can I help you? I still look relatively young to some of them anyway. Like, miss you look like you could be my mother. I [say], yes, I could be your mother, but [I am young]. But I know [it is] hard, [it is] hard to be a racialized administrator but I also think that because of the push now as a society looking at anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism that [it is] easier to a certain extent to get through the process to become a [vice-principal] or a principal. However, once [you are] there, [you are] going to have the people like, oh, [it is] because [she is] Black she got the position.

For Harriet, working in a predominately Black school did not always afford her with the

privilege of avoiding race-related barriers. While she was fortunate to work with Black

administrators, the sentiment of heightened scrutiny, judgement, and need to succeed that were

commonly felt by Black principals still prevailed. In her view,

> As Black administrators, we sometimes feel like we have to make sure we make no mistakes and do really well because obviously [we are] treated more harshly than our White counterparts. [That is] just the reality of it. [I am] knocking on wood, [I am] not saying at all that happened to me, but [I have] just been fortunate to work with this Black administrator. My other [vice-principal] was White but then I was the boss, I was the principal. I [have not] had yet a White principal that I had to work with. So. my navigation of the system was a bit different than many of my colleagues.

She continued by explaining that the role of a Black principal required a level of patience

and mastery of being able to "hold your tongue sometimes" and figuring out "who [are] really

your allies and who are not". These skills became paramount when she led professional

development sessions. Given the racial demographic of her school, Harriet ensured that she did

not always host professional development sessions centered on equity. In her practice, she

reminded her teaching staff that they worked in a predominantly Black school which required

them to use of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy to engage students on a consistent

basis. This approach was two-fold: 1) enabled an acknowledgement of systemic racism and 2)

ensured that advocacy remained one of the foci to her professional identity. While discussing

how this approach connected to her identity, she noted that,

> I think in terms of the leadership piece, in terms of preparing Black educators, I think advocacy is important. I think that we have to recognize that systemic biases do exist. They cannot go in with blinders. So, not because [you are] administration now [you are] going to change the world, no. [It is] going to take little steps, eventually wherever you are, [you will] make a difference.

Additionally, being a Black women principal meant needing to "have a strong back

because…things that White counterparts can get away with you [would not], they will send you

home on home assignment right. You have to learn how to play the game and how to navigate

the system".

Harriet's reminders were of significance for highlighting the professional landscape that Black women must traverse while constructing their professional identities, particularly in regard to representation. Although Ontario school boards were increasing the recruitment of Black principals at the time of the study, Harriet noted that there remained a sense of isolation when compared to her counterparts. She explained that,

> When I go to meetings, when I look around the room, I can still count on one hand. It looks like [it is] a lot of us, a lot of us in the certain region of [a city in central Ontario], but when all the principals meet and you look around the room, [you are] like, okay, you still definitely in the minority.

This sense of loneliness pointed towards the notion that while policies and recruitment efforts were developing, the representation of Black principals remained limited. While acknowledging that change would take time, Harriet encouraged Black women principals to practice self-care through physical activity, participating in mental health initiatives, and having a sense of humour.

Harriet's Advice for Black Women Entering Principalship

When discussing the advice Harriet had for aspiring Black women principals, she emphasized that Black women should have clarity on why they are entering principalship and an understanding of the work demands. Harriet shared the following advice,

> Well, one piece of advice is that we are really strong women, but sometimes we have to have a little bit of extra strength. [We are] in the position knowing that you have a lot of people being really critical of you because they [do not] expect anything great. Many people will think [you are] just another Black hire because the board needs that right now. But you have to have that belief in yourself. You [cannot] be afraid. […] You [should not] be going into this job first off for a salary, because trust me, they [do not] pay us enough. [It is] the amount of hours [we are] doing. Secondly, if [it is] just another career move, [that is] not for you. Like teaching just as being a principal or vice-principal is a vocation. [It is] not just a job. […] You have to be invested in it because it can suck up your life and you have to have a very supportive partner if [you are] in a relationship because that also helps […] for your own mental health and wellness.

Harriet elaborated that principals need to know "how to build on relationships and not break down relationships" as relationships are the backbone for ensuring the school can function as a cohesive unit. Reflecting on her experience, Harriet shared that being a principal was a difficult task, specifically when situated in an area where students could have fallen victim to violence. However, in her view, the stress and challenges should not outweigh the reason for being in the profession. She explained the following,

> You have to find your Black joy. You have to be able to find Black joy as Black administrators in what [you are] doing, because this can be a lonely job, especially if [you are] an administrator by yourself. Like, [I am] in elementary schools sometimes you have a single [principal] and no vice-principals. It can be a really lonely job. You have to be able to build that relationship and have a network of like-minded individuals. Or you know what, sometimes you need that critical frame too, but you need to have that network, whether [it is] formal or informal.

Harriet's reflection highlights a sentiment of loneliness and finding a purpose for persevering while in the position, which she summed up as a Black joy and a sense of fulfillment.

Wangari's Story

Wangari's journey to becoming an educator began as an educational assistant with a school board in central Ontario. After she completed her Bachelor of Education degree, Wangari intentionally became an occasional teacher for 5 years, with a school board in southwestern Ontario. Once she obtained a permanent contract, she remained at the same school for 18 years. By the time Wangari had spent 21 years as teacher, she had completed additional qualifications that were pertinent to her career goals, a master's degree in applied linguistics and teaching English as a second language, and knew she wanted to pursue school administration. She became an acting vice-principal for a school board in southwestern Ontario for approximately 1 year after which she was placed back into the recruitment pool and returned to the classroom. Wangari spent the next 2 years frustrated with waiting for an administrative position that she submitted an application for another school board in hopes of landing a vice-principal position. Her persistence was fruitful, as she spent the next 5 years thereafter as a vice-principal.

Becoming a principal was a decision that Wangari gave careful consideration. At the time of her decision, Wangari was very aware that her school board did not have many racialized administrators. She was one of approximately four other Black administrators. Wangari described the conflicted feelings she had at the time,

> When I was encouraged by my superintendent to consider applying for the principalship, … I [did not] feel very, not confident, but not comfortable to go into principalship as the only [Black leader], and I [had not] known at that time but, later I [learned] that I would be the first. [The board] had Black elementary principals and vice-principals and they had a history of that, but they [did not] have a history of Black secondary principals. I knew that if I were to do that, I would be the first. But I also knew, […] looking at the landscape, [I would] be the only and [it is] a daunting experience. When I told my superintendent, [it is] not that I [did not] think I could do the job, I said, I just [did not] want to be the only. She [did not] understand that. She says, oh, I know what you mean, [you will] be fine. I was like no, you [do not] understand. I need to have a community.

With the support of her superintendent, qualifications in her back pocket, and the determination

to become a principal, Wangari was successfully hired as a principal and had been in her role for

1.5 years at the time of the interview.

Wangari's Perceptions of Leadership and her Role as a Principal

Wangari understood school leadership to encompass a wide variety of components. In her

view, school leaders were agents of change who were accountable to a number of key

stakeholders with students being the primary reason why principals lead schools. School leaders

were not simply managers but rather "[they are] leaders, [they are] change agents, [they are]

people who secure accountability, that what needs to get done is done". Wangari explained that

to be a school leader in Ontario was to be guided by the OLF. Specifically, guided by pillars such

as,

> building and developing relationships, sharing a vision, securing accountability,
> developing the program; all of those play into what we have to do, whether [we are]
> elementary, secondary, and school leadership. That means [you are] always managing
> your relationships with those above you and your superintendent, the executive director,
> the Ministry, the curriculum that you have to make sure that is brought out, EQAO and
> the standard of testing that is conducted in all schools, and of course, with your own staff.

Given the time of when we had our interview, Wangari mentioned that the effects of the

pandemic tasked principals with the responsibility of managing the mental health and wellness

for all the stakeholders previously mentioned. Safety became a primary concern for students and

parents. She noted,

> For our staff to feel safe, we have to make sure that [we are] following guidelines and we
> have to be the barometers to make sure that our school climates and our classrooms are
> places where psychologically, emotionally, racially, physically, our buildings are safe.
> Our schools are places where our students and staff want to come in and learning can
> actually happen. [It is] a lot of work on the forehand and maintenance throughout before
> you can even touch on learning. And [that is] the ultimate goal while [we are] there. [We
> are] there for learning, for kids to have high achievement, we want to make sure that
> barriers are constantly lowered and eventually eliminated.

Among all of the responsibilities and traits Wangari identified as encompassing school

leadership, she also stated that principals had to take care of themselves—a task that was a

difficult endeavour.

As Wangari transitioned into her role as a principal, she faced the challenge of isolation. As the sole Black woman principal, she wished she had an affinity group of other Black administrators that she could rely on to navigate the complexities of school leadership.

> So, when I interacted with students and their parents, it was in the role of a vice-principal. My identity as a Black woman came up sometimes and it was noted or observed or perceived in a certain way differently than, say, my colleagues who are also vice-principals with me in the school. It [was not] as overt, frequent in that role than as it was as a principal. Because the school that I became a principal at… it [was not] the first time they had a woman. I was the second woman to lead. It was the first time they had a Black woman.

The experiences Wangari had that shaped her understanding of school leadership had been unique and at times extreme, however she felt that this was in part due to the board having "only one Black administrator in that landscape as opposed to having you know, a community where it's just normalized and that's just the way it is". The underrepresentation of Black administrators presented challenges to Wangari's leadership experience and consequently became a central point of her narration.

Wangari's Perceptions of Organizational Supports and Barriers to Principalship

Wangari's board had offered a variety of organizational supports which addressed the development of equitable hiring practices, administrator workshops, and a board-level principals' council to provide support to all administrators regardless of race. Wangari stated that obtaining a role within this council was difficult given her racial identity. She noted,

> If you have a leadership role within that organization, you can have more input. But then getting into that role takes something too because they have these openings of different roles and you can put your name in and then [it is] just someone else within that higher end of, I guess, the chair and vice-chair, they just decide. [It is] up to them who gets into those roles. [I have] applied for various roles within that organization, that council and I was able to get a seat on school budget, and I was asked to put my name in for equity, and I said no, because I said, why do you always come to me for the equity role? I said, why [do not] you go to somebody else? I think other members of our colleagues would

really benefit from being on that council as opposed to coming to me automatically. I was a bit put off by that because I thought, why is it the only one that you think I could show any capacity for would be for the equity role, even though [it is] very important. [I am] not saying [it is] not, [it is] just that was the only role that I was invited to apply for whereas others I had to fight for and see other people get into those roles.

She continued to explain that finding supports within her board for principals was difficult, thus she encouraged principals to find and/or create their own networks of support. In instances where her board did not have Black administrators to connect with, Wangari took the initiative to reach out to Black administrators in other boards. She emphasized that opportunities for connecting with administrators on the basis of certain identity markers was not made available by her board and was an endeavour she had to purposefully fulfill.

Policy Enactment. Continuing the discussion on organizational supports, I asked Wangari to describe the challenges and successes she faced while enacting school or board level policies. While crafting her response, Wangari purposefully chose to address the successes before challenges. She worked at a school that was fortunate to receive financial, time, and training resources through various OME initiatives that intended to support student learning. Working in tandem with dedicated administrators who embraced a reflective leadership approach, Wangari and her teaching staff were able to breathe life into OME led programs and policies. She explained that the programs enabled her to enact forums that focused on student voice and provided students with the authority to direct the conversation on school change. To her, this approach was a success because it incorporated student feedback and provided an opportunity to collaborate with students on an OME led initiative at the school level. In the end, she expressed,

We [are] still trying to do things better but that is something that [I am] very glad for. [I am] glad for those ministry projects that come into schools that are normally targeted as being trouble schools that give us opportunities to do school in a very creative way and to operate in a way [that is] not traditional... [I am] all about the students. That was a

success. I [will] cling to that and to the learning of the teachers who jumped in and said yeah, I want to do better.

Moving towards the challenges, Wangari explained that COVID-19 presented mental health barriers that left students and staff feeling anxious about their physical well-being and safety. The 3 year period of exhaustion had made leading post-pandemic a difficult endeavour as mental health concerns impacted student learning. In addition to leading during a pandemic, Wangari noted that enacting policies at the school-level was challenging because of her identity. Wangari gave the example of a time when she asked her staff to incorporate an equity lens to their practice given that the board had established initiatives to address the systemic injustices that were occurring in schools.

> I had asked my leaders, my department leaders, at the start of the school year and I said, we are instructional leaders. [Let us] focus on your own leadership, but through an equity lens. I gave them five different books to use as just a starting point and I said, we can look at equity and assessment, equity and instruction. I gave them some resources on sovereignty and understanding our relationship to Indigenous studies and Indigenous sovereignty and respecting our students with Indigenous roots. I had given them five different resources. I said, choose whatever you want for which one you want, I will buy whatever books you want, just to start our monthly meetings with just a 10 to 15 minute, [here is] what [I have] learned so far. And I would say a quarter of them bought in and said great. And the other three quarters did not like it.

The resistance posed by staff prevented Wangari from enacting equitable practices in the school. In response to her request, staff brought a grievance against Wangari to the teachers' union stating that she was making them read books. She understood this resistance to be "because they had received this leadership from a Black woman, they resisted and it was all good things". Wangari's experience highlights the administrative challenges she faced that not only circumvented her enactment practices, but increased her administrative duties (i.e. addressing a union grievance) as a form of resistance.

The Ontario Principal's Qualification Program. With an understanding of the

organizational supports that existed, Wangari and I transitioned our conversation to consider the

future. When asked to describe how the PQP in Ontario could better prepare aspiring Black

women principals, Wangari expressed that the question in itself "[revealed] a lot about the

expectation on the Black women in that role". It was Wangari's belief that,

> As a Black woman in leadership, I am already aware of my identity wherever I go. Wherever we go, we know who we are by how people respond to us. But I think the preparation needs to be done with the organization and how they themselves need to anticipate those reactions that we already know that [we are] going to get.

She added to her response by sharing an experience where her staff placed grievances,

underpinned by anti-Black racism, against her to the teachers' union. She recalled feeling that,

> As a Black woman if my organization was prepared for that, had policies in place for that, had an awareness of it, so that they can respond on my behalf. [It is] really important for Black women to feel that there is a buffer because when we have to face everything on every front, [it is] exhausting. But when your organization says, I know what that word means when they say [she is] difficult, [I am] going to respond to that. I know what that means when they say, oh, this Black woman, I wish [she would] change her tone, [I am] going to respond to that, so that they [do not] come to me and say, I heard that. I [do not] need to hear that, I [do not] need to hear that these people have these anti-Black racist ideas towards me. My expectation is that [I am] working in a world and a sphere in which they are not for me.

Wangari felt strongly that the education system as a whole and those in positions of power

should be held accountable and tasked with preparing themselves for,

> The onslaught and the harm that comes to Black women in leadership. But when you have no clue and you go back to the Black women and say, what do you say about this? How are you going to fix that? [That is] an added burden of oppression that I [did not] ask for it.

> I followed-up on Wangari's response by asking her how a principal should respond in the

situation she faced. She candidly expressed that a principal could approach the organization and

say, "for me to be successful this is what I want from you". However, she cautioned that,

> When [you are] talking to a group of leaders who they themselves are not aware, they think in their head, oh, I know all the buzzwords. I know what to say. But when you say to them, okay, when you hear this, what do you think that means? They have no clue.

> They just respond that we have an administrator, there are complaints, [there are] all these grievances. [Where is] the problem? Right? So, [they will] say, [where is] the problem? [It is] the administrator. We need to deal with this administrator as opposed to sifting through the threads of what exactly they say and who are they saying it to?

Wangari's experience highlighted a neglect within the organizational structures of the school board for filtering instances of anti-Black racism against administrators and understanding how racially motivated grievances could cause harm to racialized principals. At that point in our conversation, Wangari began to bring forth questions about the rate of sustainability for Black women in principalship. Specifically, for those who consistently endured oppression in instances where board procedures were circumvented to ensure the Black woman principal was labelled as a problem while masking anti-Black racism.

Wangari's Perceptions of Mentorship and Networks of Support

When Wangari was a department head she was encouraged to pursue administration by a vice-principal who gave her a shoulder tap.

> [The vice-principal] was very instrumental in just encouraging me and giving me his lens on various responses on how one would navigate that role because the [vice-principal] role is very hands on. [You are] dealing a lot with students and student behavior and all things around student achievements and parents and managing conflict. So, in that very hands on role, I had a really great mentor. And since then, even though I had left the board, he still kept in touch. He was very encouraging. He was always very supportive of me as a leader.

This mentor was particularly beneficial in assisting Wangari enter unchartered territory as her board's first Black women principal in the secondary panel. Despite her race-and-gendered identity, Wangari explained that principalship as a whole was challenging, but even more challenging to do it alone.

Wangari continued to explain that mentorship from multiple sources of support was a necessity for school leaders because principals played many roles in the schools they led. She noted,

> So, in the role of principalship, [it is] so important to have other people who understand

the seasons of a school year and what you might be going through, what you might have to face. As I said, [there is] so many roles that you have to play with so many stakeholders that if you enter into that foray by yourself, [it is] challenging to be successful, it really is.

She further qualified her response by sharing that,

[There are] complicated problems in school leadership and [there are] complex problems and the complex ones have so many layers and nuances that you have to sift through because you are dealing with people and you need to always maintain a good relationship with them. For Black women, especially in Ontario… [it is] so important.

When Wangari began to work at her board, she had a colleague who took on the role of a "tried-and-true mentor". This individual, a newly appointed principal, consistently reached out to Wangari, shared information on leadership conferences and resources, and offered genuine support. However, given Wangari's experience as the only Black women principal at the secondary panel in her school board, she had to seek mentorship and support from other Black women who were not administrators. To her, it was important that she found an affinity group of educators who had the same identity markers and could fully understand the unique race-and-gendered challenges she faced. The lack of racialized representation in Wangari's school board limited opportunities for developing mentorship relationships with colleagues who understood the complexities of her role. This deficit coupled with the scarce mentorship resources from the board, placed Wangari in a position to seek out her own sources of support and guidance to stay afloat while navigating the complex problems of leadership. Wangari shared,

I wish I had an affinity group of other Black administrators just to know how to navigate within the board itself, because it was still and it still is facing a lot of transitions, trying to address some of the historical systemic issues that are, you know, embedded in educational systems…So I wish I had an affinity group and I wish I had a solid kind of mentorship, co-mentorship, or kind of peer mentorship network that I could draw from. I know that other administrators, they had their niche of colleagues who they would reach out to but I [did not] have that. I went to as many people as I could within the system who worked in various areas that I thought, maybe I can gain some knowledge from there. But within my own cohorts, I did not have that network of support.

Wangari's recounts not only highlight the frustration she had faced as a new principal, but the lengths and self-determination that Black women principals have to assume to receive guidance while in their roles.

Wangari's Perceptions and Negotiations of her Race-and-Gendered Identity

When Wangari entered her role as a principal, she was conscious of how her identity as a Black women would inform her leadership practices. She felt that there was a certain level of competitiveness at the principal-level that came with an expectation of how to perform in the role. When shoulder tapped to apply for a school leadership position, Wangari explicitly stated,

> I will not perform as a White male. If you think [you are] looking for an old school White principal, [you are] not finding that in me. If I were to go into this role, [it is] going to look different, [it is] going to be different because [I am] different. They kept saying no no no, we know, this is what we want, [we are] looking for this. It [was not] what they were looking for. So, it was as daunting as I expected it to be. So, when I was in the role, it was very isolating because of the sixteen to eighteen principals, and [I am] the only Black administrator there. I question things. I was new, so of course [I am] questioning things anyways as a new administrator. But I questioned things along a lens that they [were not] expecting and some people were not encouraging, because they thought, why is she questioning this? [It is] just the way we do it. And [I will] say, well, why are we doing it this way? Because it seems to me that historically [it is] done, but [it is] not benefiting everyone.

Wangari carried her convictions about race and the importance of questioning inequitable practices well after obtaining a principal role. However, the process of advocating and enacting those values into action was challenging. She recalled an experience where the staff at her school held certain beliefs about "inner city" students and challenged her efforts to address the systemic practices that were embedded in the school.

> In the role as principal, I felt that my experience was hyper-scrutinized, was questioned, the tropes about being toned, [you are] police toned and [you are] coming across angry or [you are] coming across difficult. I mean, I had those adjectives described to me by my higher ups when they said, I hear [you are] being […] And I was like, no [I am] not, [I am] being a leader, I am leading my staff. Yes, [I am] asking them to reflect on their practices because we all should be doing that. And [I am] entering into those processes too.

Wangari found it difficult to build trust with the staff because,

> There was a fossilization of thinking that what they were doing was White saviourism. That they were there to save these kids, that these kids they [did not] have what they needed to do better…they were defaulting the students of not being capable of high achievement.

In her experience, Wangari's visible identity as a Black principal and the lack of academic regard for racialized students made it apparent that the capacity for exercising her professional judgement would be challenged, questioned, and at times be reflective of the anti-Black racism that existed at the school.

Given that Wangari's identity as a Black women played a significant role in her leadership approach, she had multiple stories to share that highlighted the negotiations she made in regard to her race-and-gendered identity. She shared two pertinent stories, the first centered on a student's academic needs and the second on interrupting a student's misconduct. When Wangari was the sole vice-principal at a school in a predominately White community, she was tasked with managing student behaviour and specialized needs. She noticed that one of the Black grade nine students who was typically engaged in his class was beginning to show patterns of disengagement and low attendance. Wangari called the student into her office and had the following exchange,

> I brought him in and I said, what is going on? And he said to me, [I am] bored. Well, I shifted into… well to answer your question, I became the Black mama, I became like his mom. And I said, [you are] bored? Let me look at your courses. So I looked at his courses. He was all like, general level. He was not an academic level student at all…he was all applied level. And [I am] thinking, why is this Black child in applied level, [he is] smart. So, I picked up the phone and I said to him, [you are] bored. Let me help you. [I will] make sure [you are] not bored. Because I called his mom and I told her, I said, Mrs. so and so, [I am] a Black woman, I have children of my own. And I said, your son says [he is] bored. I said, to me it sounds like he needs to be in academic. Because I said, your son has to go to university. She says yes, I know. I said, do I have your permission to change all of his courses into academic now? She says, yes, do it, do it. I said, [I am] going to take him over to guidance right now as soon as I hang up. She says, do it do it.

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Well, his jaw dropped because he [could not] believe I just changed his world.

In Wangari's view, his identity as a Black student was viewed from a deficit perspective. She explained,

> [It is] because he was a Black child. And [I am] thinking, why is it because [he is] a Black child that [he is] applied? [He is] obviously a smart boy. So immediately, like in my identity, [it is] like, no, this is not going to be the child [who is] going to just fall away because I noticed his attendance and I just noticed things. I thought no…I [do not] think another administrator would have done what I did to say, no, [you are] not doing that, [we are] changing the trajectory 100%.

In the second story, Wangari shared that her school had a special education class with a student who was high functioning and had a number of exceptionalities.

> And so he was not challenged, he was quite bored and his behavior demonstrated his boredom. It escalated. And we tried to work with the student and his family with all kinds of options but unfortunately the policies [did not] permit for him at the time—[it has] changed since— for him to be able to be half-and-half, so he can still have a certain amount of challenge. So it came to a point where he had left his classroom, was running around the school, he went to a boys washroom and he trashed it…And I was brought to, again [I am] the only administrator there, so I was brought to the boys' washroom and I told him, listen, [it is] miss Wangari, [I am] coming in. And he rained down the N word on me. He called me the N word over and over and over and over and over again. And I could not stop this boy, and other teachers and kids in the halls—because the bell started—they were passing through, and they heard this boy yelling at me. They were so upset. I had to still maintain my composure and handle the crisis of de-escalating this child. But obviously, in that moment, if I were any other administrator in the entire board at the secondary level, they would never have heard that.

Wangari expressed that her position provided her with the highest authority to de-escalate and address the situation, but it came at the expense of being verbally attacked with a racial slur. She mentioned that although the student had exceptionalities, in that moment he saw her identity as a Black individual and knew the power the racial slur held. Although the stories shared occurred a years before our conversation, the positive and negative impact of how her identity was perceived became a memory that Wangari still reflected on in her practice.

Wangari's Advice for Black Women Entering Principalship

Establishing an affinity group had been the backbone supporting Wangari's journey as a

principal. When considering the tools that aspiring Black women principals would need in their

roles, she noted,

> If [you are] thinking of going into the field, I would say find your colleagues, find your
> support network now before you go in, as opposed to going in and then seeing, like,
> looking around, finding out, like, who else is here? [It is] good to find those supports.
> And it could be a retired person. It could be someone who is from another board, as [I
> have] found from other boards.

Speaking further on the point of support, she explained that principals should seek out a "group

of other Black women within the organization, within the board, who [they] can talk to and share

various levels of whatever [they] need to share". Wangari's advice was not limited to colleagues

within the field as she expressed the need to "lean into the people who know you well, your

family, your friends. [I am] a person of faith, so I lean into my faith quite a bit too". Wangari's

experience as a principal echoed a testament of trials on the basis of race and gender. She urged

aspiring principals to,

> Take care of yourself. [It is] not easy to lead as a Black woman in any field, you will
> receive many small cuts. But Black women in the world of work do that all the time. If
> they understand that in the role of leadership, people will say things and unintentionally
> cause harm... not to say that be a sufferer of it, but [it is] going to happen. [It is] going to
> happen. They have to have their own way of responding to it.

