VIEWING EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE LENS OF SPIRITUALITY: HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALES COPE

by

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DEDICATION

To the One I cannot live without.

Jesus is the center of my joy, strength, hope, wisdom, and love. Thank you for believing I was worth saving! Thank you for looking beyond my faults to supply my every need!

One

Matthew Garnett

For being the man that you are, pushing me forward, standing still when you wanted to fight, and loving me through it all. God blessed me with you. I am ever grateful.

Two

Marcus Bernard and Jazmyn Neschell

There are no adequate words to describe my unconditional love for you. Thank you for making me better, wiser, stronger, more loving. YOU ARE MY BEST WORKS EVER!

I LOVE YOU~ I AM INCREDIBLY PROUD OF YOU

Three

To the three that helped me reach the mountaintop, spiritually, emotionally, mentally and academically. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you!
Twelve

To the twelve that sat around with me discussing ideas, offering encouragement,
correcting me gently, accepting me fully, believing in me even when I wanted to give up.
I love you! I thank God for you!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”

Joshua 1:9 KJV

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Matthew 5:16 KJV

If I have ever shared these words with you or you with me, you are a part of my heart. God has richly blessed me with friends, family, colleagues, congregations, teachers, and mentors that have been invaluable to me personally and to this dissertation specifically.

Because of who you are, I am what I am.

To the educators that enriched and empowered my life and so many others, I applaud you. To the phenomenal women that never received Teacher of the Year, Administrator positions, Specialist, or Doctorates, but paved a way for me, I stand proudly on your shoulders knowing that I carry you with me each day.

To my village: thank you for tending the lumber and making me build a mansion with the lumber of my life.
To my grandmother, Eloise Stenson: the smartest person I know that only has an 8th grade education. We walk across the stage together…
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF APPENDICES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROLOGUE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Notion of Social Justice</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences Upon the African American Educational Leader</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and Delimitations</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions to View Educational Leadership Through the Lens of Spirituality</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endarkened Feminist Theory</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice Leadership</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endarkened Feminist Epistemology</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Feminist</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE OF CONTENTS CONTINUED

Page

Spirituality as it Relates to the Endarkened Feminist Theory…61
Spirituality as a Lens to Lead: Is it a Phenomenon.................63

3 METHODOLOGY.................................................................65

Data Collection.................................................................68
Pilot Study........................................................................68
Research Study...............................................................68
Focus Group.....................................................................69
Data Collection Overview.................................................70
Summary...........................................................................73

4 FINDINGS........................................................................75

Findings............................................................................75
Elisabeth............................................................................82
Naomi.................................................................................82
Lois...................................................................................82
The Notion of Spirituality.....................................................82
Spirituality is the Foundation for Productivity....................89
Faith is the Biggest Source of Strength...............................92
Educational Leaders are Called by God.............................96
Endarkened Feminist Epistemology.................................99
Summary...........................................................................100

5 DISCUSSION..................................................................108

Conclusions......................................................................110
African American Females Cope in Educational Leadership...110
A Phenomenon Exists Amongst African American Females....111
Gap in the Literature........................................................112
Limitations and Delimitations.............................................113
Future Implications of the Research.................................114

REFERENCES....................................................................119

APPENDICES..................................................................125
LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix .................................................................................................................. 132

A. Initial Study ...................................................................................................... 134

B. Survey Questions ........................................................................................... 138

C. Follow Up Interview Questions ...................................................................... 142

D. IRP Approval Form .......................................................................................... 144
ABSTRACT

ALISON DAWN SMITH
VIEWING EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE LENS OF
SPIRITUALITY: HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALES COPE
Under the direction of LUCY J. BUSH, Ed.D.

The spiritual voice of the African American female in Educational Leadership has been omitted from educational and theological literature. This study will be guided by the overarching theme of the research: viewing educational leadership through the lens of spirituality, specifically how African American females cope.

For the purpose of this phenomenological study, data were collected via structured and unstructured interviews, audio recordings and observations. Throughout the surveys, focus groups, and the interviews, the spirituality of African American females in educational leadership was evident as a viable coping mechanism. In fact, the existence of spirituality seems to be a way of life as opposed to just being a means of surviving. Furthermore, it is the belief of the researcher that one cannot deny the belief that not only does spirituality make one a better leader, it is necessary to the survival of the African American female leader. Amongst the fifteen African American females in educational leadership interviewed, surveyed, or observed, faith and spirituality were the most valuable coping mechanism they possessed. Based on the data presented in and
throughout this dissertation, there was a phenomenon amongst African American females
to cope in educational leadership spirituality. Specifically, this research and methodology
was designed to transform the perceptions of the African American Female Leader
create social action by empowering leaders to lead in a more efficient way unique to their
culture, and to minimize a gap in the literature. Viewing spirituality as a lens to lead
triangulates African American females, educational leadership and spirituality thereby
forging a new path in educational research.
PROLOGUE

“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know, even as also I am known.” I Corinthians 13:12 KJV

This scripture, penned by the Apostle Paul, refers to living life with only a glimpse of the Heavenly Father’s master plan. He alludes to a person searching for answers but finding only bits of light amidst the dark images of pain, loss, hurt, and discovery. As people mature spiritually, they are able to access God more and more through prayer and faith, envision more of their purpose and plan that God has ordained for them. Instead of being the center of their personal universe, they are a microbe, though significant in His sight, in the infinite world that we live in.

1 Corinthians 13:12 captures my sentiments regarding the intersection of my leadership and spiritual journey. At the present time, I can only gather a glimpse of divine, educational, and spiritual matters. Through my limited perspective of spirituality and educational leadership as an African-American woman. But, someday, I hope to be able to know and understand my purpose clearly, without obstruction. The purpose and plan that God has for my life appears to be a dark place, imperfect, incomplete and seen in obscure focus. This view, limited in this season, will get stronger as I grow in Christ. He will reveal himself to me as I study his word, seek his face, commune with him, and ultimately die, living with Him in paradise. In paradise (heaven), I will see him clearly, face-to-face. There, he will unlock the door to the mysteries of life. Until such time that I can see him face-to-face, a metaphor is the best instrument of explanation of my journey to my final destination and this dissertation.
A bridge is “a structure spanning and providing passage over a gap or barrier, such as a river or roadway” (Mifflin, 2000, p. 174). As a young, African American girl raised in the South by a single mother, I suppose my barriers were more than most and similar to some. Those barriers came in many sizes; an equal opportunity obstacle designed to make me fight or take flight. Sometimes, I did neither. Sometimes, I did both. Yet, I always used the bridge. At times, the bridge was 200 feet. At times, the bridge was four or five miles long. The length of the bridge depended on the size of the barrier.

The bridge serves as a unique metaphorical undercurrent for this research study. The bridge is the analysis of my most intimate thoughts combined with my spiritual dependence on God, the Master of life and death. The bridge is my parable, a way of speaking, thinking and feeling, that I understand completely, but others see only the surface. The bridge is so much a part of me, the essence of my being, that I do not knowingly, consciously cross over or unto. One minute I am fine, feeling good. The next minute, I am traveling along the bridge with passion, speed, and desperation. As an educational leader, the bridge is my refuge. As an African American female, the bridge is my protection. As often as I cross the bridge, I wonder if it will always be a part of me. I imagine that one day I will not need the bridge. Yet, I know I cannot sustain or maintain a successful life without the daily use of bridge.

When I cannot physically leave my surroundings, the bridge takes me from one place to another, allowing me to escape reality, removing my anxieties, soothing my fears. Any time my life seems surrounded in chaos, rooted in fear, I take the bridge of mediation and prayer to another time and place where I can see clearly, think logically, and survive in the moments that can overwhelm me. I have utilized the bridge as a means
of survival for as long as I can remember; helping me cope during the complexities of elementary school, insecurities of middle school, and the uncertainties of the future. When I could not physically leave my surroundings, I relied on the bridge to transport me to an arena in which I was loved, felt safe and wanted, then I could conquer my fears.