She explained that although principals have the ability to develop their own approach to

responding to challenges, two necessary supports that should be considered are; creating a group

of supportive colleagues and a self-care regimen. Wangari cautioned that Black women

principals "have to have [their] repertoire of supports before [they] go into this because it

demands a lot of [them], it demands a lot of anybody, but it demands so much more of [them]

because so many people are watching for you to fail". Her recommendations were timely and

emphasized the significance of being specific to the demands of the role.

Rosa's Story

Rosa's experience as an educator was diverse. Her love of working with young people and passion for the visual-and-media arts led Rosa to become an elementary school teacher at a private school in central Ontario. After 10 years of service, she wanted to gain more exposure and excitement in her career. Her interest in exploring other educational roles motivated her to complete the PQP. When the principal at her school resigned, Rosa took the opportunity to become an interim principal and guided the school towards stability before relocating to the Northwest Territories to teach in the visual arts. At that time, Rosa believed she was going to remain a teacher as she enjoyed her work and spent only one year in that role before returning to southern Ontario. Although Rosa applied for visual arts teaching positions, her leadership experience and qualifications compelled recruiters to offer her principal positions—even in locations she did not apply. One noteworthy example was an offer for a principal position in a First Nations community in Northern Ontario. Conflicted between accepting the offer and continuing to look for a visual arts teaching position, which was not fruitful, Rosa let her philosophy that "sometimes your fate finds you, your assignment finds you" guide her decision to accept the principalship position. With the understanding that the position would be a short-term interim principalship, she packed her bags and moved to northern Ontario.

When Rosa first arrived at the First Nations community, she saw a dire need to improve student graduation rates among the Indigenous males specifically. During her assessment of the school, she was told that the school did not expect her to stay long as they received a new principal each year. Taking that information as a challenge, Rosa purposed to stay for 2 years and transitioned the school to a path of student success. After improving student graduation rates and two years of principalship, Rosa felt the urge to be closer to family and made the transition

back to Ontario. Maintaining her interest in leadership, she became a vice-principal in the

secondary panel for 11 years working at five different schools in a school board in central

Ontario before moving to another school board in central Ontario. At the time of the interview,

Rosa was back in her first position of leadership, a principal in the elementary panel at her sixth

school as she loved working with young people. Summing up her experience, Rosa stated, "I

want to be a child's champion, [that is] all I want to be. And [that is] the story I have about where

[I am] at and how I started and how I got here". Rosa's statement stood as a consistent testament

that was reflected in the remainder of our discussion which follows below.

Rosa's Perceptions of Leadership and her Role as a Principal

In Rosa's view, leadership can be summed up as the process of serving others. She

explained,

> To lead people is not positional, [it is] influence and impact. The only way you can
> actually be impactful is if you serve them, if you meet them at where they are at and
> actually meet them at the point of their needs. Every person you lead has a need, right.
> They need to succeed. So how do you help them succeed? [That is] what it takes to be a
> leader.

Rosa expressed that being an impactful leader necessitated removing barriers for students and

understanding the steps needed to reach personal goals. She elaborated that these steps were not

only for students but could also be applied to staff. When Rosa transitioned into the principal

position at the school she led, she was aware she had to fill the shoes of her White predecessor

while establishing her own norms of leadership. She recalled school staff approaching her and

providing praise for her ability to change the school climate and establish a culture of

collaboration among her team. In order to establish this culture, Rosa had to assert firmness in

her role. She noted,

> Sometimes I do push back a little bit on things that are not done right, but [that is] my
> supervisory role. I have to do that to make sure that we are all doing the right thing.

> However, just to make sure that teachers too feel happy and free to come into the building. I got a call from a parent recently, in just 3 months, and we all feel [there is] a move in a positive direction in your leadership.

In the same breath, she shared that being a leader did not afford her with respect in every context at all times, specifically when situations of anti-Black racism arose that required collaboration with the parent community. Rosa shared that she had recently faced a verbal altercation with a parent who became irate. When discussing how she responded to the situation, Rosa expressed that emotional intelligence and teamwork were two key components of her leadership approach which were beneficial for addressing parents.

> My emotional intelligence tells me I need to be able to read your emotional intelligence and the emotional states and know if [it is] going to work out, if this meeting is going to happen and produce anything you know. [I am] learning that in my role, that you might have to feel out some parents.

> Overall, she expressed that as a school leader "you [do not] have to know everything, you just need to know people who can do what you need to serve the kids in this education business and give them what they need to thrive". As our conversation progressed, Rosa began to introduce how her race-and-gendered identity informed how she viewed her role as a principal. In Rosa's experience being a Black woman meant limited opportunities for promotion and the silencing of students' voices who validated the impact that of her leadership.

> Well, first of all the fact that [you are] a woman I usually say the woman first, then [I am] a Black woman. And the obstacles will be, no one wants to give you an opportunity. Because… you face that barrier all the time when you even seek the opportunities and when the opportunities come to you. Because the kids that I mentioned, to me are always seeking my praises and always wanting to look to me when I meet kids from building to building. Kids' voices will not be drowned out. But no one wants to acknowledge them because if they acknowledge them that means they are promoting you. Especially when [you are] not of a race that is usually promoted easily. So, I face that probably further along than if I was a different race, I believe it.

Rosa's Perceptions of Organizational Supports and Barriers to Principalship

Looking back over her leadership experience, Rosa received plethora of support from her

school board. Supports included mentor-mentee programs, monthly leadership and

administrative board meetings, detailed written communication via email, and trainings to build

capacity. Providing details, Rosa explained,

> We also have the monthly meetings. So, every single person comes and then we have the executive council, the professional learning team. They provide us with resources that we take back to our school. The [vice-principal] and [principal] will settle and listen in and then we would decide on how [we are] going to present this to our staff. That happens every month so [that is] the organization. Also, we are also given a list of people in the organization that you need to reach out for whatever the issue might be.

She also highlighted that support from her superintendent was instrumental in strengthening her

leadership approach.

> Their role is more of a supportive role. The superintendents [I have] had in this board are more of a supportive role. [I have] actually… the superintendents I had before I left, before I left my previous board was a stellar superintendent. Awesome. And the principals I had as well before I left, that other one was also good. The Black superintendent even more so because she was the one who supported me through the process. [I have] had the education director come to my office, [she is] a Black woman. She just showed up out of nowhere in my office because [she is] visiting schools, because [she is] new too so [she is] visiting schools and my school was one of them. So that kind of support is also awesome.

When considering how principals could receive support, Rosa advised that as a principal "you

have to look for it, you have to reach out to people and be humble. You [do not] know, what you

[do not] know right?". Emphasizing, a need to take initiative in seeking opportunities and

sources of support.

Policy Enactment. While implementing school and/or school board level policies, Rosa

faced the challenge of reframing the mindset of staff who were resistant to change, specifically

when she transitioned to a new school. She recalled the conversations whereby staff were

adamant that they had followed certain procedures for years and did not want to change simply

because there was new leadership. Although the changes were occurring as a result of shifts in

school board policies and not Rosa's leadership approach. Rosa added,

Especially now that we are doing this anti-racist for Black people, sometimes there is a subtle pushback. They [will not] tell you because [it is] not the right thing to do if you want to be a Black girl or Black boy's champion. The pushback comes back in subtle ways. They push back in other ways and tell you that other reason. So that is the barrier of people who [do not] want to change their mindset.

She identified the concern of teachers who resisted policy changes that were developed to improve the academic success of all students.

For some teachers, what does that mean? [It is] too much work, they just want to keep doing things the way they do it because [it is] convenient. And then the kid who needs the most help [does not] get it but [that is] the kid that should be the poster boy or girl of that lesson.

In light of the challenges faced, Rosa was encouraged to be persistent in her efforts to implement policies in her role. She continued conversations at professional development sessions and took extra-steps to ensure that teachers were supported while adhering to policies. The process to changing teachers' mindset bore a few administrative barriers. Rosa explained the following,

You tweak an atmosphere for them to be feel comfortable, so they [do not] feel pressure, [there is] no fear culture. You give them opportunities to collaborate. What are they doing in their work? [It is] all the other paperwork we have to do that stands sometimes at the barrier for us to go sit in the classrooms. By the time [I am] preparing a letter for this, we responding to an email and all that, we have to be intentional to get up and say, okay, I need to go and be in that class, just to listen in on [what is] going on. Those are barriers.

Rosa's perseverance was rewarded when she witnessed a change in teachers' perception and learning.

Well, the successes will be when you see teachers telling you, oh, I learned something. Oh, that could be done, oh there is a new way of doing this and that and the other. When a teacher invites you into their classroom to say this is what [we are] doing here based on what [I am] learning. Whether [it is] reading or writing or something, they suddenly clued into that they know will actually benefit their students, [that is] a joy.

The change Rosa witnessed translated into the successful implementation of certain policies.

Rosa's Perceptions of Mentorship and Networks of Support

In Rosa's experience, mentorship played a key role in her journey to becoming a school leader, citing her school board's mentor-mentee program as providing guidance when navigating dilemmas with anti-Black racism and the parent community. When asked about the significance of mentorship for aspiring Black women principals, Rosa believed that although mentorship is imperative, mentors do not have to be Black women. She shared her thoughts on this matter by situating her own experience.

> The women who have impacted my life in terms of moving to the role in the last couple of years were White women from my previous board. It was eventually White women that really came alongside. And right now, my mentor is a White woman.

For Rosa, mentorship for principals did not have an expiration date. The connections she made had a purpose that transcended the time in which she and the mentors were in leadership and were not bound by race nor gender.

> My previous principal, who is retired, who was my mentor there through the process, still texts me once in a while, how is it going? Because [she is] retired now… principals sometimes still retire, they always return to do vice-principal work just to kill the boredom I guess. She said, [how is] it going? I said [it is] going okay. [I am] just checking in on you and stuff like that, so that mentorship will never end for example. The one I had now said just call me, call me, just call me. At a next call, she said I can call her back again and then back again. She will make room for me […]. So, I try to call her for everything. But when I know [it is] really really crucial like that situation that I felt, maybe I should sound this off to someone [who is] experienced. And so [that is] what I did. [It is] crucial. It [does not] have to be a Black woman, a Black woman would be awesome but [there are] not many of us as you know. There are not many of us.

Although the mentorship support provided to Rosa had been fruitful, she identified a need to enhance supports provided through the PQP in Ontario. She advised that the PQP could better prepare Black women for school leadership by providing opportunities to build their portfolios and capacity. If Black women do not have opportunities, then, "[they] have nothing to speak to, especially in an interview or to use as a springboard to the next one and next one". Rosa

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recounted the benefits of the experiential learning opportunities she received in her PQP courses,

the mentors who enabled her to translate those skills into an offer of employment, and how years

later she applied the lessons learned into her practice.

Rosa added to the discussion by explaining that a consequence of the gendered racism

faced by Black women is the uncertainty of knowing to whom the opportunities will be offered.

> For young leaders, opportunities they have to create that. [It is] taken away from them [that is] what happens. [It is] given to others in the field who can do it. They [do not] build the confidence and they [do not] build the capacity or the portfolio. So, confidence, capacity, and portfolios have to be built.

The key ingredients Rosa outlined above could not be implemented without a network of

support, which for her included a superintendent and a principal-mentor. This network of support

was beneficial for helping Rosa frame her answers for job-interviews.

> My mentor who was my principal said, you have it all Rosa, but you just need to know how to frame it. We [do not] want your interviewers looking for it. [Let us] have you frame it so you can be short and sweet and sufficient and impactful. So, I took that, I used it everywhere else I went and then I landed in [a school board in central Ontario]. Young people need someone alongside who tell them you can do it and give them opportunities and help them look at the package. Have them rephrase whatever is on there.

In our conversation, Rosa acknowledged that she faced recruitment challenges that required her

to lean on her network of support. She shared the following thoughts,

> Those people who are promoted over you, people who started right out, you know younger people and placed in positions while [you are] still there. But when that happened, initial education supervisor on the board…there was now this anti-racist move, the training and all that so they [could not] keep us back anymore. That was when I got my opportunity to make some moves. Very first time I [could not] even put in forth my package for the next level. Even though [I have] been a principal like years before, I [could not] put a package [together], I [could not] find a sponsor, I [could not] find nobody.

Although Rosa did not detail her view of why she could not find a sponsor, her experience led

her to believe,

> You need to find someone who will sponsor you. It was quite like in the fourth building

that I found somebody who would do that. Now there was this movement, a need to teach. They were now bringing in consultants, anti-Black racism consultant, anti-Indigenous perspective and so all that training and professional learning was happening and so those who were always creating various laws were made to backdown. So, [that is] when I was able to make that move and was able to be on that pool. I was supported by my principal then through the process, got on the pool but into a place was another issue now.

Rosa's recount of the inability to find a sponsor illuminates a probable factor, among many, for substantiating the number of years Black women principals spend as an educator prior to entering school leadership.

Rosa's Perceptions and Negotiations of her Race-and-Gendered Identity

Rosa identified as a woman first and then a Black woman second. When asked how her race-and-gendered identity informed her principalship, her responses focused on perceptions from the parent community and staff. Rosa recalled two stories of strength where being a visible Black woman principal was perceived positively. The first recollection was made by a parent.

I had a parent come in once and said… [she is] White but [she is] a mother to mixed kids, and she goes wow, walking in here and seeing you just makes me feel how far [we have] come along. They were the only racialized family, she was White and her husband mostly Black but mixed children. She said we had a hard time but to be able to walk in here and see you makes me feel that [we have] come a long way. I know I bring my identity into the role. I bring my identity as a woman, I bring my identity as a Black woman.

The second recollection was made by a member of the school staff.

The office manager told me that she was so happy when she heard that they had named a woman for principal. [She has] been actually very supportive. I said, okay I was hoping for a male vice-principal, but [I am] happy with my current one, so [that is] fine. Women in power is what they all say. And then in the building, [I am] probably the third Black woman. When I came to the role, there was one other Black man, and then I hired one who I [did not] even know was Black also. Yes, because he was the best candidate, and eventually I realized that he was Black. It was a pleasant surprise, was nice and happy to see that out of how many? 30 teachers we have. 30 teachers, 5 EAs, and 5… so [we were] looking at 41 or 40 something staff, including myself like that, or 48 counting the custodial staff. Just three Black people. So, we bring that into the role. And I [do not] let it stop me. I connect with kids so kids can see that in whichever role, they can have a champion.

As our conversation progressed, Rosa transitioned the focus of her responses from

parents and staff to perceptions from students. She explained that children will gravitate to an

educator regardless of their race so long as they feel a connection and that educator can be their

champion. While in her role she had a positive impact on students from diverse backgrounds,

however her identity as a Black woman had significance for Black girls specifically. She shared

the same sentiment of excitement when she heard that the education director in her school board

at that time was a Black woman.

> When I was looking out from the distance, I went wow, wow. I feel that there are
> probably a lot of kids looking up to me and going wow too. Lots of young Black ladies
> who out of nowhere come up to me and give me a hug.

Although Rosa's perception as a Black woman principal was shared in a favourable light, it

would be remiss to omit the unfavourable ways in which her identity as a Black woman principal

was challenged. The following story Rosa shared highlighted a key event where it became

apparent that her race and gender was perceived differently than her counterpart.

> I had a parent who almost broke down my door because I wanted to meet with her
> because her son had called another Black student a monkey. And I had suspended that
> student, her son. I understand the son had had a history of using derogatory slurs so I just
> simply called to say this is our process. Your son's still important, let me investigate. I
> was not going in the building while this was happening, I need to investigate. And she
> just screamed shut up. I said oh wow okay. I said, well, I'm being respectful to you, I
> appreciate if you are respectful back. But what do you want my son to do, to punch to da
> da da da da. So, I just said, okay, miss, [we are] not having a good conversation at this
> point, [I will] end this conversation, so I dropped the phone. But she went on and on, but
> she came back. Also, the brash parent she was, she wanted to bang down my door when
> we were going to the labour update.

In effort to mitigate the situation, Rosa's vice-principal stepped in to speak to the parent, who

responded differently to Rosa than the vice-principal. Recognizing the change in reception, Rosa

identified,

> If I was a White woman, I [do not] know if she would have done that. My White [vice-
> principal] ordered her out, actually said at this point, [I will] have to formally ask you to
> leave. So, you see, that was a stronger word than me refusing to see her. She [did not]
> take offense in that. Yeah, she took offense in me saying a child stays home and you

[cannot] be screaming and shouting. So sometimes you [do not] know. But I know [it is] there, [it is] nothing you can do about it, it was about them, not me. But I will still get up every day and I attempt to do my best and treat everyone civilly and ensure that everyone is welcomed.

As the situation escalated, the parent asked Rosa to speak to the superintendent. Rosa stated that "I knew what the issue was, [it is] because [I am] a Black woman". Rosa's suspicion was confirmed during the phone conversation when the parent made the revelation that her child's suspension was not the issue.

Rosa's Advice for Black Women Entering Principalship

Rosa's advice for Black women entering principalship was centered on maintaining commitment to supporting students and building capacity. Rosa explained,

I would advise them to stay [the] course. [It is] not going to be easy, but there are destinies of kids looking up to you. We need more and so we need them to be courageous, patient, do the work. Sometimes [it is] going to be tough. You might experience some rejection, but [it is] not about you, [it is] about them. So, stay the course.

In her view, the sentiment of "staying the course" worked in tandem with building capacity to navigate the role of principalship. Specifically, Rosa advised Black women to,

Get as much capacity building as you can. [There is] never been one summer where I [have not] had to do one course or the other. Even now, [I am] taking a course online while [I am] still taking this role. Always build capacity, always, always read books. If you [do not] have the time, get all your books while you drive, when [you are] listening. [It is] the knowledge, [it is] what you bring to the table that is important. Because you [do not] know with what you can make an impact. You can make an impact. You need to be knowledgeable; you need to be informed, you need to push yourself.

In the moments of uncertainty when completing professional development courses, she was reminded of the impact that building capacity would have on students' educational experience. Specifically, Black women principals were encouraged to "build capacity quietly as [they] go in, the quality will for itself eventually". A piece of encouragement that is hypothesized to achieve congruence while building capacity.

Ida's Story

Ida's journey to principalship began in 2002 as a journey to the competition of a Ph.D. Prior to immigrating to Canada from Nigeria, Ida was a teacher at the secondary panel (for two years) and became a postsecondary lecturer after completing a Master's degree in education. When she arrived in Canada, she had hopes of completing a Ph.D. in education and pursuing a career in academia. During her doctoral studies, she faced an unforeseen challenge with transferring course credits from her Master's in Nigeria and was left with two options: to redo the Master's program at her current institution or to leave the Ph.D. program. Given her experience as a teacher in Nigeria, Ida left the Ph.D. program to obtain an OCT certification through teachers college and looked for employment as a guidance counsellor. She soon realized that receiving a guidance counsellor position was challenging given the limited availability at that time and settled for any supply position in both Catholic and non-Catholic school boards. Over the span of 18 years, Ida held the position of a teacher in five school boards in central Ontario before pursuing school leadership. Becoming a school leader had been on Ida's mind for a while, however the unexpected and lengthy challenges to obtaining her Canadian teaching credentials left her in a financial predicament. She shared,

> By the time it dawned on me that [it is] not going to happen like that, I just had to continue to put food on my family's table. I [do not] know, I think that dream was probably gone, but I think over the years, friends [and] colleagues started to figure out that I have leadership skills. And a lot of encouragement and support came in. And that was why it took me almost another […] ten years to really get myself back.

Utilizing this support and the mentorship of her principal, she was able to further develop her leadership skills, enroll in PQP courses, and fruitfully pursue principalship. Persevering through the obstacles and not giving up on her dream, Ida spent three years as a vice-principal at four schools before becoming a principal, a role she held for one and a half years at the time of the interview.

Ida's Perceptions of Leadership and her Role as a Principal

To Ida, being a school leader was twofold; 1) centered on creating a lasting impact to students in her school through the teaching staff and 2) being a positive role model for Black students. She noted the following,

> I just felt if [I am in] a leadership position, it gives me greater, better, and bigger opportunities to be able to make those influences because of the power of multiplication. So, [that is] one thing of [what] being a leader means to me. Another thing is [I have] been a […] positive role model, especially for Black students… Like, you see their eyes [light] up. You see them also feeling [the most] comfortable in how they wear their hair.

When Ida transitioned into a leadership position, she initially feared the loss of her passion through the reduction in interacting with students. While she enjoyed her time "building the next generation", she felt a leadership position would provide greater opportunities to reach more children by being an influence on the teaching staff. Ida's journey to achieving her leadership goals however, was met with a few challenges. She explained that her school offered leadership opportunities for teachers and one opportunity was called teacher in charge. In this role, a teacher would perform the duties of a principal when a supply/temporary support was needed. Ida unfortunately was not provided with this opportunity nor other leadership opportunities (at the school-level) that she deemed would enhance her journey up the ladder. Despite the challenges she faced, she pursued and embraced opportunities outside of her school. She shared,

> I was able to get other leadership positions in the federation and in the community that I was able to piggyback on when I was going to apply for leadership. Because like I said, for whatever reason, [there was] just this invisible barrier that [was] thrown at me in school [where it was not] going to happen so easily and so quickly. So, even when I was writing my package, I was trying [to draw] from all these experiences from outside of the school, more than inside of the school.

When asked how her experiences in the school and school board shaped her understanding of leadership as a Black woman, Ida recalled a specific time in her career as a teacher where her Black principal helped her overcome barriers. When that principal left the school that Ida was at,

she began to face rejection in her career-related pursuits.

> When you see what my experiences are, [they are] mixed, right? There were times that I [felt like it is] not going to happen, you [cannot] get it; […] even though you have tons of experiences, right? And there were times based on who you are as a mentor or […] somebody like a leader, [you are] able to feel that, okay, you can have it. So, [it has] been a mix and a match for me.

For Ida, there was a relation between the identity of the mentor and/or superior and her ability to not only seek but obtain leadership experience. While discussing the connection between leadership and her race-and-gendered identity, Ida identified a caveat in her perception of Black leadership. Recalling her experience with both a supportive and unsupportive Black principal she noted,

> [… The saying is] that some people are Black [on the] outside, but they are White [on the] inside, right? So, I met somebody like that and that person punched my career because that was my last year to becoming a vice-principal. So unfortunate that I met that person at that time.

Her recollection cautions principals not to assume that all Black leaders will support nor instill encouragement for aspiring Black leaders.

Ida's Perceptions of Organizational Supports and Barriers to Leadership

Reflecting on her entrance into principalship, Ida shared that the organizational supports made available by school board were minimal. She attributed this lack as possible by-products of the COVID-19 pandemic and her board undergoing a review by the OME. In particular she stated,

> In terms of the board support, I would say zero. […] The board [did not] put anything in place for me to succeed. All these policies and things [cannot only] help me to run this school. So, the board did not put anything in place.

Within this discussion she identified the availability and access to mentorship for new principals as an important organizational support. She shared the following,

> There was not a lot of [support] especially for [principals]. It was like [you are] just thrown there, do whatever you want […]. No mentoring, no coaching, nothing. But there

were some board mandated trainings that you [were] supposed to do. Other than those board mandated training, there was nothing.

She did note that as a vice-principal she relied on her principal for mentorship, however certain job-related constraints made it difficult to connect and receive support.

Policy Enactment. In light of the organizational supports, Ida proceeded to discuss her experience enacting provincial and school-level policies. She identified resistance from staff as a key barrier to her enactment practices, specifically as they pertained to policies on anti-discrimination and cultural responsibility. Ida's recount highlighted two key enactment barriers; (1) a lack of time to enact and (2) union discrepancies. First, Ida shared that principals were not provided with enough time to enact the changes that a policy required.

> When [I am] trained, I have to train the staff. But nine out of 10 times there is no time for me to bring those policies down to them or create time for them to implement that. So, that is the greatest challenge. [The board will say], we want this done, you [should] figure out how you are going to get it done.

While facing time constraints, Ida explained that union policies could circumvent the ability to find solutions for enacting policies with limited time. She provided the example of needing to abide by stipulations laid out in teacher contracts as policy requirements outside of the contract were met with union resistance. She explained that "the union is a big challenge or obstacle to making both policies work and I understand where [they are] coming from". As we continued our conversation, Ida noted that prior to becoming a principal, resource teachers and teacher leads supported the principal as an instructional leader, however the structures in her board at the time of the interview no longer provided that support.

> Currently we [do not] have anything like that and we want 20 things to be done. There were some times where we have some inclusion coaches and some equity […] coaches. They were only there for one [or] three [years]. […] Even in a recent workshop I attended, [I am] like okay, you are wanting me to do all of these? How many things can I learn and teach? Yeah, so [that is] another thing; for you to be an instructional leader, you are not set up with [the] structures and resources that you need.

Her conviction was that the increased pressure for principals to teach how to build capacity

became unfruitful when a lack of instructional time led to union grievances. Ida shared a scenario

where she was met with a union grievance while enacting a school initiative.

> I only have 75 minutes in a month. And [the school board wants me to attend] three full-day workshops. And like I said, I [do not] have time to release the teachers in-house to teach them the [information from the workshops] … sometimes I look for creative ways [to teach…] which [I have] done over the years. [One time I used teacher planning time and] one time I got called by the union.

In light of her experiences, Ida felt it important to identify that while the number of policies for

school improvement had increased, the support to achieve these initiatives was missing. She

noted,

> There are many more policies to follow, there are many more things to implement than it used to be. But resources [are] zero in terms of time, in terms of facilitation, in terms of guidance. […instead of the board stating that] we want this done in June, [let us] start doing this in January, [they say] no, we want this to happen in June [and will tell] you in May.

Ida rationalized her thoughts by affirming that policy enactment in her principalship was

challenging and could be summed up with the following,

> The key thing is that the board [has] all these policies but they [do not] put in the resources in terms of time, in terms of people, in terms of personnel and in terms of structure to make it happen.

Given Ida's short time in the role of principalship, she could not detail specific policy enactment

successes and chose to speak to the longevity of certain existing policies. Particularly, she

cautioned that while certain policies centered on cultural responsibility and anti-discrimination

had received a positive reception, she questioned the extent to which said policies would be

enacted prior to removal. Specifically, she noted that,

> [I have] had positive feedback from community members. [I have] had positive feedback from so many teachers. [I have] seen transformation in the life of students. Right. But in terms of the policies, honestly, there is frustration. There is frustration because we [do not] even think that these policies are going to be continuous. It looks like [they are] just [for] show.

By voicing her frustration, Ida's choice of the word "show" highlights the potential need to question the performativity of existing policies in relation to their effectiveness and/or intended outcomes.

The Ontario Principal's Qualification Program. When discussing how the PQP in Ontario could better prepare Black women for leadership, Ida felt that programs needed to expand the theoretical concepts that are taught. Specifically, she identified this focus as a beneficial opportunity "where people can dialogue, where we can work through things, where we can walk through situations, where there can be more connection and close to real life experiences". A focus that Ida explained as also integrating opportunities for fostering networks among leaders.

Ida's Perceptions of Mentorship and Networks of Support

While Ida had briefly discussed mentorship as a form of organizational support earlier in our interview, we had another opportunity to expand on her previous thoughts. In this conversation she clarified that although she did not have an opportunity to connect with a mentor, she deemed the availability and access to mentorship as a key component to principalship for Black women. While her school board offered mentorship programs, discretion was left to principals to determine whether or not their vice-principals required this form of support. Identifying that she required support early-on in her leadership journey, Ida created her own network of friends as a vice-principal which reaped its rewards in principalship since there was "no transcript, no blueprint, nothing. Just run this school". The approach presented challenges for Ida given that she led as school as the new and sole administrator without a vice-principal on staff which resulted in the following sentiment, "I always feel that probably I was set up to fail because I was pulled out of my comfort zone". Elaborating on her experience she noted that, "sometimes many things are not written in the books. But if you see somebody tell

you or walk into it, yes, it will make your life a lot easier". Ida's perception also acknowledged that in addition to receiving encouragement, mentorship and job shadowing is essential for all principals.

Ida's Perceptions and Negotiations of her Race-and-Gendered Identity

When discussing how her race -and-gendered identity informed her role, Ida clarified that race in comparison to gender played a distinct role as women principals accounted for 80% of the profession. Her experience in the role confirmed that while her gender was the numerical majority, her race was underrepresented at the leadership level. She noticed that a significant number of Black educators held the position of education assistants and teachers which encouraged her to find ways to support their journey to principalship. Being aware that not all teachers wanted to pursue leadership, she focused her attention on those who did in efforts to propel "indirect influence", a strategy for increasing the representation of Black principals. As our conversation progressed, Ida and I transitioned to discussing experiences where it became clear that being a Black woman was received differently than her counterparts. She recalled a time in her first year of principalship where she faced resistance after implementing a task that her predecessor used to implement. At the time of our interview, Ida had been in her role for approximately 1.5 years. She transitioned into her role four months after the school year had begun, which required her to adjust to the school's procedures in a short time span. Hoping to quickly catch-up to planned activities, she asked teachers to provide a timeline for reporting—a procedure that her predecessor had previously asked teachers to submit. Her request was met with resistance from teachers who were adamantly unaware of the reporting procedure despite Ida's understanding that her predecessor had discussed the requirement. She explained that "Many of the challenges that I faced were the problems created by my predecessor. But I was

going to be crucified for it". The sentiment of crucifixion came in the form of microaggressions.

After obtaining clarity on the procedures from her predecessor, it dawned on Ida that the

resistance she was facing was based on her race-and-gendered identity as the expectations she

placed on teachers were the same as her White male predecessor. Given her infancy in

principalship, she knew she had to make certain adjustments. She explained the following as the

approach she took,

> How can we meet in the middle ground? So that was what we did. But as a nice as that is, I know that if I was a Black, if I was a White man, I [would not] get that much. Like, okay, what do you think you are doing? But as I was breaking that union, I know this is what [I am] going to do, and this is what [I am] going to do. So … they knew what they came thinking, she [does not] know what [she is] doing. She [is] an idiot. Because [they did not have a problem with the] person that was there before [me].

Ida's approach highlights the resistance she faced and brings to light the notion that her approach

may or may not have looked different had she transitioned to the school with more years of

administrative experience in the role of a principal.

Ida's Advice for Black Women Entering Principalship

Possessing and displaying confidence in your skin was one of two pieces of advice Ida

had for Black women entering principalship. In her view, aspiring Black women "should be

prepared for all the challenges that may come their way from anybody, including parents coming

in thinking [they] are not the principal". Second, principals should establish a network of Black

women who walk the walk and provide them with a delineation of the principalship journey.

Overall, Ida believed that because Black women principals "have to work double for [their]

worth", they should "cross [their] Ts and dot [their] Is" to circumvent reprisal and be competent

in their roles.

Chapter Summary

      This chapter provided insight on how seven Black women principals perceived and constructed their professional identities in Ontario schools. The recounts shared by Rosa, Harriet, Wangari, Shirley, Ruby, Michelle, and Ida provided a glimpse into their professional lives as principals while situating the identity negotiations they navigated while leading K-12 schools. The delineation of findings highlighted that Black women lead schools in complex and dynamic settings that challenge the understanding of their role as principals. While organizing the multifaceted approaches the participants used to make sense of their roles, three themes of significance emerged; 1) superhero in the morning, martyr by lunch: race-and-gender negotiations; 2) principals are in the people business: micropolitics and relationship discourses, and 3) Black leadership can be lonely leadership: mentorship networks and support. Participants identified that as school boards respond to calls for increased accountability and the adoption of EDID policies, there is an increasing need for strengthening existing organizational structures to provide Black principals with support tailored to their needs. As well as mechanisms for acknowledging how those structures tend to present barriers to their leadership. This neglect caused frustration for participants as the recruitment of principals from equity deserving groups increased representation yet placed Black women into principalship without consideration of the race-and-gendered challenges they faced. When responding to these challenges, participants created informal networks of mentorship and leaned on the support of administrators such as superintendents who extended a helping-hand. These supports held significance given that participants were held to higher standards of leadership as a result to their identity, and were tasked with fixing systemic racism despite simultaneously experiencing anti-Black racism from students, parents, and staff. Given their unique experiences and positioning in schools,

participants encouraged existing and aspiring Black women principals to find their Black joy, establish self-care routines, and prioritize their mental health. As pathologizing rhetoric such as Black excellence continued to perpetuate the view of Black women as strong and self-sufficient, participants recognized that the need to counter this view and advocate for increased support tended to be a burden too heavy to bear alone. In the next chapter, I situate the themes that emerged in relation to the existing literature and the conceptual framework that underpins this study while offering a nuanced understanding of the data.

Chapter Five: Analysis and Discussion

The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House

— Audre Lorde

Although participants' narratives indicate that the representation of Black leaders in Ontario's K-12 public schools has increased in recent years, scholarship on the leadership practices of Black principals has failed to succinctly acknowledge Black women as occupying a distinct position enabling a powerful yet unique perspective of principalship (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Brown, 2016; Lomotey, 2019). While engaging in sensemaking, policy enactment, and exercising professional judgement to successfully lead schools, Black women principals are challenged with the complexities of gendered racism and must contend with this barrier as an ongoing factor informing both the perception and reception of their professional identities (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Borris-Schacter & Langer, 2006; Echols, 2006; Essed, 1991; Jean-Marie, 2013; Reed & Evans, 2008; Sanchez & Thorton, 2010). More definitely, this standpoint and the challenges therein point towards the need to recognize Black women as key sources of leadership knowledge. It is important to note that while this study focuses on the intersection of race and gender, participants narrated professional experiences that emphasized their racial identity. While participants were not explicitly asked to justify this emphasis, I hypothesize that the timing of this study was the driver for conversations centred on race. I err on the side of caution to not reduce the totality of participants' experiences merely from narratives shared, given the breadth of their professional lives. Additionally, this study may have provided participants with an opportunity to openly and unapologetically discuss their race as an integral part of their professional identity. An opportunity which may not always be provided by others while in their roles.

This study sought to undertake this call to recognition, by examining how Black women principals construct their professional identities in Ontario schools. Utilizing a life history approach, seven Black women principals shared the experiences, values, challenges, and successes that informed their professional identities. The narrative analysis presented in Chapter 4 highlighted the categorical imperatives that puppeteer their ability, or lack thereof to lead schools. This metaphorical perception of puppeteering is indicative of the localized policies and organizational structures that pull the invisible strings of conformity—consequently constraining principal actions and agency. A policy juncture that this study reveals as echoes Audre Lorde's (1983) view of the futility of using the master's tools (i.e. tools of racist patriarchy) to examine and dismantle the master's house (i.e. the institutions governed and protected by patriarchy).

Building on the foundation laid in Chapter 4, this chapter discusses the study's findings using a thematic approach and situates their significance in relation to existing literature. I begin the discussion by revisiting the term professional identity as presented in Chapter 1 to texture how it is operationalized given participants' understanding of school leadership. Following this, I explicate the study's three themes (see Figure 1): 1) superhero in the morning, martyr by lunch: race-and-gender negotiations; 2) principals are in the people business: micropolitics and relationship discourses; and 3) Black leadership can be lonely leadership: mentorship networks and support. After discussing the themes, I offer new analytical perspectives. Drawing on the conceptual framework of intersectionality, I demonstrate that the dynamic efforts of Black women principals to receive legitimacy in their roles continues to call for greater attention to their race-and-gendered identity in the prevalent literature. As the discussion in this chapter progresses, findings will reveal that only when those conducting ELA research begin to examine, understand, and retell the experiences of those within the margins that Black women are placed,

can we as a field begin to authentically understand principalship in its entirety.

Figure 1 Delineation of the Study's Themes
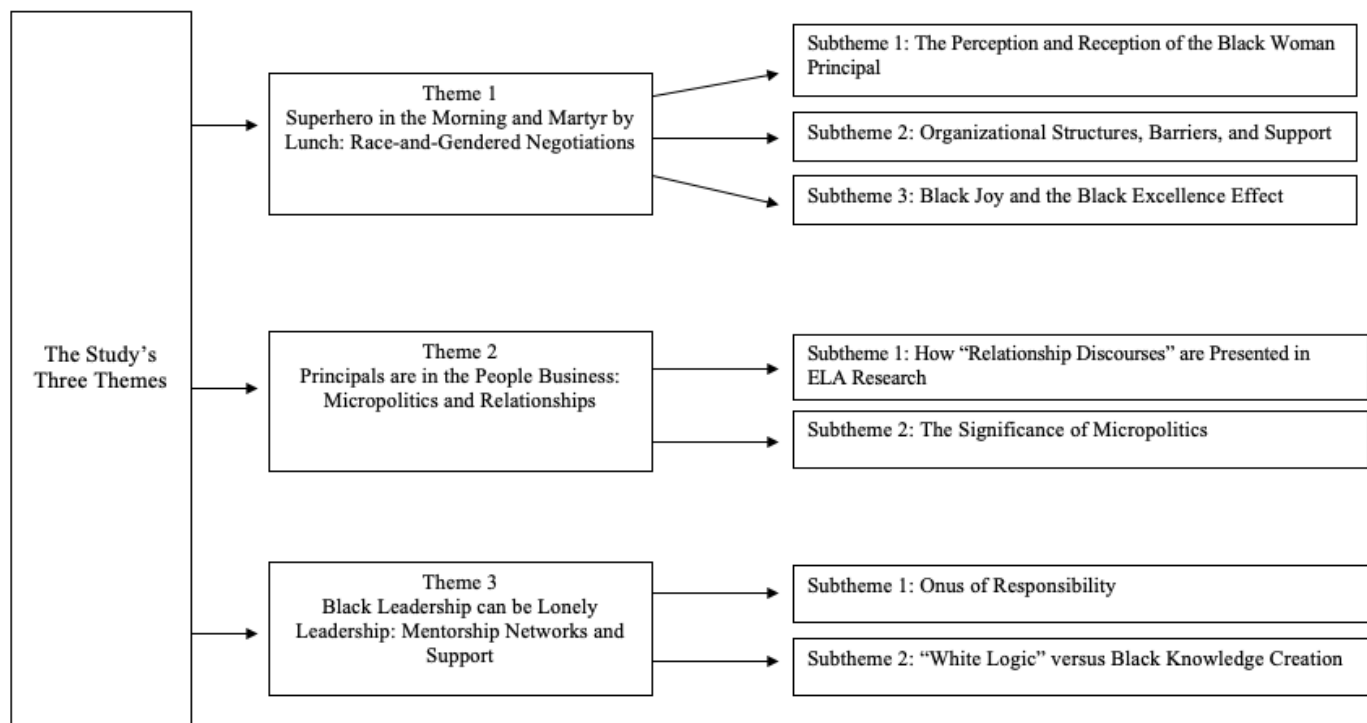
The graphical representation above is intended to provide readers with a better understanding of the breadth and depth of findings discussed in each theme. As well as be a point of reference as they navigate this chapter.

Revisiting the Term, Professional Identity

In Chapter 1, I introduced the concept of professional identity as a necessary term for naming the shared meaning making that is negotiated by others in the same position (Iranzo-García et al., 2020; Monrouxe, 2010; Tan et al., 2017; Tomlinson & Jackson, 2021; Trede et al., 2012). Given the term's varying iterations in education, psychology, and leadership literature, it would be remiss of me to engage in a discussion of its significance to principalship without

clarifying how it is operationalized in this study. Particularly, in light of the findings. While the term professional identity is used in leadership discourse and explicitly used in this study, participants did not synthesize the understanding of their role to the aforementioned two words. Rather, their narratives situated professional identity within the spheres of discourse and practice where professional identity is actualized, and made this understanding apparent through a variation of terms (e.g. professional development, relationships, values, race, knowledge, gender, purpose, helper, experience, and community) that arguably encapsulate the scholarly definition of professional identity. Conceptually, Tan et al. (2017) define professional identity as:

> The self that has been developed with the commitment to perform competently and legitimately in the context of the profession, and its development can continue over the course of the individuals' careers. A person with such identifies with the profession, its role and values. He or she finds meaning in the work. (p. 1505)

For Jackson (2018), professional identity "refers to individuals internalising professional values, beliefs, and attributes finding meaning in their work, and connecting with the conduct and practices associated with professional role" (p. 245).

Although recognizing the significance of the definitions above, findings in this study revealed that Black women principals do not only perceive their professional identities as a stratification of knowledge, skills, abilities (KSA) acquisition and shared meaning-making. Rather, the precarious work of principalship coupled with the complexities of gendered racism created a fluid construction of a professional identity where the varying dimensions of a principal's KSAs, values, intersectional identity markers, attitudes, and previous experiences played intermittent roles of significance in differing contexts. When addressing conflicts centered on anti-Black racism and inequity, Black women principals' racial identity was specifically highlighted as a prominent component of their professional identity. When enacting school-level policies and facilitating professional development workshops, Black women

principals' KSAs were recognized as defining competency attributes for their roles. How each

dimension of their professional identity emerges in the educational spaces of K-12 schools,

school board workshops, staff meetings, recruitment interviews etc. is dependent on the

immediate needs of the institution in which they serve. Armstrong and Mitchell (2017) allude to

this wavering notion of identity as an institutional identity and shadow identity whereby

institutional identity contains the administrative competencies, roles, and behaviours of the

profession while a shadow identity is structured by race and gender expectations that Black

women do not portray. I build upon this understanding further by arguing that the drivers that

makeup these co-existing identities show up differently in different contexts.

As Black women principals seek to exercise leadership practices that are congruent with

the values of provincial-level governing bodies such as the OME and professional associations

such as the OPC, CPCO, and ADFO, the various dimensions of their professional identity carry

unequal weights of significance in different contexts, to produce favourable outcomes.

Armstrong and Mitchell (2017) note that the unpredictability of principalship and the pressures

to meet normative expectations position Black women principals to accept or resist institutional

values. As products of the rigid prescriptions of managerialism, the leadership standards and

institutional values in question (i.e. management and authority outlined in the OLF) can serve as

"regulatory mechanisms of control that normalize the policy discourses on efficient leadership

and ideal leaders through practices" (Riveros et al., 2016, p. 599). Further informing and policing

the behaviours of principals, through the conscious and unconscious effect on attitudes, speech,

and management actions (Begley, 2010; Haydon, 2007; van Niekerk & Botha, 2017), while

subtly producing a panopticon effect (i.e. systems of accountabilities and surveillance) to the

governance of principalship. Identifying the moments in which the acceptance and/or resistance

of institutional values is necessary for constructing and reinforcing their professional identity is a minimally explored area in educational leadership that is addressed in this study and discussed further in this chapter. Specifically, how Black women principal's professional identity is understood while recognizing the micropolitics and organizational structures that tend to demand conformability as a condition of membership.

Given this understanding, an attempt to dissect and/or stratify professional identity into a universal definition with dimensions that are perceived equally in all contexts would obscure the multifaceted ways in which Black women principals construct their professional identities. Thus, as the term professional identity is used as a central unit of analysis in this study, I do not attempt to redefine the term but provide a nuanced view of its operationalization. Discussion of findings encourages a conscientious effort to acknowledge the ebb and flow of how Black women principals construct and understand their professional identity as they exercise their leadership in historically White institutions.

Superhero in the Morning and Martyr by Lunch: Race-and-Gendered Negotiations

Ruby, Michelle, Shirley, Harriet, Wangari, Rosa, and Ida are not just Black principals nor just woman principals, they are Black women principals. Black women principals consciously enter school spaces as both Black and a woman. While these identity markers tend to be compartmentalized in leadership discourse, findings in this study highlight this approach to be futile as Black women principals' leadership practices, policy enactment sensemaking, and development of mentorship networks are reflective of a symbiotic relationship between race and gender. Participants explain that to be a Black woman principal in the K-12 landscape is to be a version of leadership that does not fit the status quo. While working to meet school reform

initiatives, Black women principals must contend with the complexities of enacting institutional values outlined by the OME such as fairness, equity, and respect for all (OME, 2010) while being subjected to inequity, unfairness, and disrespect as a result of being a Black woman. This biased treatment coupled with the pressures to achieve leadership success create conditions where Black women principals must negotiate their race and gendered identities to retain their positions, advance their careers, and construct a professional identity that is congruent with institutional values. Discussion in this section delineates the moments of negotiation that participants navigated in their principalship journeys and interrogates the phenomena of the superhero/ superwoman as a key driver mapping the contexts for how and why Black women principals negotiate their identities.

The Perception and Reception of the Black Woman Principal

Writing on the professional experiences of Black women principals, White (1995) asserts that,

> To be an African American female in this day and age is a difficult existence. At all levels and in all situations the African American female is constantly questioned as to her right to exist in today's society. Her competency may be called into question; her authority may be called into question; her earning power may be called into question; and in the most sacred of all stations in life, her role as spouse and mother may be called into question. There can be no doubt that if the conditions listed above do exist, then the African American female's basic right to exist, is called into question. She is, for all practical purposes, invisible. (p. 99)

White's (1995) discussion of invisibility provides insight into the deficit perspective of Black women. A perspective that has been reflected in the underrepresentation of Black women in ELA positions and the politics of knowledge that gatekeep the mobilization of research on this group in traditional dissemination avenues (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Lomotey, 2019; Mponguse, 2010). Even when scarce studies exist, the contributions of Black women are deemed to have merit when written and analyzed in relation to other racialized groups, Black men, or White

woman (Tillman, 2002; 2006). Historically, Black women have been portrayed as incompetent, inferior, and angry (Aaron, 2020; Brown, 2016; Holmes, 2015). Characterizations that their counterparts have not been afforded. The deficit perception is propelled further in media depictions of principalship. Even when Black women are cast in roles intended to celebrate their leadership positions, such as the American Broadcasting Network's show *Abbott Elementary*, Black women principals are ridiculed as incompetent, hypersexualized, and assumed to engage in criminal behaviour such as blackmail to enter their role. Although *Abbott Elementary* is praised for its progressive display of Black educators and triumph, this cultural imagery, which Crenshaw (1991) terms representation intersectionality, perpetuates a damaging perception of Black women principals. As well, reinforces the pathologizing view that even in contexts where Black women are given leadership opportunities, they an incapable of achieving leadership success.

Arguably, while deficit perceptions of Black women in education exist, there is scholarship that reflects Black women as the "strong Black woman" who is resilient and perseveres in the face of adversity (Alston, 2012; Chance, 2022; Jean et al., 2009; Lomotey, 2019). This phenomenon emerged in participant's narratives, where the sentiment of being a superhero that remedied school inequities was at the foreground of their roles. While discussing the anti-Black racism she experienced as a principal, Ruby explained that,

> there's an expectation of some sort of superhero response, even though I'm dealing with the exact same constraints that my White colleagues are dealing with, or maybe even more so. That somehow I can save the world and I can be able to fight and eradicate racism because I am Black.

She also explained that,

> Being an administrator, you're a middleman to the board. You're stuck between everyone, all the stakeholders and every single stakeholder does expect miracles from you. So that's difficult. But the added challenge is race and you are expected to be a

> martyr for the Black families, the Black children, the Black or the sort of anti-Black dismantling of racism. And you're just expected to fix it all. And you're not just expected to fix education, but as I said, you're expected to fix racism as well. As if it's not something that's systemic, it's just she's going to be the person who can do it.

Ruby's experience and those of the participants, illuminate a contradiction between the perception and reception of Black women principals in school spaces. Findings suggest that Black women principals are perceived by school boards as EDI experts that can create novel strategies for dismantling anti-Black racism. This lived experience lays that foundation for their recruitment and placement in high needs schools. However, the same identity markers are received with angst and disdain by students, staff, and parents who Shirley explains, do not view Black women as the "face and/or gender of what people think of when they think of a principal". Wangari shared a similar experience of marginalization,

> So in the role as principal, I felt that my experience was hyper-scrutinized, was questioned, the tropes about being toned, [you are] police toned and [you are] coming across angry or [you are] coming across difficult. I mean, I had those adjectives described to me by my higher ups when they said, I hear [you are] being. And I was like, no [I am] not, [I am] being a leader, I am leading my staff.

The paradox of being perceived as a necessary asset to school boards but then received as a sacrificial lamb once in the role, produces an effect where Black women principals must negotiate their identities given that their "race and gender serves [them] well in some situations [and] could be an obstacle for others in some situations" (excerpt from Shirley). Reaffirming that Black women principals negotiate their intersecting identities to produce favourable outcomes that support their leadership practices. For example, Shirley's race was beneficial for liaising communication with a Black parent while Wangari's gender was beneficial for enacting a "Black mama" role to transfer a student from an applied to academic level. Black women balance the "feminine traits of being nurturing and caregiving with what have been considered the more masculine traits of self-reliance, strength, and hard work" (Perez et al., 2023, p. 2).

The heroic perception of Black women principals is problematic for two reasons. First, it removes the onus of responsibility from key stakeholders tasked with dismantling anti-Black racism and school inequities. Specifically, stakeholders at the administrative level such as the OME, superintendents, trustees, and directors. In Ontario, principals adhere to directives provided by the OME, superintendents, directors, and trustees (Education Act, 1990b,c; OME, 2022; People for Education, 2009). The hierarchical chain of command has significance for situating the undue hardship that is shifted towards the principal as the "face of the board" (excerpt from Ruby) and at times educational leadership as a whole. When scholars present a heroic perspective of principals that can save the organization (see Elmore, 2000, Karns & McGee, 2011; Wentz, 1989) it has the potential to perpetuate a false narrative whereby the principal is provided with greater positional and decision-making power than in reality.

In reality:

- Black women principals have to enact policies with limited resources because they are placed at high needs schools

- Black women principals face heightened scrutiny to achieve immeasurable goals compared to their counterparts

- Black women principals are shoulder tapped into principalship and struggle to obtain leadership experiences for recruitment portfolios, if not offered by their superior

- Black women principals must exercise their positional power to advocate for their schools when raising their voice is received as an angry Black woman

- Black women principals experience mental-health and well-being challenges as a result of the gendered racism experienced in the role.

Second, the heroic perception obscures the conceptualization of the school leader as this title is

one bestowed upon Black women principals rather than self-acclaimed or co-constructed.