My first recollection of the bridge was in elementary school, when I first realized that I was different. Ms. Ruth, my second-grade teacher, had about seven girls in her classroom. Childless, she wanted to have a little “girl-time” with her students. She invited all seven of her students to her home to spend the night. I was so excited! My teacher loved me so much that she wanted to spend extra time with me! Eagerly, I raced home, told my mother about the trip, and begged her to sign the permission slip. I can remember the bittersweet expression on her face as she looked back and forth between the paper and her only child. As a mother, I can envision her euphoria at the enthusiasm of her child, but felt her anguish as she feared, rightly so, that this experience could diminish my innocence by exposing me to the harsh reality that I would not be liked or accepted by all people.

As I bounced into class the next day with my signed permission slip, I could not see the diminished glow of Ms. Ruth’s face. I did not understand the tension in the room; the angry and disgusted look from my peers, nor the presence of all the other female parents in the room. I only knew that I had a magic slip of paper in my hand that said I could go play at Ms. Ruth’s house, a mansion if the pictures were anything to go by. Quickly, I learned that if I went on the trip, several of my classmates could not go. There was a heated debate, words I did not understand, looks I could not process, but an overall feeling of hurt and confusion. Were these not my friends that I talked to everyday? What
did I do wrong that they did not want me around? Did I tell when John pushed me down last week? Could they see on my face that Sarai and Mary never played or talked to me? What did I do? What did I say? I crossed the bridge, running with tears in my eyes, snot on my face. Crossing the bridge; falling on my knees; weeping bitterly, the bridge is there.

As a middle-schooler, the bridge was a constant destination. In fact, I do not recall a time during middle school when I escaped the bridge. If I had to pinpoint a day that my insecurities started, I could cite the first day of middle school. My physical innocence was horribly taken during this tenure. The bridge became my focus, my reason to stay alive. My grades plummeted. My body changed. Teachers told me to “grow up.” Adults gave me adult responsibilities at the age of twelve. The bridge silently supported me. The bridge cloaked my fears even as I plodded forward in the midst of hurt, pain, confusion and doubt. I spiritually and emotionally lost my mother; socially gained a father. In the face of all this strife, the bridge remained a constant source of strength. The bridge was my only friend, my constant companion. The bridge was the reason suicide was not an option. Where would I have been without the bridge?

My high school and college tenure were not points of emphasis in my life. Surviving middle school was my goal. Surviving was my motivation to get out of high school and college. Surviving, and crossing the bridge to mental security, became my single focus. College was my logistical safety net, a refuge from the atrocities of middle school, of family, of a time that lives within me, though I desperately want it to die. College transported me thousands of miles from home, my bridge without borders. I
earned my degree and independence. Yet, the bridge was there. A solitary bridge; awaiting my next journey.

Life happened. Alone with a child, the bridge was my habitation. Necessity made me return to home. Without a job, I explored the one place I never thought to go. Although education opened many doors, school was not kind to me. Could I face the demons that hunted me, that hunt me still? Could I return to the place that was supposed to be a safe place but reality said differently? As I looked into my son’s eyes, the choice was made, the decision firm. In order to provide a future for my son, I had to bury my past. The world of education was not only my destiny, but also a truth I could not escape.

Educational leadership was not a consideration as I entered the halls of the elementary school as a paraprofessional. As a new member if the teaching profession, working with a provisional license, educational leadership roles were reserved for those who already served in those positions. It was this powerful bridge experience that planted the seed for my blossoming into the leadership arena. Prior to the incident, my teaching, character, and/or professionalism were never questioned. My first year served as my student teaching. Although I was assigned a mentor, I found myself giving her instruction, calming her down in moments of crisis, and stabilizing the learning environment. It was I who served as a mentor to other teachers. It was to my class that administrators sent challenging students and defiant parents. The bridge helped me to remain cool, calm, and under control to teach, motivate, inspire, and discipline to the best of my ability. My focus was clear. My purpose was defined. I was a TEACHER! Until the incident…
One fateful day, I was called into the principal’s office after what I thought was an incidental agreement with two teachers. Unbeknownst to me, these two young teachers reported me to the principal, Mr. Amaziah. Mr. Amaziah confronted me for being “intimidating, arrogant, and confrontational.” Intimidating? How could I be intimidating at 5’1, maybe 120 pounds? How could I ever be considered intimidating? Arrogant? The self-conscious new teacher is considered arrogant? Where was this stemming from? How had it happened? When did it happen? To my knowledge, I was only teaching what I had been taught, utilizing professional jargon, demonstrating current pedagogy, and putting the needs of students first.

As I sat in Mr. Amaziah’s office listening to him, Delores, and Jalisa, two of my colleagues, speak, my heart grew heavy, fire blazed within my heart and suddenly I could not breathe. Thank goodness for the bridge that and I could retreat until I reached solid ground. I could not believe the audacity of my principal who called me into his office to discuss this nonsense. How could I make them feel better about their own inadequacies and deficiencies? How could I control their sense of authority and power? I gave my students hope. I made myself believe that I could make a difference. But I was perplexed and intrigued how I could intimidate another teacher by their lack of self-esteem. How was that my problem? Was that not something they needed to fix? These two, veteran Caucasian women felt threatened by a first-year teacher who happened to be African American. My grandmother and mother always taught me that I needed to improve myself when I felt other people were better. Why could Delores and Jalisa not improve themselves? Why did I have to be the target of their insecurities? Why was I permitted to be the scapegoat?
My ability to utilize the bridge held my tears of frustration at bay. The bridge made me swallow angry words and useless rhetoric. The bridge justified and sanctified me until I was able to calmly articulate the injustice of this attack and reprimand. Without the bridge, my wrath would have raged from every corner of the school. Without the bridge, profanity might have been released, relationships ruined beyond measure, and Ms. Smith may have lost her job. Ironically, Delores was not offered a contract the next year for professional ethics. I became Jalisa’s team leader four years later. The very action that she tried to prevent with her accusations happened anyway. She left the school at the end of that school year. Several similar events happened throughout my teaching career. Consequently, I relied on the bridge and pressed forward believing that my purpose was being fulfilled in the education arena.

When you’re weary
Feeling small
When tears are in your eyes
I will dry them all
I’m on your side
When times get rough
And friends just can’t be found
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down…(Paul Simon - Bridge Over Troubled Waters, 1970)

During my tenure at the same school, under Mr. Amaziah, I was moved from grade level to grade level in order to keep me from being Team Leader. However, it motivated me instead of discouraging me.

Ms. Eve, the Assistant Principal, worked me ruthlessly without thought to my physical well-being. Even though I had to organize and conduct spelling bees, testing, and Saturday School, I was never recommended for a leadership position. I felt like I was never considered a leader in their eyes. During this time, I was a finalist for Teacher of
the Year for the third year in a row. Yet, I was not the one chosen. I crossed the bridge when teammates were sure of a victory that third and final year. “Over half of the building hates her. She does not speak to anyone. How can she win?” Martha cried. The bridge sustained me when the winner was announced. I knew the outcome prior to the vote. Mr. Amaziah and Ms. Eve knew whom to call when they wanted work done accurately, expediently, and efficiently. There were days that I was sick, too ill to be at school but I was asked to come in anyway. Just my presence alone made a difference in the school. Ms. Eve went as far as calling my college professors to excuse me from my weekend and night classes because of those same illnesses. Yet, they did not believe I had leadership qualities. Is not the leader of an event or organization a leader? Is not a leader someone the people you want around every day to ensure that everything goes well? Take me to the bridge.

My climb to Educational Leadership was a steep one. It involved stepping out on faith, taking risks, suffering humiliation, appearance adjustments, and saying no to men who wanted sexual favors in return for promotion. My self-esteem was torn to shreds. My demeanor was dejected. I questioned whether I was meant to teach, lead, or even remain in education. Then, I remembered the necessity of the bridge. Even in good times, I cannot forget the existence and importance of the bridge. The bridge guided me through at least nine failed interviews, six overlooked applications, and one administrator who gave me an opportunity regardless of the fact that I had the worst interview of my life. It was so disastrous that I sat in the parking lot afterwards crying hysterically for two hours. The disastrous interview led me to a second interview because the administrator over the panel felt sorry for me. She witnessed my work from afar, and thought I deserved a
chance. The bridge touched her heart. The second interview landed my first Assistant Principal’s position.

Once again, the bridge became a part of my daily existence. From the low expectations of African American females in leadership to the oppression I faced as an educational leader, the bridge was my ally. During my tenure in educational leadership, two main events solidified my reliance on the bridge. The first event was my first offer of AP position and the second one was the all but dissertation (ABD) experience. These two events shaped my leadership in ways too numerous to count.

A year before accepting my first Assistant Principal position, I was offered a job in Forest County. Forest County Middle School in Forest County was a smaller system than the one I currently work within. The county had a high economically disadvantaged population and was predominately White. The middle school did not renew the AP’s contract and was advertising for an eager, dedicated professional with educational leadership certification that would reestablish high academic and behavioral expectations. The individual must be highly motivated, organized, and a proponent of best practices in the educational field. I knew I was the perfect candidate for this job. I am a transformational leader. This was my opportunity to let my light shine. Although I was nervous, I knew I was ready, willing, and able to become an AP, utilize the tools I had been given, and make Forest County Middle School a safe place where students could believe, achieve, and succeed at their highest potential. With this attitude in mind and belief in my heart, I went to the interview.

The interview went splendidly. The principal was courteous, knowledgeable, and welcoming. My demeanor was positive, speech articulate, and knowledge impressive. I
gave innovative suggestions to improve Response to Intervention (RtI), creative ideas to support and reward staff, and made sure that student achievement was the focus of all of my answers. I was confident that I had sold myself and my abilities. I knew, the bridge within me knew, that this was the school where I would become more of an educational leader. I would be an AP. All cylinders were clicking because after about an hour and a half, I was walking around the school being introduced as the new AP. I was on cloud nine. I waited at least nine years to hear the words, “Congratulations! We would like you to be our new AP.” I gleefully, almost tearfully, accepted. I will never forget how I felt that Wednesday afternoon riding home from Forest County Middle School. After calling my husband and crying, and my mother still crying, I called my current principal, Mr. Christian. He was overjoyed for me! During my interview with him the year before, he told me I would not be with him long. He saw great things in me and knew I would be getting a job in administration soon. That Wednesday, bridge intact, I could have walked on water. I was supposed to return two days later to fill out all the paperwork and the contract.

Friday morning was a beautiful day! The euphoria I felt could not be diminished by the fight at school, weariness of the long week, nor the stress of upcoming testing. I was on a cloud headed to sign the paperwork for my new job. Unfortunately, it was not to be. When I arrived at the school on Friday, the Principal of Forest County Middle School appeared angry to see me. She was not welcoming. In fact, she asked me why I was even there.

Bewildered, I asked her what was going on? I was here to sign the paperwork as she instructed Wednesday, just two days prior. This stranger suggested that I was
delusional. “I was never offered a job, was not a suitable candidate, and was not leadership material.” Oh, how I needed that bridge! Ms. Christopher, the Principal, calmly and persistently destroyed my cloud. My heart broke. My world seemed to turn upside down. Where was the bridge? Where was my hope? The pain and brutality of the moment was amplified by the total disregard for my feelings. She calmly treated me as if I were an insect daring to interrupt her outdoor party. She swatted my dreams with one humongous splat. I left her office with tears slowly pouring down my face. Quickly, I called Mr. Christian and requested my old job back. He was incredulous, but I really could not tell him anything. I did not know what happened. I only knew I was offered a job and then I was not. Numbly, I drove home, only arriving safely by the grace of God. The bridge…

Later that night, I received a phone call from a member of the Forest County Board of Education who happened to be a member of our church. I did not want to talk to her. I did not want to talk to anyone. I wanted to cry, and yell, and cry and hit something. Instead, I sucked up the tears and talked. After Ms. Naomi listened to me, she informed me that the board was just as perplexed as I was. On Wednesday, she submitted my name, an African American female, as the candidate to go before the board. At Friday’s meeting, that name was mysteriously changed to that of a White male. Furthermore, based on the recommendation, they had researched me and found that I was deserving of the job. At that time, Ms. Naomi asked if I wanted the job. The board would not approve a candidate until speaking with me first. I could not accept this position with a Principal I had no respect for. If the issue was forced upon her, Ms. Christopher could make false claims against me to jeopardize my career. I declined the offer.
Forest County taught me many lessons that night. I learned that I am a survivor. My perseverance has never been stronger. The need to persevere has never been stronger. I perceived that racism and probably sexism played a role in the decision to rescind the offer. The bridge upheld me. Consequently, Ms. Christopher was fired before Christmas. The AP was fired before the end of the school year. Whatever motive Ms. Christopher had for not hiring me did not serve her well. I became an AP at the start of the next year. In spite of her actions, I was rewarded. Doing things the right way, with a pure heart, is a true reward. People can see your hard work even when blinded by greed and hate of others. I carry the bridge with me. I cannot leave home without it. The bridge gives me strength to keep going in the face of opposition and obstacles. The bridge empowers me to step around barriers or remove them altogether.

My journey through educational leadership has brought me to this PhD destination. Yet, I have been at this port before. Twelve years ago, I enrolled in an Ed. D program at another university. In three years, I sailed through the coursework and had written two chapters of my dissertation. Then, life happened. Three weeks into my final class, I had a medical emergency. I went into the doctor’s office on a Tuesday. I came out with surgery scheduled for Friday. In my haste and pain, I applied for a medical leave of absence. Thinking everything was completed, I had the surgery and rested. When I came back to class two weeks later, I realized that I had been dropped from the class for non-attendance. Although I appealed the decision, I could not continue the class. As this class was only offered once a year, I impatiently waited another year to take the final class and finish the dissertation. Four weeks into the class, life happened again. Another life-saving surgery, another refusal of medical leave, I was again a dejected student forced to sit out
a year. Only this time, I was told there would not be many more leniencies for me. In order to complete the program, I would have to start over. Again, I needed to seek the comfort of the bridge experience. Where was the leniency? Where had I been granted grace? Was it fair that I had to start over due to circumstances beyond my control? It would appear that this decision was not about race or sex or class. It would appear that this action was not about humanity. It would appear that this action was about money pure and simple.

Am I not a woman? Am I not a human being? Must I be punished for something like cancer or a tumor in which I have no control? Must I be subjected to humiliation, isolation, accusation, insult, and a different set of rules because I am a Black female? Must I have a need for an external symbol to legitimatize an inward struggle? I must admit to stopping on the bridge. My heavy feet just would not move. Feet that were not stopped with poverty, rape, isolation, racism, delays and denials, were stopped with the continual effort to keep moving. The bridge, always constant, seemed to sway just enough to keep me from taking another step.

As I regrouped and refocused, I could not help but be captivated by the need for the bridge in my life. I could not quench my desire for more knowledge into the plight of African American females in educational leadership. Thus, there was a need for this study. The bridge represents a unique metaphorical undercurrent for this study. It led to an examination of other women who might utilize the bridge in their leadership. Is the bridge a coincidence or a viable and valuable piece of the legacy of African American females in educational leadership? Where does the bridge lead?
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As a new administrator, I remember walking into the building for the first time. It was late in the evening and only the custodians were in the building. I met a woman in her mid–forties cleaning the floor. Enthusiastically, I told her I was the new assistant principal (AP) coming to set up my office. Instead of the welcoming greeting I anticipated and expected, I thought I heard her mumble, “I hope you can read.” Surely, I was mistaken and the emotional mix of my excitement and anxiety had caused a bit of conversational confusion. This custodian, who split verbs and mispronounced words, had not just nonchalantly, offhandedly inferred incompetence by asking if I could read. As I pondered this act that could easily have been construed as an antagonistic mix of disrespect and ominous prophecy, she continued down the hall with a confusing and disturbing smile on her face.

Dauntless, I continued on my trek through the new hallway to find my office, the room that would serve as my home—away-from-home. The ominous and somewhat figurative nature of the custodian’s warning became very literal as I opened the office door—a utilitarian object that can serve as both an exclusionary barrier or a symbol of welcome—only to discover a disturbing mess left by the previous AP. The middle of the floor was covered in objects, which on initial inspection, I determined had previously belonged on bookshelves, in the desk, or in the inner-office bathroom. Undeterred in my task to stake my individual claim, I was enthralled in the mission of organizing and
reorganizing the messy welcome gift when I was surprised to hear giggling at the door. Bewildered, I approached the door to view a collection of custodians, led by the smiling custodian I had met upon entering the building, pointing at and identifying me as a spot on the floor that had to be removed instantly. More giggling ensued from the group as the smiling custodian identified by the others as, Lucy, said, “That’s her. See, I told you” with the same ominous and macabre grin from our earlier encounter. It was then that I was able to gain a more definitive and considered appraisal of my band of judges and jury.