Branson & Marra (2019) clarify that,

> To become a leader, the person needs to first negotiate with those they are leading, to build a mutually understood and accepted view of what the inherent responsibilities of the leadership position are, and how it is best to be performed. As a negotiated position, the ultimate image of leadership is co-constructed through the realization and consolidation of mutually accepted values, beliefs and expectations. (p. 92)

Considering that professional identities are informed by social and personal experiences (Cruz-González, 2020), Branson and Marra's (2019) insights on co-constructed realizations for how leadership should be performed demonstrates that a better understanding of the perception and receptions of school leaders in these experiences is necessary.

Indeed, discourse on race-and-gendered negotiations in professional settings across disciplines is robust and growing. What this study offers to the field of education is a nuanced view of the complexities that emerge when Black women principals' negotiations are in conflict with the prescriptive policy mandates, school improvement initiatives, and leadership standards that inform their professional identity construction. Briefly reverting to the discussion above, I want to draw attention to Ruby's use of the term superhero. The conscious use of the term has significance and implications for the perception and reception of Black women principals. Implications that have been examined in other disciplines yet have been loosely interrogated in ELA research. Thus, I take-up the notion of a superhero in this section to challenge the conceptualization of the school leader in mainstream literature and situate certain assumptions in relation to this study's findings. Specifically, I argue that Woods-Griscombé's (2010) Superwoman Schema presents promising contributions for analyzing the conditions that spark Black women principals to negotiate their race-and-gendered identities while leading K-12 schools.

The Superwoman Schema. The Superwoman Schema is a framework developed by

Woods-Griscombé (2010) to examine how descriptions of the Superwoman role influence the

health of Black women as they withstand gendered racism. The Superwoman Schema is

categorized into five themes: 1) obligation to manifest strength, 2) obligation to suppress

emotions, 3) resistance to being vulnerable or dependent 4) determination to succeed despite

limited resources, and 5) obligation to help others which is displayed below in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Characterization of the Superwoman Schema
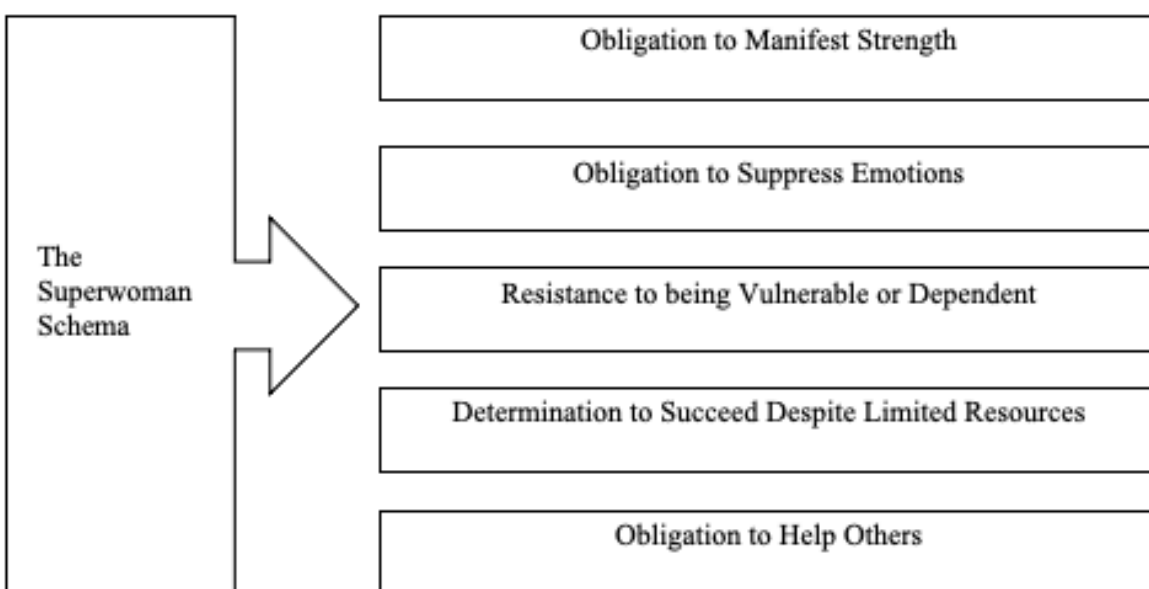
(Adapted from Woods-Giscombé, 2010)

The phenomena of the Strong Black Woman and Superwoman role have long been explored in

Black feminist scholarship on African American women (see Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003, 2009;

Hill Collins, 2000; Harris, 2001; hooks, 1993; Thomas et al., 2004) to examine how gendered

racism "forced African American women to take on the roles of mother, nurturer, and

breadwinner out of economic and social necessity" (Woods-Griscombé, 2010, p. 669). Although

Woods-Griscombé's (2010) framework is situated within a health context, the Superwoman

Schema is of significance as it illuminates the distinct conditions for how Black women cope

with gendered racism, how the perception of a superwoman manifests, and offers a new

perspective for analyzing ELA research and practice. In particular, the Superwoman Schema highlights a minimally explored area in ELA research that this study addresses, which is how Black women principals' professional identities are comprised of oscillating identities that are tethered on the premise of "self-disciplining bodies who uphold the social order" (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003, p. 36). In an attempt to highlight the congruence between the Superwoman Schema and participants' narratives, I weave excerpts from their stories into each characterization below. Further emphasizing the onerous negotiations that Black women principals make while constructing their professional identities and meeting the demands of principalship.

1. Obligation to Manifest Strength. This theme is centered around feeling obligated to present an image of strength for multiple parties such as parents, friends, children, family members, and coworkers in spite of challenges faced. Given the public portrayal of strength from other Black women such as grandmothers, mothers, esteemed Black women in the media who have overcome greater barriers, Black women "have to be strong…Society makes [them] have to be a strong woman. People in relationships make [them] have to be a strong woman. [Their] past makes [them] have to be a strong woman and [it is] really annoying as hell" (Woods-Griscombé, 2010, p. 673). For Black women, this unspoken expectation to be "the strong one" in professional contexts requires emotional suppression where complaints are prohibited, however the "sense of pride about manifesting an image of strength" is coupled with distress from consistently upholding a heroic image.

For Harriet, leading as a Black woman required strength.

> Well, one piece of advice is that we are really strong women, but sometimes we have to have a little bit of extra strength. [We are] into the position knowing that you have a lot of people being really critical of you because they [do not] expect anything great. Many people will think [you are] just another Black hire because the board needs that right

> now. But you have to have that belief in yourself. You [cannot] be afraid. You cannot see yourself going into this role and saying, oh, I really want to become a principal or superintendent so I [cannot] make waves. That [should not] be your intention.

For Michelle, her role as a principal necessitated having to "defend overtly or otherwise who I am and that [I am] just as capable as the other five, six, seven principals, White principals who came before me" while recognizing that White parents are "always just waiting for me to fall". Wangari believed that Black women principals should,

> Take care of yourself. [It is] not easy to lead as a Black woman in any field, you will receive many small cuts. But Black women in the world of work do that all the time. If they understand that in the role of leadership, people will say things and unintentionally cause harm… not to say that be a sufferer of it, but [it is] going to happen. [It is] going to happen. They have to have their own way of responding to it.

Wangari's rationalization of the need to have strength in spite of the "small cuts" echoes the arguments presented above by Woods-Griscombé (2010) that because other Black women have proven to overcome challenges, one must persevere. This theme is of significance to the study of leadership given that strength and possessing "strong leadership" is identified as "the cornerstone of the success of the educational system in Ontario" (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2008, p. 5) in provincial reports such as the *Succession Planning for Ontario Schools and School Boards*, *2008*. An acknowledgement of Black women principals' obligation to manifest strength would be beneficial for better understanding the relationship between strength and leadership in shaping professional identity construction.

  2. Obligation to Suppress Emotions. While enduring the consequences of gendered racism, Black women feel the inability to authentically voice their challenges in the workplace out of fear for displaying signs of weakness, being a burden to others, appearing crazy, and/or being misunderstood. Consequently, Black women feel isolated and tend to keep their emotions internalized, "hidden from others", "kept in [their] heart", "displayed in privacy", "bottled up inside", and "demonstrated in the presence of God" (Woods-Griscombé, 2010, p. 676). While in

the workplace, demands for maintaining productivity can obscure the signs of stress for Black

woman specifically because of the Superwoman syndrome while non-Black women are afforded

the ability to complain, show signs of stress, and do not need to be "the strong one" all the time.

Participants in this study shared key moments in their principalship where they had to

suppress their emotions while experiencing explicit displays of anti-Black racism. When

addressing a behavioural incident with a student, Wangari recalled an instance where she was

called a racial slur.

> It came to a point where he had left his classroom, was running around the school, he
> went to a boy's washroom and he trashed it…And I was brought to, again [I am] the only
> administrator there, so I was brought to the boys' washroom and I told him, listen, [it is]
> miss Wangari, [I am] coming in. And he rained down the N word on me. He called me
> the N word over and over and over and over and over again. And I could not stop this
> boy, and other teachers and kids in the halls—because the bell started—they were passing
> through, and they heard this boy yelling at me. They were so upset. I had to still maintain
> my composure and handle the crisis of de-escalating this child. But obviously, in that
> moment, if I were any other administrator in the entire board at the secondary level, they
> would never have heard that.

When addressing an irate parent over the phone, Rosa recalled an instance where her positional

power did not afford her the same respect as her vice-principal because she was a Black woman.

She shared,

> If I was a White woman I [do not] know if she would have done that. My White [vice-
> principal] ordered her out, actually said at this point, [I will] have to formally ask you to
> leave. So you see, that was a stronger word than me refusing to see her. She [did not] take
> offence in that. Yeah, she took offence in me saying a child stays home and you [cannot]
> be screaming and shouting. So sometimes you [do not] know. But I know [it is] there, [it
> is] nothing you can do about it, it was about them, not me. But I will still get up every
> day and I attempt to do my best and treat everyone civilly and ensure that everyone is
> welcome.

In both instances, Rosa and Wangari had to maintain their composure as they knew their visible

identities was the reason for their mistreatment. The sentiment of being strong in the face of

adversity contained in the Superwoman Schema is reflected in Wangari's statement of having to

"still get up every day" and "treat everyone civilly" in spite of the trauma.

3. Resistance to Being Vulnerable or Dependent. Possessing a desire to resist dependence on others and vulnerability, Black women are reluctant to accept help in fear of being taken advantage of and being perceived as being incompetent. The sentiment of mistrust and "ulterior motives for offering help" illuminates one reason why Black women enter, maintain, and feel comfortable in leadership positions. Being a leader enables Black women to be "in charge in relationships to protect themselves from getting hurt". The desire to resist dependence yet still needing support in leadership positions, creates an internal conflict for Black women as the overwhelming demands of leadership eventually require an act of seeking and accepting help.

Although Harriet understood the reasons for resisting dependence, she acknowledged that a self-righteous approach to leadership could not be maintained in the long-run. She cautioned that Black women principals cannot "be shy in certain schools, you got to ask for that you want. The most they can tell you is no. And then you keep trying right. At some point, we reached a position where we can meet halfway". This tenant of the Superwoman Schema has implications for understanding the leadership approaches and practices that Black women principals deploy in their schools, particularly when scholars such as Armstrong (2023) assert that resistance to dependence and vulnerability "constructs the Black woman as an autocratic leader who resists asking for help" (p. 15). The perception of resistance may consequently hinder principals' access to timely support.

4. Determination to Succeed Despite Limited Resources. Success for Black women is characterized as a sense of "hope for being their best and overcoming any obstacle that they faced" (Woods-Griscombé, 2010, p. 674), despite a lack of sleep, heightened work responsibilities, and compromised well-being. A recurring heroic perception is strongly

illuminated in this theme, whereby Black women must work harder than others to be the best and reach their goals with limited resources. This perceived supernatural ability to do everything is reflective of the ambition and personal high standards that Black women and those around them create. When Black women do not meet the expectations of success, they feel regret, that "they have not done enough", and that "there is always more that [they] want to achieve" (Woods-Griscombé, 2010, p. 674). Harriet's narrative echoed this sentiment when she explained that "As Black administrators, we sometimes feel like we have to make sure we make no mistakes and do really well because obviously we're treated more harshly than our White counterparts". Harriet's recount, in light of the Superwoman Schema, highlights an onus of responsibility that is placed on the Black woman principal to continuously overcome challenges for the sake of achieving leadership success.

5. Obligation to Help Others. This theme is centered on a desire to nurture others as women. Black women feel the responsibility of ensuring that others' needs are met as it is their "job to make others happy" (Woods-Griscombé, 2010, p. 674). Even in instances were remedying others' problems becomes burdensome, Black women's internal commitment to help makes it difficult to say no. While achieving this goal necessitates the acceptance of multiple roles, responsibilities, and financial set-backs, the commitment elicits a sense of pride, purpose, value, and satisfaction to give back.

Although Shirley was mistaken for the safety monitor or a trades employee by parents who did not expect to see a Black woman principal, the reception from Black families reaffirmed her value as a principal as her identity helped to establish a sense of trust with the school for Black parents. She noted,

> For Black families, they come in and [there is] a sense of relief and a sense of trust because they feel like I will understand or I will give their child a chance or I will see

their child and the good that they have. So it depends on who [we are] talking about. It depends on context.

Rosa explained that Black women principals should,

> Always build capacity, always, always read books. If you [do not] have the time, get all your books while you drive, when [you are] listening. [It is] the knowledge, [it is] what you bring to the table that is important. Because you [do not] know with what you can make an impact. You can make an impact. You need to be knowledgeable, you need to be informed, you need to push yourself.

As a principal, Ida described a situation where compromise to meet the needs of her school was a necessary component to her leadership approach, despite experiencing microaggressions in the process of helping.

> Okay, how can we meet in the middle ground? So that was what we did. But …if I was a white man, I [would not] get that much…they knew what they came thinking, she [does not] know what [she is] doing. [She is] an idiot. Because the person that was there before they [did not] have any problem.

Ruby shared that principalship is, "a lot of heavy lifting I think because [we are] leading, but [we are] also expected to solve a lot of the problems that have occurred and are continuing to exist without any sort of recognition of the fact that we ourselves are also impacted by these same issues". Her narrative emphasizes Woods-Griscombé (2010) discussion on the burden of helping and highlights a conviction to prioritize the needs of others.

The contributions of the five tenets of the Superwoman Schema in relation to participants' narratives to ELA research is two-fold. First, the Superwoman Schema helps to contextualize the historical and sociocultural drivers that inform Black woman principals' leadership practices while providing a framework for naming the specific conditions that either support and/or hinder their entrance, retention, and ascension into leadership. Second, the Superwoman Schema helps to expand Armstrong and Mitchell's (2017) discussion of the institutional and shadow identity that comprises Black women principals' professional identity. In Chapter 2 I explained that an "institutional identity" is centered on objectivity; administrative

competencies, roles, and behaviours while a "shadow identity" is informed by racial and gender expectations that Black women do not fit (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017). At the beginning of this chapter, I made the claim that the drivers that construct these co-existing identities show up differently in different contexts. In light of the participants' narratives and the tenets of the Superwoman Schema, I want to unpack this further through an illustration of the "institutional identity" and the "shadow identity" as two ends of the professional identity spectrum. While we understand the conditions that form an "institutional identity" and scholars such as bell hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Patricia Hill Collins provide us with the historical context for why a "shadow identity" exists for Black women, it would be helpful to know which conditions instigate the switch from one to the other. Particularly, Black women principals' sensemaking for presenting an "institutional identity" in certain contexts and a "shadow identity" in others. This section in particular addresses this inquiry by examining the point of equilibrium on the professional identity spectrum. The point of contention or internal struggle where a principal must choose which one of their identities will produce a favourable outcome. Before I advance this illustration, I want to make clear that I am not stating that when one identity is activated, the other is dormant. Rather, the sliding scale of a spectrum is a reminder that professional identities are fluid and that while a leader may lean strongly towards one end, the other is still activated with a weakened weight of significance. Michelle's "institutional identity" was beneficial for changing school admittance policies for racialized students, while Shirley's "shadow identity" was beneficial for remedying a dilemma with a Black mother despite being a vice-principal at the time with a White man principal.

The integration of the Superwoman Schema to the study of Black women principals' professional identities may provide further insights into the conditions that facilitate this switch

while providing a framework for developing strategies to reconcile the struggle between the two. A reconciliation that may mitigate the challenges, such as RBF that Black women principals face for choosing one identity over the other and may draw the drivers of their professional identities into equilibrium. In the absence of a distinct framework for analyzing Black women principals' institutional and shadow identities, ELA studies may continue to make inferential claims about professional identity.

Contributions to the Conceptualization of the School Leader. The Superwoman Schema in relation to Black women is not a new phenomenon considering that schools of Black feminist thought have long interrogated the complexities of gendered racism, activism, and Black women standpoint as legitimate sources of knowledge (see Hill Collins, 2000; Harding, 2004; hooks, 1984; Lenz, 2004). Although scholarship from Patricia Hill Collins, Sandra Harding, and Dorothy Smith is referenced in mainstream education literature that examines the constructs of race and/or gender, examinations of Black women are largely omitted from ELA research (Brown, 2016; Lomotey, 2019; Waring, 2003; Williams, 2013). Indeed, conceptualizations of K-12 school leadership continue to reflect stereotypical identity constructions of heterosexual, middle class, White males (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Brown, 2005; Heck & Hallinger, 2005). A heteronormative White perception of the school leader is problematic as it creates exclusionary boundaries for the perception and reception of Black women in principalship and consequently creates conditions where Black women principal must shift their "institutional" and "shadow" identities to successfully achieve leadership outcomes; outcomes that are appraised to determine their retention and career ascension. This present study challenges the conceptualization of school leadership as a generalized concept whereby leadership standards, frameworks, and practices are abstract and standardizable in all contexts. While possessing

significance for race-and-gendered negotiations, the notion of standardized leadership is taken up further in the following sections of this chapter on organizational supports, relationship discourses, and mentorship.

Continuing the discussion of Woods-Giscombe's (2010) Superwoman Schema, findings highlight the distinct and instrumental role that the study of Black women principals contribute to a multifaceted understanding of K-12 leadership. Considering the deficit perception of Black women principals and the underdevelopment of studies on this group, I argue for an integration of the Superwoman Schema in ELA research to understand the formation of leaders' professional identities. The introduction of race as a criterion in analyzing leadership practices could challenge and disrupt standardized conceptions of leadership. For example, it would be helpful to know why and how variation in leadership practices persist among Black and White women and men despite the standardization of leadership standards, school leader preparation programs, and prescriptive structure of school-level policies that shape their practices. The Superwoman Schema can offer conceptual nuance, which may help researchers and practitioners interested in ELA identify the contexts in which variation occurs and how best to align organizational practices to address this variation. Which, in turn, informs the development of organizational practices to support Black women principals' professional identity construction. Given that professional identity construction does not occur in a vacuum, there are other components of principalship, such as policy enactment, micropolitics, relationship building, and mentorship, that play distinct roles in shaping the institutional and shadow identity shift. Thus, warranting an expanded discussion of these components prior to fully digesting the potential contributions of the Superwoman Schema. The next few sections of this chapter are dedicated to clarifying the conceptualization of the school leader in general, and the Black woman school

leader in particular. Substantiating this clarification is necessary for understanding the contexts

in which successful leadership and professional identity construction occur.

Organizational Structures, Barriers, and Support

The political climate of when this study was conducted presented significant implications for the development, delivery, and access to organizational supports from participants' respective boards. Facing increased pressures to remedy inequities further illuminated by the COVID-19 pandemic and emergent social injustices (e.g. Wet'suwet'en pipeline dispute in British Columbia, the discovery of mass graves at Canadian residential school, the murder of George Floyd), school boards in Ontario were tasked with developing policies and enhancing organizational supports to meet the diverse needs of students, staff, and the community at large. In particular, the discovery of mass graves at Canadian residential schools placed a spotlight on the Canadian education system to be accountable for the errors of the past and placed policy-makers under a magnifying glass to call attention to the practices that would redress injustices. While this study does not provide a policy analysis of specific provincial and/or school level policies, it offers a critique of policy enactment practices as participants acknowledged the existence of and emergent development of organizational supports that centered on EDI, anti-Black racism, and anti-oppression policies. Before engaging in an analysis of the findings, it is important to caution that simply because organizational supports may be available does not mean they are effective nor congruent with organizational practices. For example, Shirley explained, "I will firmly and solidly critique the organizational structure we have beyond that, because I think administrators at this moment do not collectively have the support that they need, especially if they're racialized". The findings of this study highlight this incongruence through participants' characterization of available supports as lackluster.

While the supports made available to participants varied from board to board, participants provided a general acknowledgement of access to a select few supports. The supports identified

included but were not limited to training modules, mentor-mentee programs, professional development workshops, equitable hiring procedures, emails, school board meetings, conferences, board-level principals' council, policies, and support from board-level professional associations for administrators. Findings illuminate the performativity of existing organizational supports and the harm that can occur when racialized representation is increased without careful consideration for how the existing and forthcoming organizational supports will meet the race-and-gendered needs of newly hired leaders. By listening to participants' narratives, it is clear that three distinct organizational supports were of significance in shaping their professional identities. These were the PQP (the school leader preparation program in Ontario), personal networks of support via mentorship, and the enactment of school level policies. Although participants identified the PQP as a key organizational support, their recounts emphasized the importance of mentorship and policy enactment, thus the discussion in this section and those to follow will be reflective of this importance, with a brief discussion of the PQP below.

The Ontario Principal's Qualification Program. Contemporary literature of leadership theorizing used in school leader preparation programs is largely dominated by neoliberal objectives that dilute leadership acumen to a set of leadership standards (Wamba, 2021), which at times neglects the nuances of race as a necessary component for understanding how principals lead schools (Young & Brooks, 2008). This neglect presents challenges for the recruitment of principals, the development of organizational supports tailored to the specific needs of racialized principals, and the cultivation of self-efficacy among principals to lead and enact policies in racially diverse schools (Diem et al., 2019; Gooden & Dantley, 2012). Findings from this study further emphasize this realization by illuminating how frameworks (such as the OLF), used in school leader preparation programs provide a foundational understanding of leadership but do

not situate leadership practices within the sociocultural contexts in which they are enacted. This

sentiment was reflected in Ruby's narrative,

> Maybe they need to start telling the truth. Like, I think it's so much deeper than what they can do. I think these courses, the courses are offered by institutions that are steeped in White supremacy, they're not even recognizing that they are shuffling out constantly a lot of garbage that many people are drinking up, like KoolAid. And until these institutions, universities, OPC, the Ontario College of Teachers, actually stop and interrogate where their stance is and how they project their perspective on education, until that's interrogated and changed, I don't know, I don't know what else to say. I can't say they need a unit on anti-Black racism in education. What they need to look at is how has the system of education succeeded at continuously oppressing those who are already oppressed within society? Right, and they're not going to get to that point, so I'm not quite sure what they can do.

Participants suggest that if boards in Ontario are to purposefully increase the recruitment

of racialized principals, then PQP practitioners must be purposeful in transitioning from the use

of EDI "buzzwords" and racially blind resources towards identifying the underlying

organizational structures and practices that mask gendered racism. Negating to interrogate the

effectiveness of school leader preparation programs given their significance as a formative

avenue for constructing Black women principals' professional identities presents problematic

opportunities for racially-blind theoretical knowledge and limited applicability in practice. If one

is to heed participants' suggestions, then increasing the availability and access to organizational

support may appear as a probable solution. However, I caution that integration without a

purposeful enactment plan may prove to be futile. Data gleaned from this study reveals that

Black women principals face challenges when translating theoretical organizational supports into

practice due to gendered racism from students, staff, and parents, as well as a lack of guidance.

This translation gap was highlighted in participants' recounts of how they negotiated their race-

and-gendered identities to enact policies. Thus, warranting a deeper interrogation of Black

women principals' enactment practices.

Policy Enactment Context. School leaders have faced and continue to face increasing

pressures to meet the goals of school improvement reform. In response to the shifting global

landscape, further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic (Harris, 2020), there is a growing

international body of research that is interrogating the conceptualization of the school leader in

policy enactment frameworks given the worrying developments in research that favour

accountability driven practices (Drago-Severson & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2018; Ganon-Shilon &

Schechter, 2018; Spillane & Kenney, 2012). While much has been discussed on policy

enactment within leadership discourse, one pervasive yet notable discussion in the field is on the

factors and contextual processes that inform principals' sensemaking and agency when enacting

policies (DeMatthews, 2015; Ganon-Shilon & Chen, 2019; Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2018;

Rigby, 2015; Spillane et al., 2002). Policy literature addressing school reform has traditionally

positioned principals as change agents (Charteris & Smardon, 2018) that not only carry the

burden of advancing school change but possess the capacity to overcome structural barriers to

produce the desired outcomes of reform goals (Glatter, 2006; Riveros et al., 2016). This

conceptualization, partly informed by principal-agent theories, professes an individualistic view

of leadership whereby practices are characterized by a set of desired traits, standards, and

competencies which strive to ensure compliance to the system at large (Coburn, 2016;

Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood et al., 2020; Riveros et al., 2016). Further reproducing, what

Eacott (2011) describes as a market-driven approach to school leadership and what Furlong and

Whitty (2017) entitle as the new science of education. This "parochial worldview" which

Furlong and Whitty (2017) explain as a narrow and localized outlook on the nature of education

and leadership is worrying as it reduces the understanding of principal enactment to non-

behavioural and non-practical traits of leadership. Further omitting critical discussions of how

hegemonic structures shape leaders' beliefs, decision-making, and mobilization of knowledge in

order to lead schools. Such limited understanding of principals' agency obscures the connections between professional identity, policy sensemaking, and policy enactment. In the section above, I highlighted the ways in which Black women were able to negotiate their race-and-gender to achieve EDI and anti-Black racism initiatives. Here, I make specific attention to the distinct ways in which their values and intersectional identities conflicted with the enactment expectations of teachers and the board. Before I advance this section, it is important to note that this study does not provide a policy analysis of specific provincial and school-levels policies that principals enact in Ontario. To do so, may distract from the holistic endeavour of understanding policy enactment as one of many organizational supports that work in tandem to inform, support, and at times hinder Black women principals' practices. Rather, this section highlights the enactment dilemmas presented in participants' narratives and provides a critique of the enactment processes presented in key policy literature given their influence on enactment practices.