The custodians were a mixture of age and race. They each appeared to be judgmental and resentful. Their examining looks seemed to nail me to the wall as they would nail a blackboard on the wall. I could see disproval in their critical glances. Collectively, they seemed to convey a sense of doom and disappointment. I wondered which of the protected discriminatory practices I was being most judged by – race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age disability or genetic information. In a quick assessment, I determined that the verdict of my competency was based on a faulty combination of age, race, and mental ability. Their assumption was that a young looking African American female who obtained an AP position would likely be more than barely literate. As we stood on either sides of the door, the utilitarian symbol that in this case was so clearly not one of welcome, I remember being astonished by the flood of thoughts, emotions, and questions that engulfed me in that instance. Why, without provocation or evidence had they made the decision to hold such a low estimation of me and my abilities? What events had caused this low degree of expectation and belief? How had I come to be guilty by association with a former AP that I had never met? Would I ever be
able to alter or improve upon this perception of deficit and diminished capacity? If the custodial staff held me in such low esteem, what would be the estimation of my capacity held by the remaining staff, faculty, students, and broader stakeholders?

As I pondered these feelings, I metaphorically transported to the bridge. My spirituality, which is my belief in God, helped me balance my feelings of disappointment, doubt, and embarrassment. Instead of being engulfed in the negativity that seemed to surround me, I remembered the journey and challenges it took me to get to this stage. At that moment, it really did not matter what they thought. In that moment, I felt God whispering to me that he would not have brought me thus far to leave me. I was not just a new AP. I was His chosen vessel to perform his work. With my spirituality as my strength, I left to bridge and walked into my purpose.

Four years after my strange custodial welcome, I would step into a leadership role at another new school. One month into the year, at a Student of the Month celebration, my intellectual capacity was again tested. The packed cafeteria was waiting on baited breath with veiled anticipation for the new AP to massacre the script announcing the names and deeds of their precious script. With descriptions such as enthusiastic, overachiever, superb, and intellectually superior, teachers had unbeknownst to me, attempted to set me up for failure. This tender, petite, Black lady, whom the Board of Education sent here, could not possibly represent the standard of excellence set forth at our elite school. At a school where the teachers were “hand-picked,” their pre-conceived notions of ignorance and deficient capacity believed an ignorant little girl from that delinquent school could not possibly lead. After the ceremony, when the names and descriptions were read clearly, with proper diction and intonation, I was approached by
several parents stunned at my ability to articulate seemingly basic words. Was their expectation for an African American administrator really this low? Did they have preconceptions of racially-based roles and responsibilities? Are African American females in leadership underrepresented to the extent that it creates stereotyping and/or supremacist thinking? The aforementioned incidents started an inquiry inside me that has not wavered in my educational leadership tenure.

I fear that occurrences like the ones in the aforementioned paragraphs happen all too often to African American females in all leadership professions. The field of education is not immune to this environment of negative expectation for African American females who hold leadership positions. Becks-Moody (2004) affirms that African American women administrators must develop coping skills to navigate the challenges faced by racism, sexism, isolation, lack of trust and rapport, and tokenism. In fact, the encounters are unique to the African American female. Based on the limited amount of research pertaining to racism and sexism in academia, especially in higher education, rarely is this impact seen. These intentional or unintentional reactions can be classified in 2010 as racial micro-aggressions.

Dr. Pierce Chester first termed the phrase racial micro aggressions in 1970 (DeAngelis, 2009). According to Pierce, micro aggressions are “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color (Sehgal, 2016). DeAngelis (2009) posit that more recent research, stemming from Chester’s work, have expanded to include microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Respectively, these new displays of micro aggressions include,
but are not limited to, slurs, racial epithets, rudeness and insensitivity toward a person’s heritage, and/or communications that subtly exclude, negate or nullify the feelings, thoughts, and/or experiences of people of color. Basford, Offermann and Behrend (2014) argue micro-aggressions as quick verbal, behavioral, or environmental embarrassments that occur on a daily basis that communicate feelings of inferiority and hostility in regards to people of color, including, but not limited to exclusion from activities or events, subtle insults, and/or indifference to one’s feelings. Based on this research, micro aggressions appear at the center and/or driving force of the African American female’s challenges in educational leadership.

The perception of ignorance stemming from just the color of one’s skin tone or gender for that matter can leave one feeling inadequate, rejected and perplexed. Hochschild and Weaver (2007) states that skin color is connected with attitudes and life outcomes. She argues that skin color is a significant form of secondary marginalization. In fact, she termed the term colorism as the perception of behavior based on the lightness or darkness of skin tone. Hochschild surmised that skin color could dictate social, economic, and cultural characteristics without a word being said. For the purpose of this research, it is important to examine how the darker skin of African American females in leadership can be seen as a barrier to inclusion, acceptance, or even leadership ability. (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007)

What other misconceptions and deficit-based valuations exist when an African American female enters a building as a new leader? How can the African American female overcome misconceptions and perceptions of their leadership style, cope with the pressures of leadership, and extend their leadership tenure? Is it valid to classify these
deficit-based appraisals as racial micro-aggressions? Is hatred or racial micro-aggressions the best terminology to define the educational atmosphere an African American administrator walks into? How might African American females resist and contest the deficit-based perceptions without giving into frustration and battle –mode instincts thereby reducing the angry Black woman stigma in order to lead effectively? Does religious beliefs or spirituality come into play as a protective factor? Do African American females possess a spiritual aspect that provides them with the strength and conviction necessary to persist in educational leadership? Are these questions a part of a broader issue or challenge that can be attributed to and explored as a social justice matter?

Magee (2016) asked the question, “Why is educational leadership so White?” This is an excellent question when exploring issues of social justice. Yet, the question can easily be, “Why is educational leadership so male?” or “Who is encouraging African American females to be educational leaders? How can we develop and maintain African American females in educational leadership?” If racial micro aggression exists, how can an African American female cope in an area in which people think so little of her? How can African American females cope in an arena of racial micro aggression? Is there a phenomenon amongst African American females to cope and inspire each other in educational leadership? What ramifications does spirituality as a means to lead have on educational leadership? How is this topic a social justice issue? How is this discussion a cultural matter? What does this all have to do with leadership or curriculum in education?
Purpose of the Study

The aforementioned questions framed the rationale for this research study. The researcher’s status as a self-defined, spiritually situated African American female in educational leadership serves as a basis for this research inquiry. Although it appears to be centered on educational leadership, I am interested in using this research to transform curriculum as it relates to social justice, African Americans, and females in education. This study seeks to explore the ways in which social justice, culture, race, spirituality, resilience, and cross-cultural complications affect the ability of African American females to serve effectively in educational leadership roles. For the purpose of this study, the researcher will define social justice, examine social justice through an educational leadership lens; relate social justice to the theoretical framework of the Endarkened Feminist Theory (EFT) and how it affects African American females in educational leadership; and finally explore the concepts of African American female leadership and social justice through the lens of spirituality as the coping or resilience mechanism.

In order to research this line of inquiry, I used the ProQuest and EBSCOhost educational research databases. With these databases, I researched full text journals regarding African Americans females, educational leadership and spirituality. African American females and leadership produced 21,755 results in ProQuest. The results dwindled to 2,021 results when spirituality was added to the search. 3,506 articles appeared when I researched spirituality and African American females. Of these citations, there were very few that connected the three concepts with any depth to the researcher’s satisfaction. Similarly, EBSCO host produced 12 citations for African
American females and educational leadership. When the additional topic of spirituality was included, no results were found.

Based on my findings, this topic seemed to be omitted from the literature and thus a constituency to be studied. The study was guided by the overarching lens of spirituality, specifically how African American females cope in educational leadership roles. Included in this inquiry are complementary themes such as do African American females possess a spiritual aspect that provides them with the strength and conviction necessary to persist in educational leadership? Is there a phenomenon amongst African American females to cope in educational leadership?

How can the African American female overcome misconceptions and perceptions of their leadership style, cope with the pressures of leadership, extend their leadership tenure? Shulman (2005) conjectured educators incorporate a distinctive pedagogy when philosophizing regarding leading structure. Shulman (2005) argued certain non-negotiable traits be found in the psyche of a leader. These guiding principles empower leaders to transform pedagogical knowledge into action. In essence, he challenged educational leaders to know, do and be. Shulman posits leaders possess a deep understanding of complex practices, ethical conduct, higher order thinking, and political principles, model the practices, principles, and conduct by performing them on a daily basis. In addition, he discussed self-governance that can be cultivated by watching the leadership practices of others. With the guidance of professional mentors, educational leaders can effectively appraise instructional strategies and curriculum that meets diverse needs of students while facilitating a culturally responsive environment conducive for learners of all ages. Professional mentors can assist new or emerging leaders with the
signature pedagogy assimilation (Shulman, 2005). Mentors will be discussed in chapter
two in the research as it pertains to African American females in educational leadership.
Shulman’s assertions correlate with the standards of excellence outlined in the doctoral
program of the Tift College of Education at Mercer University. The conceptual
framework provided to students build upon the ideals of John Dewey and Lee Shulman
empowering thousands of Mercerians who will transform the field of education with
research, educational insight, and authority. The quest for knowledge, personal and
professional curiosity, and desire to make a difference in the curriculum field will
challenge many bright minds to open the avenues of discussion and forever change the
way in which we view leadership. This dissertation study is a prime example of this
transformative thinking.

Madsen (2008) argued the case that the very exclusive nature of feminine
experiences makes female leaders need female protégés. With regards to racism, sexism,
and being ostracized and isolated, this unique marginalized group can collaborate to cope
with issues like work and family structure. The advantage of having a mentor of the same
gender reinforces the notion that successful leadership can be achieved. When a mentor
makes a mistake in approach, demeanor, problem solving or public relations, the leader
can internalize and adjust so that he/she does not make the same mistake again (Madsen,
2008). Aldridge (2008) suggests that mentorships strengthen the individuals and guard
against damaged psyches.

Jacobs (2014) hypothesized that effective educational leadership could be
maximized through the coaching and mentoring of educational leaders. In her research
analysis for her book, first year administrators, instructional coaches and teachers were
utilized to support, encourage, direct, and guide teachers and administrators alike. One of the participants shared that internship opportunities, like job shadowing, shaped his leadership style by demonstrating perseverance. Another participant said having the assistant principal model calmness in all situations greatly impacted her. A third participant was emphatic in stating that, while her mentor modeled calmness, professionalism, appropriate attire, discipline with dignity, and built relationships, the lifelong advantage of her internship was that the mentor exhibited integrity. Prior to serving as the mentor, the assistant principal insisted on complete honesty. This relationship building technique supports the reciprocal relationship argument and beauty of trust in a partnership. If the participant had not participated in mentoring, she/he would never have learned that tactful honesty is not rude and can be refreshing to parents, teachers, students, and other administrators. Honest dealings/straight talk in education is valuable because of its scarcity. Without mentoring and coaches, the aforementioned leaders would have still become leaders. The mentorship experience altered them into transformational leaders that will reach out and give back by mentoring others. Thus, the cycle of inspiring educational leadership is a circle not a straight line (Jacobs, 2014).

Jacobs (2014) and Madsen (2008) agree most mentors are ordinary people that respond to crisis and/or people in extraordinary ways. These leaders do what feels and seems right to them to enhance student achievement. Whether the leader demonstrates positive or negative traits, teaching, modeling, and coaching still exist. It is up to the inexperienced or desiring leader to rise to the challenge and develop his/her personal style (Jacobs, 2014; Madsen, 2008). African American women in educational leadership appear to find their mentors in unlikely places.
Madsen (2008) stated, “There is a scarcity of supportive sponsors and mentors among women in educational administration as well as executive positions across all professions” (p. 157). In response to this dilemma, colleagues and peers become role models. Similar to mentors, colleagues and peers can provide much needed boosts to self-esteem. Likewise, observing colleagues and peers can help one personalize or adjust his/her leadership philosophy, style, or goals. As students learn from students, adults learn from peers. Situational leadership provided by colleagues, peers, and students proves to be a valuable learning tool. Colleagues and peers also provide critical feedback, whether positive or negative, to direct the pedagogical knowledge of the participant. In addition, being in the environment of colleagues provides opportunities for mentoring and leadership. The meaningful learning connections that peers and colleagues provide are essential to building effective leaders (Madsen, 2008).

Madsen and Shulman agree that mentorships and collegial relationships are needed in the educational leadership of African American females. The need stems from the unique position the African American female represents in the educational leadership arena. It makes me as a researcher circle back to the inquiry of why mentors and support from colleagues are so important. My thoughts and research circle back to micro aggressions hindering, preventing, and expelling the African American female from leadership roles.

Is it valid to classify deficit-based appraisals as racial micro-aggressions? Is hatred or micro-aggression the best terminology to define the educational atmosphere an African American administrator walks into? How can African American females cope in an arena of racial micro-aggression? Is spirituality a viable coping mechanism?
DeAngelis (2009) hypothesizes that racial micro aggression is a phenomenon in which people inadvertently relay messages of prejudices, imply demeaning assumptions and/or insult people of color on a daily basis. “Social psychologists Jack Dovidio, PhD, of Yale University, and Samuel L. Gartner, PhD, of the University of Delaware, have demonstrated across several studies that many well-intentioned whites who consciously believe in and profess equality unconsciously act in a racist manner, particularly in ambiguous circumstances (p. 42)”. While racial micro aggression may seem uncomfortable to the subconscious offender, the emotional implications on the recipients are still being examined (DeAngelis, 2009). As such, spirituality may be the item needed to soothe the emotions and help the recipient maintain civility.

How might African American females resist and contest the deficit-based perceptions without giving into frustration and battle –mode instincts thereby reducing the angry Black woman stigma in order to lead effectively? Although it is evident that African American educational leaders need family, peers, colleagues, and mentors to enhance her leadership, one of the most intriguing aspects of coping for them occurs through spirituality or faith. Garner and Laskin (2011) posit the church was the only institution in the Black community with authority and credibility.

The church was the first audience for Black youths. Therefore, spirituality is as much a part of the African American community as struggles, marginalization, and injustice (Garner & Laskin, 2011). Using spirituality as a lens to lead is a new phenomenon in leadership, education, practice and research. Dantley (2003) argues leaders who practice the tenets of faith-based leadership understand the multi-faceted demands of leadership, and yet still find the intestinal fortitude to aggressively deal with
the issues in an uplifting and supportive way. Fostering community unity and renewal, the spiritual leader sees oneself as a part of a major plan, a divine plan from a higher being. Spirituality integrates the science of consciousness with personal critical awareness (Dantley, 2003).

What kind of physical, mental, and persistent stamina grounded in resilience must it take to survive and thrive in an arena that rejects one automatically based on no other criterion than skin color? Zimmerman (2013) argued the conceptual framework of the resiliency theory in which some youth develop into healthy adults in spite of less than ideal circumstances. Resiliency involves, but is not limited to, behavior problems, mental distress, abuse, social, cultural, and environmental issues. Resiliency focuses on the protective or positive factors that promote self-efficacy and self-esteem that help youth overcome negative impacts. For the purpose of this study, the resiliency theory can be seen as an underlying theme. For example, mentors and the church are protective factors that enhance resiliency. Succeeding against all odds, learning to believe in oneself, and/or utilizing the metaphorical bridge are all examples of resiliency.

What type of protective factors are necessary to envelop African American female administrative leaders in order for them to persist in their service and stewardship desires? Tillman (2008) posits the African American community sees leadership as a chance to transform the community through education. The notion is the role of the black church and faith of one’s people intertwine to elevate the race and provide a plethora of opportunities for both educators and students alike. Tillman (2008) argued the legacy of Brown versus Board of Education Court Case of 1954 is that Black people encourage and strengthen each other through education. While achieving education, faith is the conduit
of matriculation. African Americans balance the struggles and temptations of a non-marginalized society through religion. Religion is the backbone of the African American community and the cornerstone of progress, movement, faith and education. Without religion/spirituality, equal rights could not have become mainstreamed into today’s educational arena (Tillman, 2008).