Policy Enactment Disjuncture. This study confirmed that Ontario principals have access to enactment support through the PQP, professional development workshops, and school board resources. Indeed, the PQP provides theoretical comprehension of policy enactment, acumen, and discourse, however findings indicate that these resources were insufficient for providing solutions that addressed the school dilemmas at hand without circumventing the race-and-gendered needs of Black women principals. The needs in question were identified as contributing to participants' enactment decisions as it pertained to Black students in general and working in high-needs schools in particular. Participants identified their placement in high-needs schools as characterized with heightened violence, EDI needs, and families from low-SES communities. When Wangari tried to enact equitable practices in her school, she was presented with a grievance from the teacher's union for asking teachers to read books. She understood this

resistance to be "because they had received this leadership from a Black woman, they resisted, and it was all good things".

Ruby acknowledged a sentiment of resentment from White colleagues towards Black leaders for attaining leadership positions and doing the same work, which influenced her enactment practices. She shared the following,

> So, if anything, for me to be able to act or enact policy, I have to ensure that I got every I and cross every t because they will challenge. So that is something that I've learned and it's fine. I think it's probably just the way in which we as Black professionals have to operate in every spare. Whether you're an administrator or you're in a health system or whatever it might be, you're always held to a higher standard and that's no different.

Harriet identified that the lack of racialized teacher representation presented a challenge for enacting policies due to union grievances that were brought against EDI initiatives and the strategies aimed at combating anti-Black racism that she tried to implement. Harriet's narrative presents a significant consideration for the recruitment of Black educators. This study highlights that "what most boards will do, they will create a mess and then they will send the Black administrators to try to clean it up instead of initially just listening" (excerpt from Harriet's interview), however, this approach becomes counterintuitive if enactment practices are inhibited by a lack of racialized teachers to support its success.

Also, findings show that the significance of the theoretical knowledge became secondary when participants were faced with enactment requiring immediate, and at times, incongruent action. Participants' narratives asserted that organizational structures and policies need to be developed to protect principals; however, the need to make decisions with limited time can present enactment challenges. Particularly, when administrative policies and/or bureaucratic procedures may conflict with the EDI needs of Black students. A challenge that is further compounded for Black principals who understand the trauma and harm that immediate inaction or racially-blind action may have on Black students.

Michelle termed this enactment dilemma as the "urgency of the now". She explained that,

> So, policy, like I said in my opening statement to you, it really is a two-edged sword. It's here to protect you, but then there is tension between you and what the policy says, and it's largely because I find that policies are made by people who are far removed from the situation. So there's no consultation to get your input. What do you think? You're on the ground, you're there with the kids, you're there. What do you think? Nobody asks you that.

Using the sentiment of the "urgency of the now", I term participants' enactment dilemma as a policy enactment disjuncture—a space of deviation whereby: 1) the intended enactment procedures of specific policies are challenged with racism and/or sexism towards the enactor, consequently shifting enactment practices, success, and outcomes and 2) the intersectional identities and values of the enactor are in direct conflict with the policy they must enact, consequently shifting the procedural timing, sensemaking, and outcome of that policy. Given that "principals are in the people business" (excerpt from Michelle's interview) and school reform initiatives task principals with enacting provincial and school-level policies that advance public interests while addressing students' diverse needs (Hope, 2002; Wiley, 2016), this policy enactment disjuncture is of considerable significance for school leaders. I caution that the race-and-gendered concerns raised in this section should not be reduced to the personal needs of 7 specific principals. Rather, I encourage that this dilemma be viewed as an unacknowledged need for reconciling racialized principals' exercise of collaborative professionalism as outlined in *PPM 159: Collaborative Professionalism* (Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 2016, see Table 2) and exercise of the cognitive portion of their PLRs as outlined in the OLF (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013, see Table 3) with the exclusionary boundaries that are placed on their enactment practices.

Table 2 PPM 159: Collaborative Professionalism

Shared Understandings and Commitments
A culture of collaborate professionalism is grounded on: • professional learning that supports and enables the conditions for student achievement and student and staff well-being • recognition of and building on the strengths of all individuals to support professional growth • leadership practices that value the expertise and inclusion of all voices, perspectives and roles • a commitment to building professional capacity at all levels • professional practice informed by research, evidence and knowledge arising from the strengths, needs and interests of students and education professionals • a trusting environment where school, school board, and union leaders and the ministry create the necessary conditions, including consideration of time and resources, that enable teams to learn with, and from, each other • an environment that can enhance and influence professional judgement, as defined in *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools*, in supporting effective assessment, instruction, evaluation and reporting of student achievement • an understanding that collaborative professionalism is not intended to increase workload

(OME, 2016, para. 4)

Table 3 Personal Leadership Resources: Cognitive Resources

PERSONAL LEADERSHIP RESOURCES Leaders draw upon the personal leadership resources to effectively enact leadership practices
Cognitive Resources
Problem-solving expertise • understanding/interpreting problems • identifying goals • articulating principles and values • identifying constraints • developing solution processes • maintaining calm/confidence in the face of challenging problems **Knowledge about school and classroom conditions with direct effects on student learning** • technical/rational conditions • emotional conditions • organizational conditions • family conditions **Systems Thinking (NEW!)** • being able to understand the dense, complex, and reciprocal connections among different elements of the organization • having foresight to engage the organization in likely futures and consequences for action

(The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013, p. 22)

The absence of an intersectional lens in policy discourse such as Ball et al.'s (2012) theoretical approaches to policy enactment is problematic it fails to acknowledge the how the intersection of different systems of oppression may influence the boundaries of agentic inclusion

and exclusion that principals navigate in their professional practices. By omitting or obscuring intersectionality in the analysis of policy enactment, these theories risk reproducing and reinforcing the very systems of oppression that educational systems aim to diminish.

Towards an intersectional approach. While scholarship on policy enactment and school leadership is well developed, there has been very limited discussion of the role that professional identity plays in enactment. A robust interrogation of intersectional identities in relation to policy enactment remains at the margins of most work on the theorization of policy enactment and conceptualization of the school leader. Before I advance the insights of this section, I want to provide a reminder that this study does not offer a policy analysis. Rather, it addresses an important conversation on policy enactment practices that emerged in participants' narratives and is a necessary topic of discussion that helps to frame the issue of leadership. In an attempt to redress the disjuncture presented above, I present a critique of existing policy enactment literature and propose a reconceptualization of policy enactment for school leaders that is centered on an intersectional approach. Invoking Crenshaw's (1991) tenets of intersectionality, the findings of this study call attention to a reconceptualization of Ball et al.'s (2012) theoretical approach to policy enactment to address the enactment challenges that are highlighted in participants' narratives. Particularly, the findings that highlight race and gender as being necessary conditions for framing how school leaders enact policies, make sense of the contexts in which said policies can be enacted, and the implications of their identities to either enable or hinder successful enactment. Incorporating a recognition of the principal's intersecting identities into Ball et al.'s (2012) approach to policy enactment will offer a more nuanced understanding of how policy is taken up in diverse spaces of enactment (Furlong & Whitty, 2017; Showunmi et al., 2016), given that "individual action is shaped by interaction and peer

effects" (Coburn, 2016, p. 465).

Ball et al.'s (2012) scholarship provides a pivotal foundation for understanding how policies are enacted in schools by presenting a theoretical approach that goes beyond the limited perception of implementing policies to solve a problem. Ball et al. (2012) challenge the simplicity of policy implementation and argue for a transition to enactment. Particularly, they contend that policy is:

> Done by and done to policy actors producing specific subject positions. Concisely, policy enactment is concerned with the "creative processes of interpretation and recontextualization—that is, the translation of texts into action and the abstractions of policy ideas into contextualised practice—and this process involve 'interpretations of interpretations'". (p.3)

Writing from the school level context, Ball et al. (2012) make explicit mention that policies are rooted in relations of power which are situated in human connection and relationships. Contained within these relationships are the contexts in which policy enactment is exercised in schools. These contexts, which are dynamic and shifting, manifest and are categorized into four dimensions: (a) situated, the historical and local setting of schools, (b) professional cultures, the ethos and values of personnel, (c) material contexts, physical characteristics of a school, and (d) external contexts, how expectations from broader local and national policy frameworks impact schools. Among the factors that play a role in the policy enactment process, findings from this study make contributions to the interpretation and translation of policy directives.

Ball et al.'s (2012) "heuristic distinction" between interpretation and translation situate policy with practice. Interpretation, the process of making sense of a policy, involves decoding of policy texts in relation to the "culture and history of the institution and the policy biographies of the key actors" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 50). In this phase, institutional priorities are compared to political requirements and the consequences of action and inaction are weighed. Translation is

defined as the process of "making institutional texts and putting those texts into action" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 52). Both processes involve authorization where the symbolic value of a policy is relayed by leaders to the school community and taken up by various policy actors or positions. The act of interpretation and translation is centered on the policy actors (see Table 4) that are involved in enactment activities. At the school level, this particular focus is on principals given the political nature of principalship and the top-down hierarchical structure of schools (Hope & Pigford, 2001; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015).

Schools have unique sets of professional cultures and attitudes that have developed over time and shape actors' policy response and practices (Ball et al., 2012). Although policy positions inform and frame who does what in the enactment process, the framework also neglects the significance of social identity representation that is involved in how these policy actors form and maintain relationships as well as its effect on their agency to enact. Coburn (2016) explains that principals engage in a sensemaking process while enacting policy directives and allot new meaning from prior experiences and beliefs to their leadership and enactment practices. In this process, principals are tasked with translating these new meanings into educational practices and face the challenges of adapting broad directives to local contexts (Coburn, 2016). Simply because a policy exists does not necessitate its enactment nor facilitate policy actors' agency to enact. Charteris and Smardon (2018) posits that indeed principals are agentic when they "resist, refuse, and appropriate" (p. 2018) policy, however, leader agency becomes nuanced when "produced through the politics of policy enactments" (p. 28). Further, policy actors' agency becomes muddied when principals are thrust into complex and overlapping relationships with other policy actors and the school community (Charteris & Smardon, 2018). Relationships that can err on the side of privileging traditional conceptions of individual leaders over the social

contexts in which enactment occurs or how certain identities are social represented, perceived, and understood. It is clear that there is a connection with the social and material influences of policy actors and their identities that surpasses the structural and political positioning of the policy enactment process that is presented by Ball et al. (2012). If researchers are to examine leaders' enactment practices in meaningful ways, it may be beneficial to expand the narrow view of structural and political influences on actors' agency to acknowledge representational influence (see Crenshaw, 1991) and its effects as a key factor in the interpretation and translation process rather than a post hoc consequence of policy enactment.

While Ball et al.'s (2012) theoretical approach presents a promising approach for interrogating the enactment practices of this study's participants, it is insufficient for understanding the variation in enactment practices by all actors in all contexts. Specifically, it fails to acknowledge the important role that structural, political, and representative intersectionality (see discussion in Chapter 1) play in shaping leaders' capacity to enact policies. The structural positioning of policy actors (see Table 4) explicated by Ball et al. (2012) is framed around the hierarchy that is inherent of institutionalized power.

Table 4 Policy actors and 'policy work'

Policy actors	Policy work
Narrators	Interpretation, selection and enforcement of meanings
Entrepreneurs	Advocacy, creativity and integration
Outsiders	Entrepreneurship, partnership and monitoring
Transactors	Accounting, reporting, monitoring/supporting, facilitating
Enthusiasts	Investment, creativity, satisfaction and career
Translators	Production of texts, artifacts and events
Critics	Union representatives (reps): monitoring of management, maintaining counter-discourses

Receivers	Coping, defending and dependency

(Ball et al., 2012, p. 49)

This illustration helps to understand the structural and political terrain that actors navigate in their positions and the significance of each actor's contributions at different stages of the enactment process. However, further analysis of Ball et al.'s (2012) case studies in light of participant's narratives, highlights a missed opportunity to interrogate an essential discussion of how representative intersectionality was manifested, perceived, and understood by various policy actors. Demonstrating the effects of the structural and political underpinnings of actors' identities without regard for representative intersectionality skews the portrayal of policy enactment practices and actors' experiences.

Considerations for Racialized Leadership. Dominant narratives of school leader identity have historically reflected stereotypical perceptions of Black women as lacking the knowledge and skills to effectively lead their schools (Aaron, 2020; Brown, 2016; Pollock, 2008). This deficit perception, shaped by cultural imagery during Black enslavement, possesses detrimental effects for Black women's entrance and advancement into leadership positions in addition to presenting barriers for their enactment practices (McClellan, 2012; Williams, 2013). Understanding the policy enactment disjuncture faced by racialized principals solely using structural and political intersectionality does not address the complexities for how and why Black women principals face resistance while leading school to the same degree as representative intersectionality. Nor would it begin to interrogate the race-and-gendered challenges that school leaders face when enacting provincial and school-level policies. Revisiting Crenshaw's (1991) argument, to understand the experiences of individuals within the social world and its constructs is to understand the effect that structural, political, and representative intersectionality have on individuals and group patterns. To this end, subtracting

the dimension of representative intersectionality from discussions of structural and political intersectionality is impossible. Findings in this study highlight that it is necessary for researchers examining policy enactment in schools to include discussions of all three dimensions as the strength of their mutually beneficial relationship warrants its summation rather than division. Given this understanding, I propose a disruption of the narrow view of the theoretical approach presented by Ball et al. (2012) to bring nuance to a necessary conversation for policy enactment and leadership theorization.

As Ontario school boards continue to enhance recruitment efforts that diversify school leadership, those placed in leadership and administration continue to seek support in the infancy and advancement of their careers. Findings from this study highlight an incongruence between the challenges faced by Black women principals and the availability of organizational supports that are tailored to their race-and-gendered needs. While supports may exist, their availability varies across school boards and can occasionally provide a counterproductive and arguably token effect when increased recruitment is conducted without consideration of how identity markers inform leaders' professional identities and practices. Participant narratives suggest that if meaningful progress is to be taken in advancing the representation of racialized school leadership and practices that meet school reform initiatives, then boards must look towards acknowledging race-and-gender as necessary mechanisms in the development and enhancement of organizational supports (i.e. leadership frameworks, school board policies, school leader preparation programs, mentorship programs etc.).

Black Joy and the Black Excellence Effect

While the two sections above may occasionally provide a bleak perception of the race-and-gendered landscape of principalship, the consensus of findings highlight a sentiment of resilience for participants overcoming existing barriers. Particularly, a conscientious effort for reconciliation on the part of the Black women principals to assert their positional power and to legitimize their agency, purpose, and professional identity while in the role. This sentiment is familiar and has widely been descriptive of the Black community through the adoption of microaffirming ideals such as Black joy and excellence. In recent years, the resurgence of overt acts of anti-Black racism and White supremacy has undeniably instilled notions of fear and uncertainty in Canadian Black communities (Greene, 2022; Mullings et al., 2016; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). The denial of existence and pervasiveness of anti-Black racism for Black Canadians has long been characterized by its erasure in tropes of Canada's multicultural identity (Jean-Pierre & James, 2020; Mullings et al., 2016; Williams 2013). As scholars (see Hoyos, 2014; Latham, 2008) continue to question Canada's positive perception as a multicultural nation, overt acts of racism—further illuminated by social media hashtags #BlackLivesMatter, #BlackOutTuesday—have highlighted the ethnically and racially stratified policies that marginalize and police the inclusion of Black Canadian experiences. Contemporary media depictions, dissections, and narrations of the injustices of Emmett Till, Andrew Loku, Dafonte Miller, Trayvon Martin, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Regis Korchinski-Paquet, position the political and cultural significance of those names to specific periods of time for civil rights—evoking a painful reminder of the ongoing racial tensions that challenge and muddy the understanding of freedom in the West.

As the political landscape in Canada shifts to address this resurgence, attention has been

increasingly placed on social institutions such as education, to call-out and call-in (see Woods &

Ruscher, 2021) the personnel, resources, policies, and strategies that can remedy the injustices

centered on racism (Kempf & Watts, 2024; Lander, 2021). Missed opportunities to heed careful

attention to this resurgence coupled with the fallacy of a cohesive multicultural nation is

problematic and has the potential to replicate the same occurrences of anti-Black school policies

and practices (e.g. House Bills: 2898, 377, 2, 1508, 1775, 580 [Schwartz, 2023]) evidenced in

the U.S. Consequently, informing the ways in which race and Black school leadership is

acknowledged, understood, and accepted in the field. Let me hasten to identify that while this

section is not intended to be a political critique, the political fabric in which social identity

markers (specifically race) and principalship is understood warrants a discussion that draws upon

the political tensions and histories of when this study was conducted. In this section, I attempt to

substantiate how participants' understanding of Black joy and excellence as key drivers of

motivation to counter the effects of anti-Black racism, can be deployed as pathologizing rhetoric

that continues to marginalize their racial existence as school leaders. Further highlighting missed

opportunities and the limitations of discourse on Black joy and excellence used in the field.

Before I progress this discussion, I find it important to note that while the parameters of this

work did not ask participants to define their use of the term Black joy nor excellence, its

profusive use in media, text, and policy (given civil rights movements in Canada and the U.S.)

presented an assumptive understanding of its operationalization by participants. As well, my

identity as a Black woman researcher may have contributed to a presumption on the participant's

part of my understanding of the terms in relation to the communities to which we belong.

  Reclamation of Power/ Sovereignty. In 2017, the United Nations highlighted concern

for the "structural racism that lies at the core of many Canadian institutions and the systemic

anti-Black racism that continues to have a negative impact on the human rights situation of African Canadians" (United Nations, 2017, p.15). This declaration conveys a message too familiar to the Black Canadian community as the structural racism that ensued in Canada as a consequence of the transatlantic slave trade and the White backlash that saw the termination of Black teachers and principals following the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling (Lutz, 2017; Richardson, 2014; Wiley, 2016) have etched a lingering sentiment of degradation into the fabric of the Black Canadian identity (Cooper, 2007; Fenwick, 2022). While navigating the continuous acts for erasure fueled by White supremacy, Black communities in Canada and the U.S. have strived to reclaim their power and reconcile the errors of the past by mobilizing counterstories and celebrating instances of racial microaffirmations. For racially minoritized communities, microaffirmations— "behaviors, verbal remarks or environmental cues experienced by individuals from minoritized racial groups in the course of their everyday lives that affirm their racial identities, acknowledge their racialized realities, resist racism or advance cultural and ideological norms of racial justice" (Rolón-Dow & Davison, 2018, p. 1) —serve as "protective factors" (Pérez Huber et al., 2021) that mitigate the effects of microaggressions, form resilience, and develop feelings of inclusion.

The extant literature on resilience, racial sovereignty, and microaffirmations in relation to the Black community have been widely centered on discussions of Black joy and excellence. For example, Adams (2022) explains that,

> In North America and other antiblack colonial and postcolonial contexts, Black pain and Black joy exist in a dialectic where Black joy is resistance, resilience and illumination in the darkness of the violence and pain. The lived experiences of Black people, including schooling exist in what Sadiya Hartman calls the 'after life of slavery,' which entails 'skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration and impoverishment'. It is within these circumstances that our Blackness is constructed which is the, "cultural material, and political signifiers associated with the lived conditions of African and African-descended communities; [it is] a series of

strategic and spiritual identifications that subsume directed, desired and ascribed connections between endarkended bodies in the afterlife of slavery. (pp. 200-201)

For the Black community, Black joy represents a radical tool of imagination that evokes a feeling of freedom (Adams, 2022; Cruz, 2017). A space where Black people can unapologetically exist without the constraints of White supremacy and imagine possibilities that are centered on community, love, light, and resilience (Johnson, 2015; Lu & Steele, 2019; Perry, 2020; Tichavakunda, 2021). Black excellence is the "high level of achievement, success, or ability demonstrated by an individual Black person or by Black people in general" (Dictionary, 2022, para.1). While presenting as a means to celebrate Black individuals, the term can also carry a negative connotation (Scott, 2017).

Outside of the academy, sources such as USA Today, the Washington post, the British Broadcasting Corporation, and the Toronto Star have made significant connections between the Black community and resiliency riding on the shoulder of Black joy and excellence as forms of racial triumph. At the school level in Ontario, Black joy and excellence are mobilized through board-wide student conferences (e.g. Harriet's mention of the Black Brilliance Conference), centres dedicated to anti-Black racism (e.g. The Toronto District School Board's Centre for Black Student Excellence), professional development workshops and/or additional qualification courses (e.g. Addressing Anti-Black Racism to Change Pedagogy and Practice, offered by the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario), podcasts (e.g. Leading Equity Centre's podcast, endorsed by the OPC), and scholarships (e.g. Peel District School Board's Black Excellence Scholarship).

In these variegated perspectives, the notion of resilience is acknowledged as integral to the survival and perseverance of the Black community. The findings of this study as they relate to racial negotiations confirm these perspectives and emphasize Tichavakunda's (2021) claim

that "racialized emotions are material, with embodied and spatial manifestations" (p. 299), suggesting that the terms and the emotions connected to their use surpass the simplicity of a perlocutionary speech act. Rather, the significance they possess has implications for how the racialized emotions are decoded and enacted into practice by the actor. The obscurity of this enactment process lays the foundation for better understanding the capacity in which literature and school initiatives centered on Black joy and excellence inform Black women principals' professional identities and leadership practices.

     Theoretical and Practical Complexities. The premise of Black joy and excellence tends to focus on a single identity marker, race. This focus neglects to acknowledge the intersecting identity markers that may exclude certain groups from achieving their aspirations of success while privileging others. In this study, gender played a significant role in how participants' identities were perceived by parents, students, staff, and how they established networks of support to progress in their careers. Michelle pursued leadership after her children were in university. Shirley wrestled with the discomfort of resisting leadership because of caregiver duties to her family, while Wangari faced resistance from teachers because she was a Black woman. Understanding that Black women face a double jeopardy of gendered racism (Aaron, 2020), provides an opportunity to understand the undue pressures it places on this group to achieve greatness in spite of the constraints that only focus on racism as the barrier. An understanding that has implications for leadership theorizing and the perception of leaders in ELA research. The emphasis of racial barriers and reduction of achieving excellence solely on racial terms masks the reality of gendered barriers that Black women principals have to overcome in addition to racism, ultimately disserving Black women.

     The deployment of the terms Black joy and excellence present theoretical and practical

limitations for the research on and practices of Black women principals. Historically, Black women have been portrayed as resilient and capable of overcoming race-related barriers. As articulated in the sections above, while White women are culturally portrayed as fragile, Black women are characterized as strong. It is within this characterization of resilience that the organizational barriers Black women principals have to overcome while in their roles can be obscured under the guise of attaining leadership success. Findings from this study reveal that Black women principals are called to higher standards than their counterparts to meet the professional standards and accountability measures that define their leadership success. Michelle explained that while Black individuals have historically had to work "twice as hard to be acknowledged as half as good", Black women have a right to be in principalship. Echoing a similar sentiment Shirley candidly shared the following:

> And from the time I was a small child, and many Caribbean children who are first generation heard you have to work twice as hard to get half as far. And so I was always used to having to do more and be better. That was just something you understood was part of being a Black racialized person in Canada, Ontario, southern Ontario, that's just what the reality was. So excellence has always been something very important to me, and I've always tried to embody that, and I do expect that from those around me. And I have always had high expectations for children, especially Black children, which is its own conversation, because I think that that's one of the reasons that our kids have not done well, because not everybody has held that.

These recounts highlight a culturally understood expectation to outperform and overcome the racial barriers that exist to attain the affordances of non-Black individuals in the same roles or mediocrity at best (half as good).

The problem for school leaders lies when the terms Black joy and excellence are used to inform the practices of Black principals without problematizing its use, or when the support tailored to the needs of Black individuals rides on White notions of leadership success. Audre Lorde reminds us that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 1984). There is futility in using the same measuring stick for White individuals to label Black

excellence as it pertains to successful leadership. Specifically, the measuring stick in question are the professional leadership standards (e.g. outlined in the OLF) that pervade leadership discourse, are used to standardize and appraise leadership practices, and are mobilized to prescribe a rigid depiction of leadership. This study highlights that existing leadership standards in the OLF are race-and-gender blind, however I caution that the discussion of this finding in this particular section must not be misconstrued to be verbatim in nature. While the standards do not explicitly make reference to privileging a specific race and/or gender identity, the omission of race-and-gender as important mechanisms that contribute to leadership outcomes provides opportunities for perpetuating White notions and hegemonic perceptions of leadership by its readers. Consequently, the hegemonic foundation on which leadership theorization has been conceived (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Coleman, 2012; Showunmi et al., 2016) and the tools (i.e. the OLF) used to translate these theorizations into practice are unable to effectively counter the anti-Black racist effects of the master's house because they privilege the majority.

A reliance on Black joy and excellence dilutes and invalidates the efforts for removing the barriers that marginalize and exclude Black people by instead encouraging Black individuals to push themselves to reach standards that were intentionally meant to be unattainable to privilege Whiteness and maintain colonial structures. Unattainable through inequitable policies and limited organizational supports. A focus on Black women principals embodying Black excellence shifts the macro-level responsibility from school boards and key education actors from removing systemic inequities, as the burden becomes a micro-level dilemma. More definitively, it focuses attention on the pathologizing requirement for Black women to evoke a level of perseverance and "thick skin" that surpass those of their counterparts without the organizational need to dismantle the existence of racist barriers. Further diminishing and

silencing Black women principals' pleas for increased organizational support and reduced

scrutiny to fulfill their roles. Neglecting to understand the effect of the rhetoric used to

perpetuate Black women as resilient is problematic because it dehumanizes the leadership

capacity of Black women and reduces them to machine qualities to meet leadership outcomes

through appraisal of KSAs and leadership standards.

For participants, finding their Black joy and attaining excellence enabled them to push

past the lack of organizational resources and support because they knew they had to succeed. It

was not only a component of their professional identity but also a cultural expectation. In essence

not succeeding or maintaining mediocrity was akin to failure. This realization coupled with the

job-related challenges of principalship was reflected in participants discussion of mental-health

and well-being. Ruby cautioned aspiring Black women principals to evaluate whether the

challenges are worth the sacrifice to one's mental health. Michelle emphasized a notion of

unwavering understanding of oneself, specifying that placing personal attachments to the

challenges faced while in the role would impact a principal's mental health and well-being.

Shirley noted a siloing effect of Black principals being placed in high-needs schools with high

Black populations and the inequitable expectation for Black women and men administrators to

perform at levels that are higher than those of their counterparts. Scott (2017) explains that Black

excellence "embodies a historical, societal burden that is demoralizing rather than liberating

given its unreasonable expectations" (p. 111). Rather than solely encouraging the attainment of

greatness, a space should be created were saying the wrong thing is accepted among the Black

community, both by the community and those outside of the community. The fatigue of

maintaining exceptionalism, finding joy while facing racism, and the energy dedicated to coping

with racial microaggressions can result in racial battle fatigue (Arnold et al., 2016; Smith et al.,

2007).

When participants were asked to provide their advice for Black women who aspire to enter principalship, narratives called attention to the need to better understand the organizational conditions that facilitate Black principals' attainment of legitimacy and success in their roles. Reliance on the master's tools and finding sources of Black joy cannot suffice to dismantle and/or mitigate the gendered racism that Black women principals' experience. If the field is to move towards developing novel strategies for supporting Black women principals in their roles, then we must first create a space where there is nuance in how Black and resilience are understood in relation to leadership expectations, practices, and outcomes.

Principals are in the People Business: Micropolitics and Relationships

A common thread presented in literature of Black women's entrance to principalship is the concept of relationships. Relationships built, nurtured, and desired. Contemporary expectations of school leadership position principals as "a builder of relationships among a number of constituents including teachers, students, parents and the community at large" (Sorenson & Machell, 1996, p.12). Scholars such as Witmer (2005) also highlight the significance of relationships by categorizing the term as the fourth R in education (following reading, writing, and arithmetic) and dedicating significant portions of scholarship to examining relational approaches to organizational theory and education administration. The diverse scholarly examinations of relationships as it pertains to education actors, point towards a heightened interest in its implications for the field. In the Ontario K-12 landscape, the use of this term pervades provincial and school board level documents such as the OLF (56 occurrences), Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario Schools (18 occurrences), and the Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation (22 occurrences), with minimal attention to its operationalization. Given the exposure to these documents as a necessary component of their careers, participants readily used the term to define their experiences, roles, and professional identity. Michelle explained that "90% of our job has to do with relationships, has to do with navigating the system, has to do with how do I handle people? I am in the people business". Shirley shared that principalship "is all relationship based… I would not have survived the transition or the entry into the role without those things", while Harriet believed that "to be a good leader, you have to build those relationships". Findings in this study as well as developments in the frameworks presented above highlight an insidious obsession with the term relationship in the field of education that may

hinge on what this study reveals as a taken for granted understanding of its meaning.

How the term relationship is presented at the school-level is concerning as select

frameworks used to inform principal practices provide a skewed perception of its

operationalization. Specifically, one that rests on a performative and transactional process

between 1 or more education actors—where enacting a display of charisma and/or interpersonal

skills affords one the ability to create and maintain said relationships. This approach masks the

mechanisms of power that are embedded in the multifaceted interactions principals must

navigate while leading schools. In this section, I challenge how the term "relationships" is

conceptualized in frameworks and literature that inform Black women principals' professional

identities and argue for an acknowledgement of micropolitics as a necessary component for

understanding how principals decode "relationship discourses".

How "Relationship Discourses" are Presented in ELA Research

When examining how the concept of relationship is taken up in discussions of

professional identity, Tan et al. (2017) detail professional identity as the product of interactions

with people, language, and culture; and shared meaning by others (Iranzo-García et al., 2020;

Monrouxe, 2010; Tan et al., 2017; Tomlinson & Jackson, 2021; Trede et al., 2012). Likewise,

Gómez-Leal et al. (2022) outline school leadership as a role centered on serving multiple

stakeholders on demand in varying contexts. These perspectives coupled with participants'

confirmation of serving a multitude of educational stakeholders, characterizes the work of school

leaders to be inherently relational. Branson et al., (2018) describe leadership as a transrelational

phenomenon where "its essence is to move others, the organization and the leader to another

level of functioning by means of relationships" (p. 49). For Black principals in particular,

principalship provides an "ethos of service" obliging them to impart their knowledge and cultural

capital to the Black community through relationships (Richardson, 2014). While arguably all actors in the system must engage in relationships, what makes the "relationship discourse" for principals unique is the enforcement of accountability measures linked to the role structures and, at times, may police principals' agency and leadership responses.

In most ELA scholarship, "relationship discourses" are presented as a set of intrapersonal skills that participants in this study identified as being inadequately taught in the Ontario PQP yet expected to be inherently displayed at all times. These skills blueprint the capacities that allow school leaders to resolve conflicts and leverage resources for school improvement, while simultaneously meeting student, staff, and community needs (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Gallagher et al., 2005; Gómez-Leal et al., 2022; Lasater, 2016; Riehl, 2012; Stronge et al., 2008), yet providing a shallow rationalization of what makes relationships successful. For example, Gómez-Leal et al. (2022) characterize twenty-first-century school leaders as requiring "an awareness and understanding of emotions, the ability to manage one's emotions, and the ability to express emotions in appropriate ways" (p. 2) while engaging with multiple stakeholders. While in their roles "principals must rely on a breadth of highly sophisticated relational skills and understand when and how to use these skills to develop meaningful relationships with diverse stakeholders" (Lasater, 2016, p. 20). Lasater's (2016) discussion of school leader's relationships highlights that leaders are inadequately prepared to develop relationships and must be trained on how to build rapport, communication, and trust.

Although these narrations position "relationship discourses" to centre on a set of necessary intrapersonal skills, they provide a narrow perspective of the conditions in which relationships can be successful, the barriers that exist, and the contexts in which the attainment of such skills can occur. Even when discussions of perceivable barriers emerge, the discussions

focus on structural components such as time and funding (Lasater, 2016). Notably, these barriers only emphasize the spatiotemporal conditions of "relationship discourses" and do not explicitly state how mechanisms of power and constructions of gendered racism work to support and/or hinder principals' practices, further providing a limited and narrow view of relationship development. This omission creates an epistemological gap in the conceptualization of the term "relationship" and its operationalization in leadership frameworks and standards. In this study, I make particular focus on a select few provincial-level documents given the key role they play in constructing principal's professional identities and their capacity to either validate or highlight discrepancies in Black women principals' practices. Given that ELA research informs the development of leadership frameworks, it is understandable that frameworks and Ontario school board strategies referenced in the PQP, such the OLF and BLDS, reinforce this obscurity when deploying the term "relationship". For example, when describing how leaders should build relationships with people at the school level, the OLF states that school leaders should embody a set of personal leadership resources (see Table 5) "to effectively enact leadership practices" (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013, p. 15).

Table 5 Personal Leadership Resources

PERSONAL LEADERSHIP RESOURCES		
Leaders draw upon the personal leadership resources to effectively enact leadership practices		
Cognitive Resources	**Social Resources**	**Psychological Resources**
- Problem-solving expertise - Knowledge of effective school and classroom practices that directly affect student learning - Systems thinking* *Especially important for system leaders	- Perceiving emotions - Managing emotions - Acting in emotionally appropriate ways	- Optimism - Self-efficacy - Resilience - Proactivity* *Especially important for system leaders

(The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013, p. 12-13)

It is important to note that while being purported as essential skills, the OLF does not

acknowledge the socio-cultural complexities that are attached with "acting in emotionally appropriate ways" and leave the subjectivity of the reader to justify what is considered appropriate. The ambiguity can present barriers on the leadership practices of Black women principals.

Aaron (2020), Brown (2016), and Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) remind us that Black women are increasingly censoring their behaviours in the workplace to avoid the stereotypical label of an "Angry Black Woman" and must suppress their authentic selves to make their perceived Blackness less apparent. They must act in ways that portray the "Acculturated Girl Next Door" (Holmes, 2015) persona. Drawing on Crenshaw's (1991) discussion of representation intersectionality, the cultural images of inappropriate behaviour displayed by Black women perpetuate racial and gender hierarchies that marginalize Black women principals and create an environment where their leadership responses are stereotypically presumed. When narrating her perception of organizational support available for her role, Harriet shared the following:

> You're going to have to advocate, but you don't want to come across as an angry Black woman, right? ... Same way I'm talking to you is the same way I'll talk to others even when I'm not angry, rarely do you see me raising my voice. And so I think sometimes we're afraid to advocate because they're like, what will people think? Will that mess up my career?

This finding emphasizes the barrier the Black women principals face when pivoting their perceivable identities to make their counterparts feel comfortable and minimize foreseeable obstacles to their career advancement (Nickens & Washington, 2017). The ambiguity and presumptive nature of building relationships by enacting a set of PLRs becomes problematic when Black women principals' leadership responses are measured against the subjectivity of "acting in emotionally appropriate ways".

The use of the term "relationship" in these resources places emphasis on the performative

functions of leadership and centres the onus of successful relationship outcomes on the school

leader. The analysis of findings highlights a missing conversation about the power dynamics that

are embedded in the fabric of the relationships that are built, nurtured, and desired. This is an

important conversation that could shed light on how principals decode "relationship discourses"

while constructing their professional identities. An emphasis on power dynamics would reveal

how Black women principals negotiate their intersecting identities to overcome barriers to build

and maintain relationships. Findings suggest that the micropolitics of principalship warrant a

critical analysis of relationship discourses, which would better support Black women principals

in their leadership responses and their professional identity construction.

The Significance of Micropolitics

Before advancing this approach as necessary for understanding Black women principals'

professional identity construction, it is important to note that this section focuses on

micropolitics as it relates to Black women leadership, which adopts a social justice lens.

Given the insights presented above, it becomes redundant to discuss findings and the

conceptualizations of professional identity through an emphasis of transactional relationships.

I err on the side of caution as to not reduce the small-scale interventions and negotiations

performed by Black women principals to the personal interactions conducted with others.

Centering the role of principalship solely as a relational endeavour obscures "principals'

experiencing time" (see Eacott, 2018a,b; 2022) and the political processes informing who gets

what, where, when, by whom, and how. Implications of the connections cultivated by

participants cannot be defined entirely by the term "relationship". The discussion in this section

does not strive to reduce the term with other terms used in field. Rather, the participants' pursuit,

acquisition, and utilization of power through these connections, highlights the idiosyncrasies of

their relational endeavours as micropolitical processes. When the tenets of micropolitics are omitted, the orthodox approaches to defining relationships sustain and legitimize race and gender blindness in ELA research.

While in their positions, K-12 education leaders are challenged with navigating a continuously changing political terrain that tasks them with enacting various provincial and school-level policies to meet school reform initiatives (Cranston et al., 2006; Hallinger, 2005; Tuters & Armstrong, 2016). Further, these challenges place emphasis on leaders to mediate private, professional, and public interests in environments informed by "neoliberal school-based management systems" (Tuters & Armstrong, 2016) that value standardization, increased accountability, and conformity (Pont et al., 2008; Riveros et al., 2016; Volante, 2012). Factors which have reshaped the ways in which conversations of social justice, equity, and school leaders' responsibility in creating socially just schools are conducted. In Tuters and Armstrong's (2016) view, school leaders perform a juggling act when attempting to reconcile "external neoliberal agendas that support common standardized values and outcomes with the diverse beliefs, values, and needs of their students, external stakeholders, and their personal beliefs and values" (p. 47), forcing leaders to prioritize certain values over others. This "politically charged" environment muddies the leadership responses and interactions leaders have as the sustenance of their relationships cannot rely on small-scale interventions and negotiations to meet both social justice and political aims. Rather school leaders must play a political game where "involved parties use their understanding of their political environment to achieve their goals through the use of skills or tactics they believe would be most helpful" (Tuters & Armstrong, 2016, p. 47). A game that is accurately defined as micropolitics. Micropolitics is:

- About power and how people use it to influence others and to protect themselves

- About conflict and how people compete with each other to get what they want

- About cooperation and how people build support among themselves to achieve their ends

- About what people in all social settings think about and have strong feelings about, but what is so often unspoken and not easily observed. (Ryan and Higginbottom, 2016, pp. 5-6)

For principals in general and Black women principals in particular, micropolitics plays a central role in how they can leverage the internal environment, existing policies, and translate them to meet the diverse needs of various stakeholders; all under the guise of fostering relationships. Branson et al. (2018) caution that the ability for a school leader to control the organization's internal environment and manipulate or predict future conditions for the external environment rests on interactions they have with actors within that organization. Specifically, "it is the people in the organization who bring about what will happen in the organization. It is through the willing involvement of the people that the leader is able to enact their leadership" (p. 46). Knowing that principals are in the people business, the complexities and conflicting views for how an organization should meet its various and often competing aims, creates space for relationships to surpass a transactional process that is enacted and mediated through a performative display of interpersonal skills. Thus, aligning the act of forming and maintaining stakeholder relationships with strategic leadership sensemaking.

Briefly, I want to revert our attention back to Gómez-Leal et al.'s (2022) insights presented above. Gómez-Leal et al. (2022) state that twenty-first-century school leaders are called to possess "an awareness and understanding of emotions, the ability to manage one's emotions, and the ability to express emotions in appropriate ways" (p.2). While this statement may be an agreeable depiction of leadership as it relates to relationships, it is not an all-

encompassing depiction. Specifically, it is limited in its ability to account for the constructs of gendered racism that portray Black women's expression of emotions as the Angry Black women when they raise their voices. By integrating the tenets of micropolitics as a necessary dimension for understanding "relationship discourses", Gómez-Leal et al.'s, (2022) insights could be expanded to problematize how the expression of emotions within the role of principalship can be strategically manipulated to achieve goals that maintain institutional values.

This reconceptualization of the role of emotion in leadership challenges Eurocentric constructs of managerialism that prescribe "appropriate" leadership behaviour. It shows how the panopticon effect of accountability mechanisms can minimize differences while reinforcing a hegemonic status quo by using coercive power. Another point of contention with Gómez-Leal et al.'s (2022) statement, "the ability to manage one's emotions" is that it places sole responsibility on the school leader for the outcome of the relationship and negates the power dynamics that surpass simply managing emotions. Specifically, in instances where positional power does not always outweigh the effects of race-related trauma such as RBF— "the physiological and psychological strain exacted on racially marginalized groups and the amount of energy lost dedicated to coping with racial microaggressions and racism" (Smith et al., 2007, p. 555). Given that RBF continues to emerge in the analysis of participant's narratives, its significance should not be neglected.

Implications for Black Women Principals

As the first thematic finding of this study revealed, to be a Black women principal necessitates the task of remedying school inequities—whether voluntary or involuntarily adopted as a leadership approach and/or value. Findings highlight that the recruitment and placement of Black women principals in high-needs schools provided a presumptive assumption that

participants had the KSAs and lived experience to dismantle anti-Black racism, school inequities,

and better address the needs of Black students. While some participants such as Ruby, Shirley,

and Michelle were explicit in aligning their leadership approach with social justice, this may not

be the case for all Black women principals in all contexts. Ruby shared that:

> Being an administrator, you're a middleman to the board. You're stuck between everyone, all the stakeholders and every single stakeholder does expect miracles from you. So that's difficult. But the added challenge is race and you are expected to be a martyr for the Black families, the Black children, the Black or the sort of anti-Black dismantling of racism. And you're just expected to fix it all. And you're not just expected to fix education, but as I said, you're expected to fix racism as well. As if it's not something that's systemic, it's just she's going to be the person who can do it.

Ruby's testament further emphasizes Branson et al.'s (2018) claims of leadership being

transrelational and validates Richardson's (2014) point that Black principals provide an "ethos of

service" for the Black community through relationships. Whereby Black women principals'

identity markers are key driver for their leadership and the relationships they foster as the

"middleman to the board". However, her insight also sheds light on Tuters and Armstrong

(2016)'s claim that leading for social justice and engaging in stakeholder relationships to meet

school initiatives, necessitates a level of political acumen for mapping how leaders discern their

leadership response. The relationships thus that participants cultivated and fostered to meet

social justice aims were not and could not be apolitical.

How "relationship discourse" is understood or misunderstood has consequences for Black

women principals' leadership responses as well as the development and affirmation of their

professional identities. In the opening of this chapter, I consciously used the term puppeteering to

illustrate the masked veil of micropolitics that constrains the autonomy and decision-making that

participants in this study faced. Particularly highlighting the perceived fallacy that principals are

in complete control of leadership outcomes as it pertains to policy enactment, school

improvement, and creating a positive school culture in addition to the relationships they develop

to achieve these initiatives. Rather, the mechanisms of power and constructs of gendered racism are embedded into the fabric of school-level relationships and pull the invisible strings of conformity to maintain the status quo. This perception disservices Black women principals because it simplifies leadership outcomes to person-job fit and omits the socio-cultural influence of gendered racism that informs the hegemonic boundaries of how they exercise their leadership. In their study of principalship, Pollock et al., (2014) identified relationship building as a key skill principals need to develop or enhance to achieve successful leadership outcomes. If successful leadership outcomes are viewed predominately in terms of the "relationships" that principals cultivate, then Black women principals will perpetually struggle to succeed given the White "boys club" (Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Johnson, 2017) that continues to exclude them from full participation in the field (Aaron, 2020; Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; McClellan, 2012; Williams, 2013). An acknowledgement of the mechanisms of power in documents that inform principalship in Ontario (e.g. the OLF and the BLDS) is necessary for better understanding the contexts in which Black women principals build and maintain relationships as well as how they decode "relationships discourses" while constructing their professional identities.

Black Leadership can be Lonely Leadership: Mentorship Networks and Support

Discourse on the mentorship of women leaders has permeated studies in the field of education for the past 50 years (Hill et al., 2016), however a narrowed body of literature has paid attention to the mentorship of Black women principals (Kellar, 2013; Lomotey, 2019; Newton-Thompson, 2020). Despite its wide application in disciplines such as psychology, management, and education, concretizing the term mentorship is difficult given its varying interpretations and evolving definitions (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). While competing definitions exist, scholars (see Fletcher & Mullen, 2012; Kochan, 2017; Kram, 1983; Li et al., 2018) concur that mentorship is comprised of two key drivers, relationship, and development. Mullen and Klimaitis (2021) add to this discussion by detailing the practice of mentoring as having "career (instrumental) and psychosocial (relational) functions, and 'includes phases and transitions'" (p.20). Recognizing that they were facing increasing administrative challenges and subjected to anti-Black racism, participants took additional measures to obtain mentorship outside of the formal school board structures. In contexts where mentorship was both available and absent, participants sought mentorship opportunities through the multiplatform messaging app WhatsApp. While serving the purposes of quick and contactless communication (specifically during COVID-19), WhatsApp provided an accessible haven for participants to connect with other Black women leaders across the province. I consciously use the term haven to illustrate a "safe" space void of the pervasive anti-Black racism targeted towards Black leaders that has and continues to exist in Canadian schools (Sefa Dei & Rutherford, 2023; McPherson, 2022).

My discussion of participants' acts of self-organized mentorship is not intended to recognize their resiliency and perseverance—although these actions should be applauded. As discussed in the section on Black excellence, the tendency of celebrating creative resistance to

hegemonic structures can mask the reality that existing organizational structures are flawed at perpetuating White ideals and Black erasure. Rather, my aim is to illuminate the limitations of current mentorship literature for including Black women ways of knowing and congregating as a necessary mechanism for the contexts in which knowledge mobilization, creation, and transfer occurs among Black women school leaders. This work distinguishes Black women from the generalization of Black ways of knowing. Making particular focus on gender as participants' mentorship needs were specific to and reflective of their intersecting identities. The problematic nature of developing informal networks of support and mentorship is twofold; 1) it circumvents the onus of responsibility from school boards and administrative-level actors (i.e. superintendents, directors, trustees etc.) from addressing the mentorship gap while compelling Black women principals to remedy their own needs, and 2) it reinscribes a narrative where knowledge creation and mobilization that conforms to "White logic" (James, 2019; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008) is reflected in formal mentorship structures while racialized knowledge creation occurs in the margins.

Onus of Responsibility

In this study, the deployment of informal networks of support enabled participants to voice their opinions, challenges, and successes in identity affirming groups, while silencing their collective power to voice the need for race-and-gender based mentorship to the appropriate channels. These groups and the ways in which they are privately created provide a band-aid solution, temporarily masking the larger systemic inequities embedded in the perception of Black leadership in school leader preparation programs, the recruitment of Black women principals, and how accountability measures are maintained at the school board level. When Black women principals solely participate in self-organized mentorship, particularly in silence, they

involuntarily reject the significance of existing mentorship programs (even if the programs are not accessible nor operating) which may send misleading messages that question whether Black women principals require mentorship. This idea of rejection is amplified because the informal networks are created using personal resources and are sustained through private congregation via multiplatform messaging platforms. These actions may further alienate Black women principals from crucial conversations that include non-Black education actors. Sole reliance on these informal groups for career guidance is problematic, particularly for newly appointed principals. This self-segregationist approach limits opportunities for networking with key movers and shakers who inform career advancement and obtaining insider-knowledge commonly shared through job-shadowing and/or informal conversation. When Black women principals only engage in mentorship groups comprising specifically of Black women principals, they become excluded from alternative non-race-and-gender based networks of support that are beneficial for their career progression. Networks that are comprised of White and racialized women and men administrators, including Black men principals.

It is worth noting that participants did not make reference to invitations, knowledge of, nor interest in informal mentorship groups formed by other racialized principals and/or administrators. As well, were explicit in detailing their mentorship groups to be purposefully void of Black men principals. Narratives presented a persistent emphasis on mentorship tailored to participants' intersectional identity markers.

When asked if mentorship was necessary for Black women principals, participants praised the mentors they were fortunate to have and unanimously expressed a need for mentors that matched their race-and-gendered identity. Although recognizing that the availability of mentors who "looked like them" was limited, participants were appreciative of any mentorship

they received in their careers. Participants expressed that their school boards lacked the deployment of formal mentorship programs to support their roles and understanding of the profession. Ruby shared:

> I was very lucky I think, to have developed relationships prior to entering in that were not supported by the organization at large necessarily, of other Black female administrators. And those relationships have been crucial and have provided a great deal of mentorship. But again, those were not as a result of the organization being explicit in wanting to provide support for their young racialized administrators.

Harriet began her principalship at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and had to navigate her role in the absence of mentorship due to an influx of principal retirements and work intensification brought on by the pandemic. Shirley candidly shared that her source of information for her role came from Black women friendships she had built in her career as the board did not provide formal mentorship opportunities. In Shirley's case, her board partnered new principals with seasoned principals, however she was never assigned a mentor

These recounts illustrate inconsistencies in both the availability and access to mentorship for principals and provide significant insight into the absence of explicit accountability measures for ensuring that mentorship is effective in meeting principals' career needs. Participants' gravitation to other Black women reaffirms the phenomenon of "sisterhood" (see Bryant-Davis, 2013; Johnson, 2017) where Black women principals consistently initiate their own networks of support within and beyond the school community. However, due to the scant leadership literature on Black women, this realization is missing from most mentorship literature and consequently reflected in the absence of race-and-gender specific mentorship. In their study on the mentoring experiences of Black women principals in Southern Ontario, Newton-Thompson's (2020) findings affirmed that Black women principals develop their own networks of support as a "coping strategy … to circumvent the very real barriers they faced" (p. 133). The barriers in question were the psychocultural and structural aspects of racism that prevented Black women

from receiving mentorship. By seeking alternative avenues for support, the Black women principals in Newton-Thompson's (2020) study secured their opportunity for participating in leadership pursuits. Indeed, the participants' mentorship experiences shed light on the gratuitous steps that Black women principals must take to ensure they can meet the leadership standards that privilege White men and the obscurities of accountability at the board level for meeting their needs. Particularly in instances when administrators such as principals or superintendents that are intended to support entry into leadership, prevent candidates from partaking in the school board recruitment interviews by blocking their application (Newton-Thompson, 2020).