Reed and Johnson (2010) cited 69.9% of African Americans are spiritual and religious beings, producing leaders that possess spiritual attributes in their leadership style. This religious leadership is systemic of a marginalized society overcoming prejudice and creating change by any means necessary. Faith in the midst of overwhelming odds is a clear indicator that God or a higher power directs one’s path. This unyielding faith allows the Black leader to focus on the task at hand, not on the disrespect or perceived dissatisfaction of his/her leadership. Reed and Johnson (2010) suggest education and spirituality were inalienable rights for African American students, including the adult learner.

Mattis (2002) argued there is a psychological link between religion and spirituality, coping, and understanding the lived experiences of the Black woman. Based on the religion of Christianity, the Black woman has traditionally used the church and the Bible as a transgressive and transformative force to overcome the ills of a chauvinistic and racist society. The Bible as a spiritual weapon possesses literary guidelines, symbolic of a blueprint to treat people with dignity and respect. The mantra “love thy neighbor as thyself” has resonated within the community and reveals itself via the instructional leader. The Bible allows the African American woman to emulate the passages of
scripture within her own wilderness experience of isolation, ostracism, and pain (Mattis, 2002).

Female educational leaders are constantly balancing the needs of home, work, and school. Jamison (2015) refers to this triple balancing phenomenon as tri-intersectionality. The pivot in the balance for many is spirituality. Spirituality is the lens through which sociopolitical struggles are seen (Mattis, 2002). Dillard and Okpalaoka (2011) postulate spirituality is the necessary pendulum of race, class, sex, and gender worldwide. Spirituality negates the negative impact that the aforementioned issues have on a person. A single force of balance, insight, and consciousness, spirituality brings a reverence and focus to the lives of those who chose to embrace the philosophy of love, life, eternal rewards, and a supreme being. Through spirituality, the African American woman can cope with the injustices of society while remaining driven, compassionate, and competent. For many women of color, spirituality travels throughout the heart, mind, and soul of the person, being its lifeblood (Dillard & Okpalaoka, 2011). In order to adequately communicate the plight of the African American female in leadership, a unique perspective must be acquired. This perspective will be acquired by viewing educational leadership through the lens of spirituality.

Does religious belief or spirituality come into play as a protective factor? Do African American females possess a spiritual aspect that provides them with the strength and conviction necessary to persist in educational leadership? An examination of the coping skills of women in leadership, created an inquiry into the spiritual aspect of women in leadership. Spiritual or purposive leadership may reveal a coping mechanism for African American women who happen to be educational leaders. Klenke (2003)
conjectures encompassing spirituality into leadership roles to empower the leader and to infuse a degree of authenticity of self into their position. Pauchant (2007) proposes that spirituality in the workplace is based upon quadrants of development and input. The more one utilizes spirituality, the more worker output. Contrary to popular belief, separating church and state is not only difficult at times; it is also not always the best solution. Cavanagh (2007) states spirituality in the workplace leads to coercion and favoritism, dividing the workplace. Cavanagh suggests business people compartmentalize work, family life, and faith. This separation results in the narcissistic belief, individuals are responsible for what happens, God will not assist them, and the responsibility is his/her price for working. Can a leader who is spiritually –situated successfully ease out or disregard one strand of self or is it possible to combine spirituality and educational leadership? What effect, if any does a leader’s spirituality have on her leadership style?

Are these questions a part of a broader issue or challenge that can be attributed to and explored as a social justice matter? An examination of the notion of social justice sheds some light on this subject.

The Notion of Social Justice

Giroux (2014) suggested that hatred stems from ignorance, mistrust, and fear. Opotow (2005), utilizing Webster’s dictionary, defines hate as:

an intense hostility toward an object (as an individual) that has frustrated the release of an inner tension (as of a biological nature); to feel extreme enmity toward or regard with active hostility; antonym of love; extreme dislike, aversion, and enmity experienced often toward an equal with a possible accompanying feeling of grudging respect.
Royzman, McCauley and Rozin (2005) argue that hate is the propensity to shy away from an unpleasing object of awareness, sadness caused by some peripheral entity, and/or the intense, unwavering desire to annihilate an object, person, race, or gender. Baumeister and Butz (2005) suggest that hate is a word that makes one think of evil or anger. Much debated, there is no single definition for hate in which researchers can agree. Yet, there are many plausible explanations for its existence.

Royzman, McCauley and Rozin (2005) hypothesize hate as a multifaceted response to stimulus over time. Whether episodic, motivational as in the Holocaust, or simple rage, hate manifests itself in intention to harm or intimidate people because of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or other minority status. The lack of compassion one feels for a person or group contributes to pre-judging and/or social, cultural, and political marginalization of said person or group. This social bias is a living, breathing entity corrupting institutions such as schools, churches, government, and industry.

The moral and societal implications of this travesty fall under the auspice of social justice (Giroux, 2014). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) posit social justice is the moral onus one has to treat all people with respect, dignity, and common courtesy. Whether economically or socially, people in authority or positions of power, have a moral obligation to ensure that the inalienable rights of the United States Constitution are upheld for all people regardless of race, gender, creed, political affiliation, or beliefs. In religious/spiritual terms, marginalized people would be termed the least, lost, and left out. The practice of social justice includes, but is not limited to, empathizing with the marginalized group, searching for answers, and becoming an advocate for those that are being ostracized to empower the aforementioned people and restore their dignity. In
addition, social justice seeks to create an atmosphere by which those disregarded will become their own activists (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Westheimer (2015) hypothesized the role of citizens to promote socially conscious students for the advancement of society. Students that are socially conscious practice the notion of social justice, fostering equity and respect. Citizens are not mutually exclusive in their role to improve community relations. Social justice citizens examine the structure of society by investing time in critical thinking regarding the collective work of individuals for a common purpose. These reflective and introspective practices allow students of all ages to examine how institutions, governments, and communities work, and provide meaningful dialogue to enrich the practices for all people. Community agencies, such as schools and churches, often provide the catalyst for social, educational, cultural, and political change. Social justice education begins with these community institutions and generalizes to society as a whole (Westheimer, 2015).

Bogotch and Shields (2014) postulated the term 'social justice' incorporates the need to recreate a systematic approach to justice without compromise. This postulation proposes the need for change, modification, and adaption. Proponents of social justice are change-agents. The change must occur on a surface level, within the person’s own practices, and extend to the society as a whole. The concrete and tangible concept of injustice demands that society address the spectacle of social injustice to ascertain the root cause and minimize its effect. Social justice challenges and demands citizens to ignore stereotypes, invoke democratic philosophy, and embrace diversity (Bogotch & Shields, 2014).
Leithwood (2005) conjectured that successful educational leadership starts with a sense of purpose to positively impact student learning. Thorough analysis of effective educational leadership revealed a need to develop people and relationships. This drive to focus on people and relationships reinforces the need to examine social justice. Organizations that collaborate to build school cultures and climate seek to incorporate community and affect community relations. They display emotional sympathy and empathy and passionately demonstrate a need for equity in education. These organizations also set values for social justice and enhance the environment, creating an atmosphere where students can prosper, thus positively enhancing student achievement (Leithwood, 2005).

As researchers and educational leaders, the lens through which social justice is examined and explained is multi-pronged and critical to the success of future leaders. Bogotch and Shields (2014) incorporated a plethora of beliefs within the social justice leadership arena. They include, but are not limited to:

1) Social justice leadership is founded on a humanitarian and generalized view of society.

2) Social justice leadership focuses on the shared experiences of leader Social justice leadership focuses on the shared experiences of leaders that stimulate change in perceptions and bias, leading to cultural misconceptions and hatred.

3) Social justice leadership is the vehicle that turns discussions into practice and application.

4) Social justice leadership starts with self-awareness of culture and extends to community, and then society.
5) Social justice leadership is leadership practices that acknowledge the power
gleaned from collective diversity, wisdom from a body of learners, and sensitivity of
cultural, political, and economic awareness that impact society.

The need for social justice is evident in gender equity and educational leadership.
Gupton (2009) noted that women make up 57% of the educational workplace and hold
more advanced degrees than their male counterparts, yet women are dominated by males
in educational leadership roles. Similarly, women who manage to break the glass ceiling
of administrative roles are paid less than males in comparable positions. The stereotypical
beliefs that men are natural born leaders and women are weak-minded, emotional
creatures keep the disparity of female educational leaders current. Capodilupo, Nadal,
Hamit, Lyons and Weinberg (2010) argue gender micro-aggression supports the theory
that women’s influences are not as respected as men. Robnett, Anderson and Hunter
(2012) suggest that non-traditional women, career women as opposed to housewives,
threaten men’s status in the workplace and gender inequalities in the workplace are
justified. In addition, women desiring male-dominated positions are often seen as
intimidating, overbearing and aggressive (Gupton, 2009). The aforementioned
statements affirm the need to examine social justice, gender equity, and treatment of all
women, African American women in particular. Thomas, Hacker and Hoxha (2011) posit
women experience sexism for being female while African American women experience
the “double jeopardy” of sexism and racism. Furthermore, they face discrimination at the
hands of service providers, at work or school. “African American women also face petty
harassment (e.g., being picked on, lied about, having complaints made against them), and
sexual harassment” (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011, p. 531).
Jean-Marie (2013) argued Black female administrators are questioned, examined, and challenged as instructional leaders. Inquiries such as, “Why is she so angry?” “Is she trying to be White,” “Can she not soften her approach?” and “Who does she think she is?” are discussed daily during the course of her tenure. The notion that the African American female in educational leadership lacks pedagogical knowledge, is overly emotional, highly sexual, lacks femininity and sound judgment plague even the best leader. In addition to the mutilation of her abilities and character, the African-American woman is consistently “put in her place” when her vision, beliefs, or policies stray from the status quo. This heavy scrutiny is a symptom of double discrimination, gender equity, and racism. Being Black and a woman places her in a distinctly marginalized group (Jean-Marie, 2013). (One may notice that the researcher has utilized African American and Black interchangeably. While census data alludes that Black and African Americans are one and the same, they are viewed, weighed and convey altogether different standpoints in the field of social science. Research on this topic addresses Black and African American as the same entity. For the purpose of this study, the researcher self identifies herself as African American. An awareness exists within her that being Black denotes the pride and strength of the Civil Rights Era. Yet, in reclaiming a heritage denied her forefathers, she embraces being an American, a whole person (as opposed to three-fifths of a person as noted prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964), and being ordained as a queen as her Heavenly Father is the King of Kings. She personifies herself as being Black and African American. She remains empowered and self-determined, to rise above negative stereotypes, cope, and break the standards and barriers that keep her as only a Black or African American educational leader. She is simply herself.
Theoretical Framework

Lederman and Lederman (2015) hypothesized that the function of a theoretical framework is to answer 1) What is the problem, and 2) How can you realistically solve the problem. The framework is the “structure” of problem through theory and literature. Delicath and Buckley (2011) argued that the theoretical framework is the theories that support the underlining concept in a study. Furthermore, the framework starts with a broad idea that narrows in scope as it is explained. In a phenomenological study, the theoretical framework is the viewpoint or voice of the participants.

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2011) assert African American women have traditionally had to speak from the single viewpoint of being a woman or being African American. They suggest that until 2010, epistemologies or theoretical frameworks considered the voice of the Caucasian female as the authority on females and Black males as the authority on Blacks, respectively. Although these focus groups articulated the social, emotional, cultural and political plight of African Americans or women, only parts of the story were accurate.

Hull, Scott, and Smith (1982) argued Black Feminists have been active since 1974. The focus of their research and book was to discuss African American women as a politically disenfranchised group. They believed that Black women could not exist until they began to identify who they were. They felt it was time for the “embattled” Black female to unite, confront racism, and dispel the myths about Black women. Hill, Scott, and Smith argued that survival for the Black woman included preserving the body, mind, and spirit. In addition, they argued that the voice of the Black woman become “necessary
bread”. People should hear the struggles and strength of the Black woman. Thirty plus years later, this research seeks to convey those same struggles and strength.

Patricia Hill Collins wrote Black Feminist Thought published in 2000. She captured the voices of women who successfully silenced their own voices after the daily trauma of being the “lesser” woman as an African American female. The initial analogy of this book was that as they grew older, their world widened. Unfortunately, their place in that world was one of ridicule and pain by women who did not look like them, who thought they we less than because of the color of their skin. In order to cope with the humiliation, they withdrew within themselves, becoming silent and invisible. In the second edition of the book, the focus shifts to knowledge being powerful, transnational freedom and global economies. Yet, the Black woman still struggles for social empowerment. Black Feminist Thought was their voice. It articulated their struggle as only they could tell it. While the views of the aforementioned women captured the imagined experiences of the group, the truth, as they saw it, of the struggle remained a silent voice. The cry for social justice for these women, many like them, myself included is the reason for this topic, this research, at this time (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011).

Dillard and Okpalaoka (2011) posit a framework distinct from the traditional commentary of the White, Black or African feminist. Chilisa and Ntseane (2010) affirm that generalizations are made regarding the condition of African women, men and children. Ignoring the revised culture and people of Africa, traditional narratives are seen as the norm and voice of Africans. Nevertheless, the African feminist framework according to Chilisa and Ntseane is permeated with healing methods. The role of the researcher is to transform a wounded, oppressed girl into a spiritual, dominating woman
while promoting harmony in the community. African feminists are interwoven in the thinking and being of non-Western feminists (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010).

Okpalaoka and Dillard (2011) argue that women of African descent experience the same oppression, created by gender, class, and racism, as Black women. (For the purpose of this study, Black and African American are used interchangeably). Okpalaoka and Dillard (2011) postulated that the vicious cycle of slavery permeated generational lines. Likewise, the spirituality and faith of African women were interwoven in their knowledge and history, consciously and unconsciously. The similarities between the struggles of African American women in the United States and the women of African descent legitimatized the struggle and prompted Dillard to create an epistemology that spoke to, and for, women on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean (Dillard & Okpalaoka, 2011).

Although women in continental Africa fought for independence, they quickly learned that independence and women’s rights were not synonymous. Economic opportunities were diminished along with the limited power and authority that independence gained. Moreover, gender discrimination reared its ugly head. Dillard (2011) posits that oppression and culture were linked much like fear and violence or poverty and despondency. Dillard and Okpalaoka (2011) espouse that centuries of slavery and colonialism left African women without visual, cultural, or verbal representation. Class, gender, and race cross territories that paralyze continents and leave more women victimized and voiceless. Feminists like Aidoo, Abena, Busiam Sofola, and Ogundipe-Leslie had to advocate for cultural identity as well as race. Racism, sexism, and classism
transcend regional locations proving that oppression of the African-American woman is universal.

Jones, Wilder and Osborne-Lampkin (2013) theorized that the theoretical approach of Black feminist thought emerged from the exclusion and marginality of Black women. Within and outside the boundaries of the Academy, black feminist adheres to the ideas of activism, voice and resistance. Furthermore, the aforementioned researchers argue that the black feminist ideology accentuates and validates the power of the Black woman. In addition, they felt only the Black woman could dignify and articulate the reality of the Black woman (Jones, Wilder, & Osborne-Lampkin, 2013).

Angel, Killacky and Johnson (2013) posit that the Black feminist lens looks at the oppressive political structures that obstruct the credibility of knowledge possessed by Black women. In Black Feminist Thought, Patricia Hill Collins asserts that within the U.S., Black intellectuals often struggle to justify the credibility of the knowledge they possess due to the oppressive processes by which knowledge is validated. She argued that knowledge validation processes work to suppress Black intellectual knowledge. These processes are oppressive because they tend to reflect the interests of the dominant group of elite White American males.

Taylor (2001) suggested that the goal of Black feminism is to create a political movement that not only struggles against exploitative capitalism and what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham calls the ‘racialized construction of sexuality,’ but that also seeks to develop institutions to protect what the dominant culture has little respect and value for black women’s minds and bodies (pg. 19).
In addition, Taylor (2001) asserted that a majority of women have feminist foundations and practice the fundamentals of feminism. However, modern women reject the stigma associated with being labeled a feminist. Dillard (2011) visualized “black power” as knowing your roots, embracing your religious or cultural heritage, and uplifting the race by action, thought, and deed (p.201). These sentiments support Taylor’s postulation.