"White Logic" versus Black Knowledge Creation

The absence of race and gender-specific mentorship is problematic for how Black women's knowledge is perceived in leadership theorizing and mentorship research. The congregation of Black individuals is not a new phenomenon. Black people have historically congregated in private, and this is depicted in the secret networks of abolitionists involved in the underground railroad, secret societies during the temperance movement in the U.S. (Thompson, 2005) and the history of "invisible institutions" established in Black churches (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Further, the sense of community and communal sharing of knowledge embedded in the Ubuntu proverb "I am because you are" has long been praised in historical accounts of Black education and is further reflected in participants' creation of affinity groups. While this insight is acknowledged in literature centered on the Black identity, it is largely neglected from ELA and mentorship literature. Within the field of education, developments have been made to acknowledge Black knowledge creation and mobilization through discourse on Afrocentrism in curriculum. Kershaw (1998) notes that "one way the academy helps in the maintenance of White supremacy is through generating of knowledge designed to enhance the

status quo" (p. 27). Given that knowledge creation is intended to convey specific philosophical and ideological worldviews (Kershaw, 1998), the integration of Afrocentrism in the field of education presents opportunities for acknowledging and appreciating the history, knowledge, culture, and sovereignty of Black people in a system that has historically minimized difference (Dei, 1998). Scholars interested in Black studies (see Akua, 2020; Asante, 1998; Dei, 1998, 2018; Karenga, 2002; Pellerin, 2012) concur that Afrocentrism centers African or Black (I use the terms interchangeably here) thought as the central unit of analysis for phenomena that addresses Black people. Specifically, these ideals generate an image of Black reality that is rooted in African culture while acknowledging that "a major purpose of Afrocentric generated knowledge must be to humanize" (Kershaw, 1998, p. 28), where Black people are studied as subjects rather than objects pitted against their White counterparts.

Agreeably, attempts to recognize non-Eurocentric approaches to knowledge creation in ELA have been noted in discussions of culturally responsive and relevant leadership (see Campos-Moreira et al., 2020; Johnson, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016; Lopez, 2015, 2016; Vassallo, 2015), however these conceptions are limited in their racial generalization. Heeding Tillman's (2002; 2006) cautions, this study argues for the separation of Black women from the generalizations of other racialized groups. Contemporary literature of ELA mentorship fails to explicitly identify Black knowledge creation as having distinct and necessary contributions to the mentorship of Black school leaders and the development of their professional identity. Given that ELA scholarship continues to be informed by Eurocentric conceptions of knowledge (Wright et al., 2018), it is expected that Black knowledge creation is unacknowledged and willfully neglected. I consciously use the term "willfully" given the theoretical developments that have mobilized the appreciation of Indigenous storytelling, knowledge keepers, and oral traditions as

legitimate ways of knowing for Indigenous peoples, yet discourse on the significance of Black agency and sovereignty in the diaspora have long existed. Thus, the findings of this study emphasize theoretical tensions between the lack of Black knowledge creation and the perpetuation of "White logic" (James, 2019; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008) in mentorship literature. A tension that muddies both the understanding of principals' practices and discourse of role-preparation. The truism of White logic rests in the acceptance of "white male-centered ideas about the inherent deficiency of racial and gender minorities is objective knowledge while claims to the contrary must be tested and proved via heavily scrutinized scientific investigation" (Buggs et al., 2020, p. 1388), further reinscribing the histories and realities of Whites. As I will detail in the section below, the provincial and board level frameworks used to inform principal mentorship in Ontario are racially-and-gender blind. The strategies presented exclude collective forms of mentorship tailored to the racial needs of racialized principals in general, and Black principals in particular. Plainly, these frameworks remove the culturally subjective nature of mentorship and position identity difference as an illegitimate dimension of both mentorship and successful leadership outcomes. The socio-cultural and political histories of Black people in the diaspora are weaved into the fabric of their identity (Kershaw, 1998; Shockley & Frederick, 2010). Thus, the lived experiences of the Black community must become the focal point of knowledge generated by and for Black people. First, traditional mentorship relationships are top-down, which may limit the agency that Black leaders have to champion for Black-centered knowledge creation to be central to their relationships when partnered with White mentors. Second, as a result of gendered racism, Black women leaders may face additional barriers in advocating for both race-and-gender in their mentorship relationship. Given these challenges, participants justifiably congregated using methods that reaffirmed their identities while meeting

their mentorship needs. I must emphasize that unlike the common perception of Afrocentrism or Black knowledge creation as being in complete opposition to Eurocentrism, this section calls for integration rather than a replacement. Also, it is important to note that although findings challenge current mentorship structures and call for the integration of Black knowledge creation, I do not assert this approach as a means to minimize the existence of other racial groups. Rather, the realities of leadership faced by Black women principals that are expressed in the Whatsapp groups, deserve to hold space within existing mentorship relationships and programs.

Having said that, I re-emphasize that the self-segregationist organization of Black individuals is not new. The data gleaned from participants' reveal the inadequacies of a system that isolates Black women from the collective group and fails to recognize the race and gendered complexities they must navigate to lead their schools. If researchers interested in ELA and mentorship are to advance the understanding of Black women principals, then it is necessary that Black knowledge creation and dissemination are acknowledged as key mechanisms for the development and deployment of principal mentorship programs. Moreover, the findings of this study are relevant for the understanding of ELA mentorship given the significance of mentorship as an institutional priority in notable frameworks.

Mentorship as an Institutional Priority

Traditionally, leadership literature has situated mentorship as an organizational tool mapping the deployment of KSAs from professional certifications, while acclimating new employees into the organizational culture (Johnson, 2017; Kram, 1985; Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021), often in a one-way, top-down approach whereby the mentor possesses the power in the mentor-mentee relationship. An analysis of key leadership frameworks in Ontario reveal that this approach is still evident in contemporary leadership structures within the K-12 landscape and

more definitely addressed in provincial-level documents that maintain mentorship as an institutional priority of school leadership. For example, the OLS, "a comprehensive plan of action designed to support student achievement and well-being through a coordinated and strategic approach to leadership development" (OME, 2013, para.3), defines mentorship as "a powerful stimulus for professional learning of new and experienced leaders" (OME, 2011b, p.8). Further, the OLF which supports the OLS, has been designated as a guide that underpins the mentorship of newly appointed school leaders and "identifies effective practices and competencies, skills, knowledge, and attitudes of successful educational leaders (OME, 2011b, p. 5). In recent years, the significance of mentorship has been explicitly recognized in school board's BLDS through the development of the 2011/2012 *Mentoring for Newly Appointed School Leaders*, a manual that supports school boards' implementation of mentoring for newly appointed school leaders.

In addition to these resources, the priority of mentorship for Ontario school leaders is further evidenced in the OPC's recent development of its Mentoring Qualification Program that "teaches [leaders] the strategies, tools and processes that form the foundations of effective mentoring and coaching" (OPC, n.d., para. 1). Collectively, these resources articulate mentorship as serving two purposes: 1) to attract the right people to principalship; and 2) to help principals and vice-principals develop into the best possible instructional leaders (OME, 2011b, p.6). These two purposes are of significance in this section for showcasing the congruence, or lack thereof, of the micro-level mentorship needs of Black women principals to the institutional values of the OME and other professional associations that govern school leadership. While these organizational resources purport mentorship as both a necessary tool and an institutional priority, the findings of this study reveal a discrepancy between the rhetoric encompassing school leader

mentorship and the legitimacy of its availability and effectiveness for Black women principals.

Efforts to examine, understand, and develop mentorship programs that meet the race-and-gender-based needs of Black women principals become futile if mentorship programs are not available, accessible, nor tailored to principals from the outset. While efforts at the board-level have been attempted such as the Peel District School Board's 2014 pilot program *Aspiring Racialized Leaders Mentorship Program*, large-scale traction at the provincial-level is lacking. Participants' insights contribute an important consideration for elevating existing mentorship programs to meet current needs, however, mentorship programs must exist and operate to be enhanced. Given the OLS and OLF's recognition of mentorship as an essential tool for leadership, a lack of school board accountability to make mentorship programs available and accessible on a consistent basis adds an additional barrier for developing and reaffirming Black women principals' professional identities. When revisiting the OLS, statements that position mentorship as "a powerful stimulus for professional learning of new and experienced leaders" (OME, 2011b, p. 8) are rendered institutional rhetoric that fail to support new and experienced Black women principals to break the glass ceiling, access information, and obtain insights from collegial relationships to advance their careers (Wells, 2013). Further adding missed opportunities for role association and organizational support, particularly during pivotal times of leadership uncertainty such as the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd, when this study was conducted.

Closing the Gap

Considering the financial and structural challenges faced by boards, work intensification faced by school leaders, and the leaky leadership pipeline (Fuller & Young, 2022; Stohr et al., 2018), it would be naïve to suggest a complete transition of mentorship programs to address the

immediate and tailored needs of Black women principals—particularly when Black leaders continue to be underrepresented in the field. Rather, findings highlight the significance of integrating a multifaceted mentorship approach to school leadership. Enabling a robust portfolio of mentor connections that include race-and-gender specific mentorship as an imperative component of role KSA acquisition.

Given the insights presented in this section, the question surrounding the topic of Black women mentorship is not whether Black women require a tailored delivery of mentorship, as participants have voiced this need. Findings challenge mainstream discourses on ELA mentorship research to question how existing mentorship frameworks that inform principals' professional identity can be recontextualized to acknowledge race-and-gendered ways of knowing. Indeed, if mentorship continues to be valued as an institutional priority by the OME and education professional organizations such as the OPC, CPCO, and ADFO, serious consideration at the school level is needed for examining the development and deployment of school board mentorship programs on the actors they attest to serve. Moreover, if intersectionality is understood to be conceptually true and applicable to how we understand leadership practices, then it becomes paradoxical to not also view the ways in which actors from the same race-and-gender based groups foster networks of support as being non-mutually exclusive.

Chapter Summary

This chapter offered an analysis and discussion of participants' narratives. Utilizing a life history approach and Clandinin and Caine's (2012) 12 touchstones for assessing trustworthiness, the data collected highlighted three emergent and significant themes for unpacking the stories

shared by participants. While working in historically White institutions, Black women principals must navigate the challenges of gendered racism and overcome organizational barriers to successfully lead their schools. Black women principals negotiate their race-and-gendered identities by pivoting between an institutional and shadow identity that enables them to meet leadership outcomes while countering the "angry Black women" stereotype. This negotiation is not without its limits as the deficit perception of Black women principals is continuously in contradiction to the expectations for them to remedy school inequities—all while disregarding how anti-Black racism subjects them to the same harm they must redress. This harm is further emphasized in literature that advance Black joy and excellence as conditions for Black women to overcome barriers they did not create, all while maintaining the status quo. The notion of a superhero or saviour to all approach aligns participants' recounts with Woods-Griscombé's (2010) framework, the Superwoman Schema, which offers a new perspective for analyzing ELA research and compartmentalizing the experiences of Black women principals. In addition to negotiating their race-and-gendered identity, Black women principals must contend with a lack of organizational supports that meet their race-and-gendered needs. Although a variety of organizational supports are made available, participants' access to these supports vary by school board. Even in instances where supports are accessible, participants deduce the supports as performative and lackluster due to their inability to adequately address the context-specific decisions leaders must make to meet school reform initiatives without diminishing their intersecting identities. A notable area in their leadership practice where this conflict occurs is when enacting policies that require immediate action while circumventing how race and gender inform an enactor's sensemaking. Discussion in this chapter continued by interrogating how "relationship discourses" are presented in ELA research and frameworks. The analysis of

findings revealed that misconceptions about "relationship discourses" has consequences for Black women principals' leadership practices as well as the development and affirmation of their professional identities. By omitting an acknowledgement of micropolitics as a constraint on principals' autonomy and decision-making, ELA frameworks such as a the OLF can perpetuate a perceived fallacy that principals are in control of leadership outcomes and the relationships they cultivate to achieve school initiatives.

Finally, this chapter delineated how Black women principals self-organize to form mentorship groups and/or connections as an act of creative resistance from "White logic" (James, 2019; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Findings indicate that the lack of mentorship opportunities from same race-and-gendered leaders presents a knowledge gap for principals entering and advancing in their careers on how to lead schools in light of the gendered racism they encounter. Given the underrepresentation of Black women in principalship, this chapter argued for a recontextualization of existing mentorship frameworks to acknowledge Black women ways of knowing and congregating as a key mechanism for informing how knowledge mobilization and creation occurs among Black women school leaders.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

We must open the doors and we must see to it they remain open, so that others can pass through

—Rosemary Brown

The main objective of this study was to examine how seven Black women principals constructed their professional identities in Ontario schools. Specifically, the study aimed to obtain a better understanding of the race-and-gendered negotiations that Black women principals make while leading K-12 schools. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the study's findings, situate their significance to the field, and discuss the research questions that guided the study. Further, the chapter acknowledges the limitations that emerged and identifies opportunities for future research.

Overview of the Study

As the study of school leadership continues to develop, efforts to identify school-level actors tasked with enacting school improvement initiatives have positioned principals as a central unit of analysis in ELA research (Hall, 2013; Pollock et al., 2015). Informed by neoliberalism and managerialism, these discussions correlate successful school outcomes to select professional leadership standards that produce desirable leadership responses. While much literature has been written on how principals translate professional leadership standards into their professional identity, research on Black women leaders continues to be underrepresented in ELA research. Of the studies conducted on Black principals, their race-and-gendered identity markers are inadequately addressed (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Lomotey, 2019; Mponguse, 2010; Nickens & Washington, 2017). While enacting policies, exercising professional judgement, and leading schools, Black women principals experience gendered racism and must navigate the

complexities of this barrier as a key driver informing both the perception and reception of their professional identities (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2006; Echols, 2006; Essed, 1991; Jean-Marie, 2013; Reed & Evans, 2008; Sanchez & Thorton, 2010).

The extant literature that informed this work suggested that studies adopting a race-and-gender neutral or standardized approach to understanding professional identity, unwittingly reinforce a hegemonic White male perspective of leadership, (Armstrong & McMahon, 2013; Diem & Carpenter, 2012) which consequently negates the experiences of racialized principals in general and Black women principals in particular. Although a race and/or gender-neutral discourse may highlight the technical dimensions of leadership in select frameworks, such as the OLF, it "[curtails] the value of the professional, including their motivation or commitment in improving schools" (Murakami & Törnsen, 2017, p. 807). This omission is problematic as it challenges the career advancement of existing and aspiring Black administrators whose career trajectories and leadership practices are appraised by these select frameworks. Further obscuring the understanding of Black women principals' professional identity constructions. Given the underdevelopment of literature on Black women principals in Canada, the present study sought to fill this literature gap by centering the narratives of Black women principals to the fore of ELA discourse while creating a space where their identities are acknowledged as legitimate sources of leadership knowledge. Moreover, this study not only contributes to existing research on principalship but also proposes novel strategies for advancing ELA mentorship, leadership theorizing, and school leader preparation programs in a Canadian context.

The design of this qualitative study was guided by a life history approach and drew on Crenshaw's (1991) notion of intersectionality as the conceptual framework. The tenets of intersectionality laid the foundation for understanding the intersection of race-and-gender as a

multifaceted concept informing both the perception and reception of participants' visible identities. The data sources for the present study were semi-structured interviews and provincial-level documents that defined principalship in Ontario.

By listening to participants' experiences, the findings of this study illuminated a number of theoretical and practical limitations concerning the professional identity construction of Black women principals. Firstly, Black women principals construct their professional identities as "superwomen" in contexts that demand a negotiation of their race-and-gendered identity to meet prescriptive leadership outcomes. The complexity of this negotiation is heightened when combined with a lack of organizational supports tailored to their intersecting identities and a pathologizing rhetoric of Black joy and excellence that task Black women principals to remedy inequities they did not create. Secondly, the analysis of data highlighted how the understanding, or misunderstanding, of the notion of "relationships" in ELA professional frameworks and research has consequences for Black women principals' leadership responses, as well as for the development and affirmation of their professional identities. Particularly, the ambiguity in how the term "relationship" is operationalized, masks the mechanisms of power embedded in the diverse interactions that principals navigate while leading schools. Thus, this study argued for an acknowledgement of micropolitics as a necessary component for understanding how Black women principals decode "relationship discourses". Finally, findings revealed that current mentorship literature has yet to investigate Black women's development of informal networks of support. This study shows that informal networks are an important mechanism that generates contexts for knowledge mobilization, creation, and transfer among Black women school leaders. By bringing to the fore the challenges and successes they faced while leading their schools, participants' narratives candidly created a space for recognizing their experiences as distinct

from other racialized and gendered groups. Further emphasizing the necessity for better understanding how Black women principals construct their professional identities in a Canadian context.

Retracing the Study's Research Questions

This study sought to answer the four research questions that guided the study. In this section, I revisit and answer each question through a synthesis of the findings.

R1: How do Black women principals in Ontario construct their professional identities?

Black women principals in Ontario construct their professional identities in contexts that demand conformability to institutional values such as "fairness, equity, and respect for all" (OME, 2010, para. 1) as a condition of membership. Further, these contexts are situated in Ontario's political and sociocultural climate where being a Black woman is synonymous with resilience, perseverance, and working "twice as hard to get half as far". Given that professional identity construction is fluid and continuous, participants' experiences varied and did not follow a standardized nor linear path. While navigating their professional journeys, Black women principals engage in micropolitics and encounter pivotal moments that are indicative of how their intersecting identities are perceived by other actors, which informs their understanding of their role as racialized leaders. These include but are not limited to school leader preparation programs, vice-principal experience, mentorship relationships with principals and superintendents, professional development opportunities, and interactions with students, staff, parents, and the school community. Contrary to the theoretical definitions of professional identity, Black women principals do not perceive their professional identities solely as products of KSAs and shared meaning-making with others in the same profession. Rather, they must

juggle the complexities of gendered racism with the precarious and demanding needs of principalship—an endeavour that creates a fluid construction of a professional identity where values, previous experience, intersectional identity markers, KSAs, and attitudes play intermittent roles of significance in different contexts. This wavering notion of identity is identified by Armstrong and Mitchell (2017) as an institutional identity and shadow identity, however findings from this study assert that the stratification of these identities is not fixed. As Black women principals seek to exercise leadership practices that are congruent with the institutional values listed above, the various dimensions of their professional identity carry unequal weights of significance in different contexts—an imbalance that can be best analyzed through Woods-Griscombé's (2010) Superwoman Schema. While these leadership practices aim to produce favourable leadership outcomes, the race-and-gendered negotiations faced by Black women principals and the unpredictability of principalship inadvertently position them to either accept or resist said institutional values (Armstrong, 2009).

R2: What organizational practices support and/or hinder the construction of Black women principals' professional identities?

Given that professional identity construction is fluid and continuous, opportunities that provide depth and breadth of leadership experience become important for the cultivation and reaffirmation of principals' professional identities; opportunities that are afforded through key organizational practices at the provincial and school-level. However, since gendered racism can impede access to these experiences, Black women principals face organizational barriers to the construction of their professional identities. The participants identified that while organizational practices vary among school boards, supports were provided in the form of mentor-mentee programs, training modules, school board meetings, professional development workshops,

conferences, equitable hiring procedures, board-level principals' councils, board-level

professional associations for administrators, emails, and policies. Among these variegated

supports, school leader preparation programs, personal networks of support via mentorship, and

the enactment of school level policies are of particular significance for shaping Black women

principals' professional identity construction.

The cultivation, maintenance, and pursuance of relationships for Black women principals

is of particular interest as it plays the role of being both a support and hinderance to their

professional identities. Indeed, relationships with key education actors, such as superintendents,

that aid in role affirmation and career ascension are a necessary support. However, since the

study of superintendents is an underdeveloped area in ELA research, an analysis of this group

and their role in shaping organizational supports and practices is limited. Without a better

understanding of the role superintendents play in relation to principals, the degree to which a

principal-to-superintendent relationship can yield beneficial outcomes becomes subjective and

reduced to the luck of the draw.

R2a: How do Black women principals perceive the influence of these practices?

The participants perceived the influence of these practices as performative and/or

regulatory measures that did not adequately meet their race-and-gendered needs in all contexts at

all times. While describing the organizational practices they were familiar with, participants were

not reluctant to expound upon the areas of improvement they deemed necessary for achieving

successful leadership. These practices in isolation were insufficient for helping principals meet

their leadership goals as they rested on theoretical knowledge with limited opportunities for

practical guidance. However, when used in tandem with the support of mentors cultivated

through personal connections (i.e. superintendents, other Black women principals), the perceived

value for shaping leadership practices were realized. Indeed, there is an incongruence between the organizational practices made available and accessible to Black women principals and their efficacy in practice. Black women principals in Ontario are not advocating for a heightened increase in organizational practices but where possible, an expansion of existing practices to acknowledge their intersecting identities. It is within this distinction that the necessity of purposefully developing race-and-gender conscious practices is made apparent.

R3: How do Black women principals negotiate their gendered and/or racialized identities?

Black women principals are tasked with leading schools in climates where they are identified as the token saviour who will remedy anti-Black racism while facing the harm and trauma of being subjected to anti-Black racism by students, staff, and parents. Black women principals are expected to remedy school inequities under heightened scrutiny compared to their counterparts while actively countering the perception of the "angry Black woman". Although Black women principals cannot separate their intersecting identities to show up as just Black or just a woman in education spaces, they can compartmentalize their leadership approach to address concerns where their race may better diffuse a school dilemma (e.g. speaking to an irate Black parent) in comparison to their gender. The process of compartmentalizing and negotiating their intersecting identities is particularly challenged while fostering relationships at the school-level. Black women principals must contend with the micropolitics embedded in the relationship building process and negotiate whether to enact their "institutional" or "shadow" identity to ultimately support their desired leadership practices and outcomes.

Significance and Implications of this Study

This study presents several implications for the field of education that are of considerable

significance. By interrogating how Black women principals construct their professional identities, findings illuminated points of tension in dominant school leadership discourse and offer novel strategies for remedying the omission of race-and-gender and necessary mechanisms for understanding ELA research and practice. This section provides a synthesis of findings as they relate to the field and highlights their contributions to an existing body of literature on leadership theorizing, organizational supports, and policy enactment in a K-12 context. Each is described below.

Research Contributions

This study makes theoretical and methodological contributions to the study of ELA and Black women principals.

The theoretical contribution of this study is centered on proposing an interrogation of leadership theories and frameworks used in professional development workshops and school leader preparation programs that shape the professional identities of school leaders. Particularly, an interrogation that advances race-and-gender as necessary constructs for understanding the professional identity construction and practices of school leaders in general, and Black women principals in particular. Murakami and Törnsen (2017) remind us that although a race and/or gender-blind discourse may shed light on the technical components of leadership, it "[curtails] the value of the professional, including their motivation or commitment in improving schools" (p. 807). While the aim of this study was to analyze how constructs of race-and-gender shape principals' professional identity construction, it would be difficult to present this discussion without acknowledgement of the professional leadership standards that are: 1) a by-product of leadership theories and 2) inform and standardize the profession. Specifically, standards outlined in the OLF, BDLS, and provincial resources such as the *Succession Planning for Ontario*

Schools and School Boards, 2008. Data gleaned from this study reveal that a rigid and prescriptive organization of leadership standards negates the contextual nature of leadership and circumscribes successful leadership to a set of outcomes that maintains a hegemonic status quo. The fruits yielded from a more focused examination of professional leadership standards as they relate to systems leadership may be two-fold: 1) help to identify organizational practices that hinder and/or support successful leadership and 2) provide tangible justifications for variation in leadership practices and outcomes in all contexts. Further inviting opportunities for interrogating how practitioners translate these standards in professional identity constructing avenues such as professional development workshops and school leader preparation programs, and how principals then decode these messages into practice. While this study does not explicitly define how participants enacted successful leadership practices, it provides an opportunity for interrogating the very notion of the term success and the criteria used to access its achievement. For example, participants may have consciously exercised transformative practices to engage with communities, however these steps may not be recognized in measurable outcomes for appraisals. By providing a narrow definition of success that is centered on accountability, key perspectives and insights are omitted.

Additionally, findings demonstrate the importance of not assuming that the professional experiences that shape professional identity construction will be offered, accessed, nor perceived the same for leaders within the same race or gendered communities This study makes an unwavering argument for the recognition of Black women principals as a group distinct from Black men and White women principals; a distinction that has significant implications for leadership theorizing and the conceptualization of a school leader as a whole.

The study of Black women leaders is an underdeveloped area of research (Lomotey,

2019; Smith & Nkomo, 2001) and the scoping review presented in Chapter 2 indicates that studies on principals vary from the use of case study, life history (1 occurrence), and autoethnography. This study makes methodological contributions for the study of Black women in ELA by using a life history approach. This study adds to an emerging database of studies that interrogate the social, cultural, and political histories of leaders' professional lives as key drivers for understanding the conditions that informed their practices, values, beliefs, and more importantly entrance into the profession.

Organizational Supports

This study builds on existing literature of mentorship by contributing discussions of self-organized mentorship as an act of resistance and empowerment for Black women principals, while illuminating the theoretical tensions of "White logic" (James, 2019; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008) versus Black knowledge creation. In light of the various sources of organizational supports made available to participants and those they sought, mentorship was identified as a key support that guided and affirmed the construction of their professional identities. While the findings of this study affirm the "sisterhood" phenomenon whereby Black women gravitate to other Black women (Bryant-Davis, 2013), it distinctly disrupts a superficial analysis of race-and-gendered mentorship by interrogating self-organization as a creative resistance to hegemonic structures of knowledge creation and mobilization. This study makes an argument for acknowledging Black women ways of knowing and congregating as a necessary mechanism for the contexts in which knowledge mobilization, creation, and transfer occurs among Black women school leaders. Particularly, findings recommend that researchers interested in Black women mentorship incorporate Black knowledge creation and dissemination as a central unit of analysis for the study and development of principal mentorship programs.

Policy Enactment

While much has been discussed on policy enactment within ELA research, discourse on the factors that inform principals' sensemaking and agency when enacting policies is still developing (DeMatthews, 2015; Ganon-Shilon & Chen, 2019; Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2018; Rigby, 2015; Spillane et al., 2002). This study contributes to this discussion by offering a critique of policy enactment that integrates an intersectional approach to understanding enactment variation and challenges. Findings indicate that if research is to move past stereotypical perceptions of leadership and enactment, then a disruption of traditional organizational structures is needed. By deploying an enactment framework that acknowledges intersectionality as a contributing factor to policy actors' sensemaking and relationships within the school community, opportunities for better understanding variation in enactment practices may be realized (Haynes et al., 2020). Particularly given the impact that pathologizing media portrayals of racialized people (e.g. pop cultural depictions of the Black woman as hypersexual, angry, loud, and violent in Superwoman and Mammy) have on the perception of Black leaders. Further offering nuance to longstanding discussions and debates on ways to address educational systems of oppression as well as offering novel strategies for researchers interested in examining racialized leaders' enactment practices in all contexts. Expanding the dimensions of Ball et al.'s (2012) theoretical approach to policy enactment to incorporate an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1991) has the potential to highlight the socially situated and relational scenarios that the principal, as an agentic policy actor, must navigate. First, this improved understanding may provide meaningful accounts of the variation in enactment practices and outcomes experienced by racialized leaders in relation to their counterparts, further adding a multifaceted perspective to critical discussions and debates in the field. Next, it may benefit the development of

organizational supports tailored to addressing the race-and-gendered challenges faced by racialized leaders in their enactment practices. Finally, this approach offers guidance towards conceptual clarity of the operationalization of intersectionality in educational leadership studies—a consideration that may add nuance to studies for researchers and practitioners interested in policy enactment.

Before I conclude this section, I must revisit the intentions posed in the preface of this study as a gentle reminder of the collaborative effort for advancing the understanding of Black women principals. While the stories of Ruby, Michelle, Shirley, Harriet, Wangari, Rosa, and Ida are not generalizable, they provide rich insights into a continuous struggle that informs their professional identities. This study sought to speak to a wide audience of education actors through our stories—stories that have merit as legitimate sources of knowledge on their own. An endeavour which in isolation presents significant implications and contributions to an existing knowledge base on principalship in a Canadian context.

Challenges and Limitations

There are a few noteworthy challenges and limitations to this study. To begin, this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Requirements for isolation and restrictions on personal contact posed challenges for the recruitment of participants, collection of data, and the sample size.

This study sought to recruit 10 Black women principals. Studies developed using life history intend to document and interpret stories that represent human experience cultivated over time. Consequently, sample sizes of life history studies tend to be small as this methodology demands considerable time commitment from participants (Goodson, 2001, 2013; Goodson &

Sikes, 2001; Labaree, 2006). School principals, particularly in Canada, are tasked with meeting increasing job demands and accountability measures which have consumed both scheduled and disposable time (Armstrong, 2015; Leithwood, 1992; Rintoul & Bishop, 2019; Wang et al., 2018). Experiences of work intensification have only been exacerbated as principals and schools respond to the political, social, and economic changes that have emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hauseman et al., 2020; Pollock, 2020). In addition to the underrepresentation of Black women principals in Ontario, participants' expression of increasing work intensification during a global pandemic shed light on a general sentiment of limited access to time and an assumed "Zoom fatigue". These conditions limited the analysis of data to a small sample size however, given that this study did not intend to offer generalizations, the sample provided conceptual nuance to an underdeveloped and understudied topic. Noting the challenges and limitations presented above, the study successfully recruited seven Black women principals who provided rich accounts of professional identity construction in Ontario. Further emphasizing the study's ability to attain internal validity through information power—the notion that "the more information the sample holds, relevant for actual study, the lower the number of participants is needed" (Malterud et al., 2016, p. 1759).

Continuing the discussion of COVID-19, a perceivable second limitation of this study is that interviews were conducted online instead of in-person. While participants may have felt more comfortable discussing their professional experiences and intersecting identity in-person, the use of a Zoom video interview still enabled participants to see my visible identity markers as the researcher—markers which have significance for establishing trust as a community insider (Black women conducting research on Black women). As well, the Zoom video interviews provided the same opportunities to observe body language as in-person interviews. By using a

combination of member-checking, triangulation, articulation of researcher bias, and multiple recruitment sites, this study ensured that data collected was rich and representative of a diverse group of Black women principals.

The final limitation is the non-generalizability of this present study. Although this work utilized a life history approach that does not subscribe to a specific geographic location, the study's focus on Ontario principals limits the generalizability of findings. As such, comparisons between participants' school boards are not offered for two reasons: 1) the unit of analysis was participants' histories, not their respective school board's organizational structures, and 2) to maintain confidentiality. Contextual differences such as organizational, historical, political, socio-cultural, and systemic disparities present a challenge for enacting a distinct definition of professional identity construction in the field in all contexts. Having said that, it is important to note that this limitation does not obscure the significance of the findings nor their implications for research, theory, and practice. Rather, the richness of the participants' narratives provides valuable contributions to the study of Black women principals, which can be transferred to varying contexts.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study offer several recommendations for future research. Given the underrepresentation of Black women in principalship in Ontario, the sample size for this study was limited. To increase the sample size, future studies would benefit from a recruitment approach that is inclusive of vice-principals and retired principals. While this study did not purposefully exclude retired principals, the recruitment partner organization used, and the publicly available email addresses obtained, were centered on acting principals. By widening the

participant sample, future studies would yield a broader perspective of principalship from tenured experiences while further validating the findings of this work.

It is recommended that future studies employ a comparative approach to offer a better and more nuanced understanding of professional identity construction as it relates to race and gender. Comparative studies between Black women principals in different Canadian provinces would provide further insights into professional identity construction in varying Canadian contexts and propose new perspectives for organizational supports that support and/or hinder Black women principals' leadership practices. Future research that explores the constructs of race-and-gender as necessary components to understanding professional identity construction would benefit from a focus on the similarities and differences between Black women and Black men principal. Internationally, comparative studies would enlighten a multifaceted understanding to principalship and professional identity construction that is informed by global perspectives of policy enactment, social identity, and leadership theorizing.

As a formative source for leadership development, school leader preparation programs play an integral role in aligning aspiring principals with the theoretical and practical knowledge for constructing their professional identities. Given the requirement for Ontario principals to complete the PQP (OME, 2023) and the pervasive nature of racism in K-12 schools (Kohli et al., 2017), it is necessary that future research examines the processes, or lack thereof that are deployed in school leader preparation programs to support principals in developing race-consciousness. Such a study would reveal areas of success and neglect that not only address the needs of Black women principals but enhance racially-responsive leadership practices. Insights that could be incorporated into professional development workshops and inform subsequent studies on Canadian school leader preparation programs.

Given the race-and-gender neutral approach to leadership standards, specifically in frameworks such as the OLF, future research should be conducted on the effectiveness of professional leadership standards for meeting the race-and-gender specific needs of principals. Findings from this new research would be of significance to researchers and practitioners while addressing and under-researched area in ELA research.

Concluding Remarks

As this study comes to an end, let me hasten to draw attention to a few final and considerable thoughts. In this chapter, I provided an overview of the study's findings, situated their significance and contributions to the field, discussed the research questions that guided the study, acknowledged its challenges and limitations, and identified opportunities for future research. This study is justified in that it illuminated the theoretical and practical misconceptions of how Black women principals negotiate their race-and-gendered identities while constructing their professional identities and argued for this recognition in leadership theorization. By examining the emergent themes of 1) race-and-gender identity negotiations, 2) micropolitics as it relates to "relationship discourses", and 3) informal networks as sources of mentorship, findings from this study have the potential to add new insights for advancing leadership theorizing, school leader preparation programs, and ELA mentorship within a Canadian context. At the beginning of this work, I highlighted that the experiences of Black women have long been placed in the margins of Canadian history, scholarship, and praxis. Experiences that illuminate a contentious history of silencing and erasure that willfully negates the complex dance between pain, resistance, perseverance, and triumph endured by Black women in leadership. As this study has revealed, a reconciliation of this reality necessitates that only when those conducting ELA

research begin to examine, understand, and retell the experiences of those within the margins that Black women are placed, can we as a field begin to authentically understand principalship in its entirety. Lastly, I want to draw attention to the preface of this dissertation and the commitment to solidarity from education actors of all race-and-gendered identities. Whether you arrived at this work intrigued by its race-and-gendered focus, make contributions to the field of education in your research and/or practice, or may find your social and professional identities reflected in its title, insights drawn from this work necessitate action on your part to share the participants' stories and initiate change.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Western University Ethics Approval

Western Research

Date: 12 October 2022

To: Dr. Augusto Riveros Barrera

Project ID: 120600

Study Title: Embracing the Race: How Black Women Principals Construct Their Professional Identities in Ontario Schools

Short Title: Black Women Principals in Ontario

Application Type: NMREB Initial Application

Review Type: Delegated

Full Board Reporting Date: 04/Nov/2022

Date Approval Issued: 12/Oct/2022 13:18

REB Approval Expiry Date: 12/Oct/2023

Dear Dr. Augusto Riveros Barrera

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. **All other required institutional approvals and mandated training must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.**

Documents Approved:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
Qualtrics LOIC Link	Written Consent/Assent		
Interview Guide	Interview Guide	04/Oct/2022	
Recruitment Email—Publicly Available Email	Recruitment Materials	04/Oct/2022	
Letter of Information and Consent—In-Person Interview	Written Consent/Assent	04/Oct/2022	
Informational Flyer	Recruitment Materials	11/Oct/2022	3
Letter of Information and Consent—Online Interview	Written Consent/Assent	11/Oct/2022	3

No deviations from, or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Ms. Zoë Levi, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).

Appendix B: Informational Flyer

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR A RESEARCH STUDY ON BLACK WOMEN PRINCIPALS

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled, *Embracing the Race: How Black Women Principals Construct Their Professional Identities in Ontario Schools* that examines the professional careers of Black women principals in Ontario. You will be asked to participate in a confidential, one-hour audio-recorded interview that will take place virtually or at a location of your choice.

▶ Have more than one year of combined administrative experience as a principal with certification from the Ontario College of Teachers

▶ Self-identify as a woman

▶ Self-identify as Black

If you are interested in participating or have any questions about this study, please contact Nyasha Nyereyemhuka and/or Dr. Gus Riveros using the contact information provided below.

Nyasha Nyereyemhuka, PhD Candidate
Faculty of Education, Western University
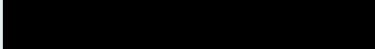
Dr. Gus Riveros, Associate Professor
Faculty of Education, Western University

Version: 11-OCT-2022

Western
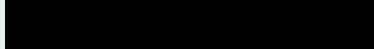
Appendix C: Participant Recruitment Email

<u>Subject Line: Invitation to Participate in Research on Black Woman Principals</u>

Dear [name of principal],

We obtained your email from the [name of School Board] website. You are being invited to participate in a study that we, co-investigator Nyasha Nyereyemhuka and principal investigator Dr. Gus Riveros are conducting. This study will examine how Black women principals construct their professional identities in Ontario schools. Your participation in this study will help us better understand principals' socialization into the profession, implementation of school and provincial level policies, perceptions of mentorship, and access to organizational support provided by schools and school boards in Ontario's K-12 education system.

You may be eligible if you:
- Have more than one year of combined administrative experience as a principal with certification from the Ontario College of Teachers
- Self-identify as a woman
- Self-identify as Black

If you are interested and agree to participate, you will be asked to partake in a one-hour interview.

If you require any further information regarding this research project or would like to receive a letter of information and consent, you may contact the investigators at the information given below. If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Human Research Ethics at ████████ or ████████.

Thank you for considering participating in this study.

Principal Investigator
Dr. Gus Riveros, Associate Professor
Faculty of Education, Western University
████████████████

Co-Investigator
Nyasha Nyereyemhuka, PhD Candidate
Faculty of Education, Western
████████████████

Appendix D: Recruitment Partner Organization Email

<u>Subject Line: Recruiting Participants for Research on Black Women Principals</u>

Board of Directors
Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators

Dear Board of Directors,

My name is Nyasha Nyereyemhuka, I am a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education at Western University in London, Ontario, under the advisement of Dr. Gus Riveros. I was made aware of your organization by Dr. Alana Butler, who suggested me to contact you and request your assistance in recruiting potential participants for my doctoral research project.

I am conducting a study on the professional identity and career progression of Black women principals in Ontario. The purpose of this research is to better understand the socialization of Black educators as school leaders, their role in the implementation of school and provincial level policies, their perceptions of mentorship, as well as their experiences in relation to organizational support in schools and school boards in Ontario's K-12 education system. The study has been reviewed and approved by Western University's Ethics Review Board.

I am writing to inquire about the Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators' ability to assist in recruiting participants for the study. Specifically, in the dissemination of recruitment materials to your network of members. I would appreciate the opportunity to connect and further discuss the study and its recruitment process.

Thank you in advance for your time. I look forward to connecting with you.

Kind regards,
Nyasha Nyereyemhuka B.Comm (Hons.), M.Ed
Faculty of Education | Western University

(Cc) Dr. Gus Riveros
Associate Professor
Faculty of Education | Western University

Appendix E: Letter of Information and Consent

Western

<u>Letter of Information and Consent</u>

Project Title: Embracing the Race: How Black Women Principals Construct Their Professional Identities in Ontario Schools

Document Title: Letter of Information and Consent

Principal Investigator
Dr. Gus Riveros, Associate Professor
Faculty of Education, Western University
███████████████

Co-Investigator
Nyasha Nyereyemhuka, Ph.D. Candidate
Faculty of Education, Western University
███████████████

Invitation to Participate
You are being invited to participate in this research study about how Black women principals construct their professional identities, because as a self-identified Black woman who has more than one year of combined administrative experience as a principal, and has been certified by the Ontario College of Teachers, you meet the inclusion criteria for this study. To participate in this study, you must agree to be audio-recorded, and must sign this consent form. No verbal consent will be allowed.

Why is this study being done?
The purpose of this study is to explore how Black women principals in Ontario construct their professional identity. Specifically, the examination will focus on principals' socialization into the profession, implementation of school and provincial level policies, perceptions of mentorship, and access to organizational support provided by schools and school boards; given the lack of tailored theoretical and practical supports, mentorship opportunities, and scholarship on how Black women principals' intersectional identity informs their principalship.

Further, this study will identify and critically analyze the challenges and successes that have contributed to Black women principals' work as they lead schools. Given the underdevelopment of academic literature on Black women in principalship positions in Canada, this study intends to bridge the knowledge gap, provide opportunities to bring Black voices that have been historically neglected to the fore of contemporary literature, and contribute to the existing literature on K-12 educational leadership in a Canadian context.

How long will you be in this study?

Western

You will be asked to participate in one interview that will last approximately 60 minutes. Providing (optional) feedback on the interview transcript may require 45 additional minutes of your time.

What are the study procedures?
After agreeing to participate in this study, you will be required to partake in an interview for approximately 60 minutes. Audio recordings will be collected on a digital audio recorder which will be placed by the speaker of a laptop for virtual interviews and on the table for in-person interviews. With your consent, only the audio of the interview will be recorded; no video or pictures will be taken during the interview. The interview can take place in-person at a location that is convenient to you or online using the videoconference software (Zoom) at a time and date convenient for you. The audio from the interview will be transcribed verbatim by the co-investigator. About four weeks from the interview date, you will receive an email with the transcribed interview. This email will allow you to provide any feedback you consider necessary. Answering this email will require approximately 45 minutes of your time.

What are the risks and harms of participating in this study?
Discomfort may arise from sharing your experiences and obstacles encountered in your profession. You have the right to withdraw from answering any questions in the interview. Like online shopping, tele-conferencing/video-conferencing technology has some privacy and security risks. It is possible that information could be intercepted by unauthorized people (hacked) or otherwise shared by accident. This risk cannot be completely eliminated. We want to make you aware of this.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
Participants may not directly benefit from this study. Participation will provide you with an opportunity to reflect on your professional practice. In doing so, you will be contributing information towards improving the knowledge base on Black principalship in Ontario.

Can participants choose to leave the study?
You may withdraw from the entire or portions of this study at any time prior to publication. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request (e.g., by phone, in writing, etc.) withdrawal of information collected about you. It is important to note that a record of your participation must remain with the study, and as such, the researchers may not be able to destroy your signed letter of information and consent, or your name on the master list. However, any data may be withdrawn upon your request. Should you wish to withdraw, please send your request in writing to the investigators, and the data associated to you will be withdrawn from the study. Once the study has been published, we will not be able to remove your information.

How will participants' information be kept confidential?
All information collected for this research will remain confidential. Your identity will be made confidential through the use of pseudonyms which will be assigned to you. Pseudonyms will be used in the transcription of your responses and for the duration of this study. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study. With

Western

your permission, anonymous and de-identified quotations may be used when reporting the research findings.

All electronic information, not limited to written transcriptions, master list linking full name and email with pseudonym, and digital audio files from the interview phase will be encrypted and stored in a password-protected external hard drive during and after the transportation of study-related records to ensure the safety and security of all confidential information and documents. As well, access to data will be restricted to the study team. Delegated institutional representatives of Western University and its NonMedical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research in accordance with regulatory requirements. Upon the completion of this study, all data will be encrypted and will remain stored on a password-protected external hard drive for an approximate duration of seven years to ensure all affiliated parties have access to the results of this study.

Are participants compensated to be in this study?
Participants will not be compensated for participation in this study.

What are the rights of participants?
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate, you can exercise the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. Should you choose not to participate or leave the study at any time, it will have no effect on your employment status. You do not waive any legal right by consenting to this study.

Whom do participants contact for questions?
If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact Dr. Gus Riveros and/or Nyasha Nyereyemhuka using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Non-Medical Research Ethics Board at Western University.
If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Human Research Ethics at ███████████████

Thank you for your assistance in this research study. This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Western

Consent Form

Project Title: Embracing the Race: How Black Women Principals Construct Their Professional Identities in Ontario Schools

Document Title: Letter of Information and Consent

Principal Investigator	**Co-Investigator**
Dr. Gus Riveros, Associate Professor	Nyasha Nyereyemhuka, Ph.D. Candidate
Faculty of Education	Faculty of Education
Western University	Western University

I have read the Letter of information, have had the nature of the study explained to me, and I agree to participate. All questions I had have been answered. I know that I may leave the study at any time.
YES ☐   **NO** ☐

I agree to be audio-recorded in this study.
YES ☐   **NO** ☐

I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research.
YES ☐   **NO** ☐

_____   _____   _____
Print Name   Signature   Date (DD-MM-YYYY)
of Participant

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

_____   _____   _____
Print Name of Person   Signature   Date (DD-MM-YYYY)
Obtaining Consent

Version Date: 04/10/2022   Page 4 of 4

Appendix F: Interview Guide

Introduction
- Please introduce yourself, your name, and current role
- How many years were you a teacher?
- Were you a vice-principal, if so for how long?
- How many years have you been a principal?
- How many schools have you worked at?
- Have you worked in other school boards?

Research Question 1: How do Black women principals construct their professional identities?
- Please describe your career path to becoming a principal?
- What influenced your decision to become a principal?
- What does it mean to be a school leader?
- As you transitioned into a leadership role, what obstacles did you have to overcome?
- How did your experiences within the school and the school board shape your understanding of leadership as a Black woman?

Research Question 2: What organizational practices support and/or hinder the construction of Black women principals' professional identities?
a. How do Black women principals perceive the influence of these practices?
- What organizational supports (from the school board) have you received in your role as a principal?
- What role did mentorship play in your entrance into the principalship?
- Is mentorship necessary for principals, and particularly, for Black women who aspire to become principals?
- In terms of organizational support, how can principal preparation programs better prepare Black women for school leadership?
- What challenges have you faced while implementing school and/or school board level policies as a principal?
- What successes have you faced while implementing school and/or school board level policies as a principal?

Research Question 3: How do Black women principals negotiate their gendered and/or racialized identities?
- As a Black woman, how has your race and gender identity informed your role as a principal?
- Tell me about an experience or key event in your principalship career where it became clear that being a Black woman was perceived and/or received differently than your counterparts?
- What advice would you offer to Black women entering principalship?

Conclusion—Additional Information
Thank you for the insightful discussion you have provided. Is there anything else we did not cover that you would like to add to our conversation?

<center>**Curriculum Vitae**</center>

EDUCATION

2019-2024   **Doctor of Philosophy**, Critical Policy, Equity, and Leadership Studies in Education, Western University

2016-2019   **Master of Education**, Administration and Leadership in Education, Brock University

2012-2016   **Honours Bachelor of Commerce**, Human Resources, McMaster University

HONOURS AND AWARDS

2022	Ontario Graduate Scholarship	$15,000
2020	Dr. Allen Pearson Graduate Award in Educational Leadership	$1,500
2020	Ontario Graduate Scholarship	$15,000
2019	Western Graduate Research Scholarship	$9,896
2018	Brock Univ. Dean of Graduate Studies Spring Research Fellowship	$4,000
2016	Brock University Dean of Graduate Studies Entrance Scholarship	$2,000
2015	McMaster University Dean's Honour List	
2012	Infundo Ephakemeyo Scholarship	$1,000
2012	McMaster University Honour Award	$750

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

2019—2021   **Research Assistant**, Doctoral level
Faculty of Education, Western University

2019   **Research Assistant**, Master's level
Department of Educational Studies, Brock University

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2023   **Contract Lecturer**, Lakehead University
Course title: Cultural Studies in Education (Masters of Education)

2023   **Instructor (Team Teaching)**, Western University
Course title: Social Foundations (Teacher Education)

2021—2022   **Teaching Assistant**, Western University
Course title: Social Foundations (Teacher Education)

2016—2018   **Teaching Assistant**, Brock University
Course title: Introduction to Foundations of Education (undergraduate)

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2022-2023 **Research Assistant**, Diversity Institute, Toronto Metropolitan University

2022-2022 **Curriculum Review Assistant for Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Decolonization**, Arthur Labatt Family School of Nursing, Western University

PRESENTATIONS

Nyereyemhuka, N**.** (2024, June). *On the outside looking in: The necessity of race-and-gendered mentorship for Black women principals.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education, Montreal, Québec.

Nyereyemhuka, N. (2023, September). *Embracing the Race: How Black Women Principals Construct their Professional Identities in Ontario Schools.* Paper presentation at the annual meeting of the British Educational Research Association, Birmingham, England.

Nyereyemhuka, N. (2023, May). *Demystifying the Black excellence Effect: Black Women Principals' Pursuit Organizational Support.* Paper presentation at the annual meeting of the Black Canadian Studies Association, Toronto, Ontario.

Nyereyemhuka, N. (2023, January). *We are hiring principals, but they are not applying.* Oral presentation for Retiring with Strong Minds of Schulich Medicine and Dentistry, Online.

Nyereyemhuka, N. (2022, September). *Towards an Intersectional Perspective: The Incorporation of Intersectionality in Policy Enactment Frameworks.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the European Educational Research Association, Yerevan, Armenia.

Briscoe, P. & Nyereyemhuka, N. (2022, May). *Turning leadership upside down and outside in: A change in leadership beliefs during a pandemic.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education, Online.

Riveros, G. & Nyereyemhuka, N. (Accepted). *Using the Notion of Place to Investigate the Experiences of Immigrant Parents in Schools.* Paper to be presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association*, San Diego, California. *Withdrawn due to COVID-19.

Nyereyemhuka, N. (2021, May). *Meaningful Space: The Impact of Space and Place in Principals' Policy Implementation Practices.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education, Online.

Nyereyemhuka, N. (2020, March). *Earning Their Stripes: The Recruitment and Retention of Black Principals in Rural Settings.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Robert Macmillan Symposium in Education, London, Ontario.

Nyereyemhuka, N. (2019, April). *Student Equity and Inclusive Education Policy in Ontario: Perspectives of Three High School Principals.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mapping the New Knowledges Graduate Student Research Conference, St. Catharines, Ontario.

INVITED PRESENTATIONS

Guest lecturer, "Anti-poverty and addressing classism in schools" Social Foundations (Teacher Education), Faculty of Education at Western University, January 2022

Guest lecturer, "Critical reflexivity" Social Foundations (Teacher Education), Faculty of Education at Western University, January 2022

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