Okpalaoka and Dillard (2011) reiterate that Black feminism is about more than the title. The purpose of Black feminism is to comprehend and advocate for human rights across racial, tribal, ethnic and national differences. Since the Black feminism standpoint incorporates the total woman from more than a dichotomous and exclusive perspective, its tentacles embrace race, class, gender, and spirituality. Anna Julia Cooper, whose work was one of the precursors of Black feminism, suggested that Black women must choose to be Black or feminist, wealthy or minority, and/or downtrodden or victorious. One, by virtue of birth, cannot be successful, Black, and a woman by Cooper’s standard. Conversely, Dillard (2011) postulated that instead of minimizing race or gender or class, society should connect these arenas to find common ground and eliminate causes of oppression (Dillard & Okpalaoka, 2011). Although Black feminism incorporates spirituality, it does not utilize it as a coping mechanism for African American females. Furthermore, it does not focus on the African American leader’s voice. Therefore, the EFT best captures the sentiments of the researcher and the voice she seeks.

In order to shed some light on the disregarded African American female, the EFT became the most recent and articulate culmination of research. Dillard’s (2000, 2006) notion of EFT is research from the standpoint of responsibility for the very population
explored and served in inquiry, a woman’s “transnational” way of knowing and being in research from an intellectual spiritual perspective. From a social justice perspective, EFT incorporates race, gender, class, and cultural identity. In addition, it adds the spiritual dimension of a race that prizes religion and/or spirituality as the cornerstone of the community. Dillard and Okpalaoka (2011) theorize the oppression faced by Black women, while diverse in nature, still remains unique in comparison to other women of color and white women. The shared experiences of these women are best viewed through the lens of EFT (Dillard & Okpalaoka, 2011).

For the purpose of this study, I believe the EFT lens will best express the voice of African American women in educational leadership because it includes religion or spirituality. EFT was compared to the resiliency theory as well as the social justice theory. In addition, it captures the voice of the very women who know and experience their plight. All leaders face hardships, dilemmas, challenges, and opposition. Leaders utilize various components to help them cope with the stress and/or pressures they face in the educational arena. Dillard and Okpalaoka (2011) suggest that EFT honors the sacred way Black women approach a task. The nature of oppression unique to Black women empowers them as women and leaders to respond to opposition with grace, dignity, respect, prayer, and resiliency. These traits are key components of challenging discrimination, recognizing diversity, and/or combating unjust policies and practices. Spirituality centers some Black women emotionally, enabling them to cope with and compartmentalize injustices while remaining focused, efficient, and professional (Dillard & Okpalaoka, 2011). Patton and McClure (2009) argues that “often overlooked, racially
isolated, misrepresented, and misunderstood, African American women often turn to spirituality as a transformative, regenerative, and uplifting space” (p. 42).

The researcher’s status as a self-defined, spiritually situated African American female in educational leadership serves as a basis for this research inquiry. Furthermore, the exclusion, bigotry and chauvinism displayed towards African American females in educational leadership are social justice issues that cannot be ignored. In fact, the transformative nature of the researcher will not allow voices to be silenced, situations ignored, and discrimination to continue without shining a light on the darkness. Ignorance and fear plague the community and society as a whole in regards to these kindred souls. The cry for social justice is a never-ending gong in the ears of the researcher. Only through the power of education can this sound be silenced.

Influences upon the African American Educational Leader

One can describe an administrative position in educational leadership as a two-edged sword. Polka and Litchka (2008) posit educational leadership is comparable to Dickens’s novel, A Tale of Two Cities. One minute the leader is seen as a savior, a long overdue solution, and an answer to the community’s prayer. The next minute, those who thoroughly praised the administrator can turn against everything the leader has ever done. One moment, one delicate and/or critical decision can turn a dream job into a nightmare. Leadership is an oxymoron that is rarely understood by those who are not in the trenches. Garner and Laskin (2011) argue leaders carry repressed hurt and/or humiliation from childhood into their present leadership roles creating a ruthlessness and determination that others may find incomprehensible. Due to the compelling and often criticized nature of administration positions, administrators are generally isolated, and/or ostracized, from
the non-leadership population; yet, in competition with his/her counterparts (Polka & Litcha, 2008). This statement is especially true for the African–American female.

Jean-Marie (2013) postulated Black female administrators are heavily scrutinized in all aspects of their leadership practices. From pedagogical knowledge, to femininity, to aggression, the Black female’s every move is questioned, examined, screened, and dissected. In addition to the dismemberment of her abilities, the African-American woman is constantly “put in her place” when her vision of policies and/or procedures is different from her counterparts. This scrutiny socially, emotionally, and professionally isolates her from her faculty and/or other administrators, even those sharing the same hue. Jean-Marie (2013) cited two African American principals who stated that their White colleagues wanted them to be unsuccessful as leaders to the extent that they extracted themselves from fellow administrators. When one does not trust those in close proximity, one tends to withdraw. Aldridge (2008) captures the spirit or perhaps plight of the African American stating,

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world – a world which yields him no self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings: two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (p. 65).
In order to survive in the educational leadership arena, painted so eloquently by Aldridge’s reiteration of W. E. DuBois, leaders, with the emphasis here on African American females, must acquire skills to remain effective, focused, and balanced. Polka and Litchka (2008) suggested that prosperous leaders practice self-control, remain enthusiastic, establish confidantes, maintain his/her principles, and develop reflection time. When leaders find strength in family, friendships, mentors, and/or faith, student achievement is affected. The following analysis conveys some of the factors that influence educational leaders and contribute to his/her guidance (Polka & Litchka, 2008).

Madsen (2008) hypothesized that the supremacy that culminates from mutual trust, respect, partnership and dialogue cultivates energy and supports educational leadership. Sergiovanni (2005) articulated leaders could not be independent of reciprocal relationships. In fact, relationships where both parties encourage, uplift, and advise each other are essential to the growth and command of the leader. Furthermore, reciprocal relationships are an investment in social capital and community (Sergiovanni, 2005). Educational leaders must develop a network of people to inspire and support them with integrity and fidelity. Without trust, one cannot release the frustrations of racism, sexism, and gender basis one feels. In addition, the complexities of personnel, professional learning, personal and professional challenges need to be expressed without censure, fear of retaliation from confidantes and/or colleagues, nourishment for gossip, or verbatim analysis. In order to confide in another person, leaders must be able to trust whomever they choose to confide in. Leaders who cannot, or will not, release the “toxic poisons” that contribute to stress, do not survive the cutthroat world, the double-edge sword of the position of leadership (Madsen, 2008).
Families are usually the first layer of support for educational leaders. Madsen (2008) postulated many people encouraged the women involved in her studies. In fact, familial support gave the participants confidence to apply for jobs and continue amidst adversity. Family provided reminders of the participant’s strengths and abilities at times when assurance was needed (Madsen, 2008). Families can provide a sound emotional and social support, empathy for resistance, whether socially, spiritually, or culturally; a sense of self; and a directional focus. Hargreaves and Boyle (2015) would generalize the abovementioned support as uplifting. Something as simple as laughing at a situation, providing a kind word, and/or pushing one in a new direction, encompasses elevating leaders. Furthermore, this inspirational leadership provides the rationale or purpose for why and how one leads. Families do not simply highlight one’s success from point A to point B. Family celebrates the journey of one’s leadership (Hargreaves & Boyle, 2015).

Families are generally the first and only source of complete trust for the leader, as confidentiality is a huge factor in personnel issues. When there is a crisis within the school, the administrator is generally the first person contacted. Although the leader must respond immediately, at some point the leader must express grief and/or frustration. The fall out or emotional breakdown of the leader can only occur with the people one is most familiar with – family. For some leaders, this is the greatest source of comfort. Conversely, family can be the biggest source of frustration when they do not understand the role of the leader or the complexities of a situation. Some family members question why one would choose to fight such a gigantic, frightening war against illiteracy, poverty, and indifference to student achievement for parents and children who are ungrateful at best, and resentful at worst (Madsen, 2008).
Howard (2007) posits in communities, especially where the population does not look like, or see representations that think or act like the administrator, one must establish trust. An honest examination of practice, perceptions, and expectations of all stakeholders must occur. In addition, issues of social justice and dominance, or lack thereof, must be addressed. Since trust is critical to establishing relationships which lead to a climate of academic excellence, the initiation must be sincere, positive, and inclusive. Instead of looking at a school, system, or community as being intentionally biased or racist, the leader must embrace the challenge as an opportunity to develop new competencies and pedagogies. Leaders are as diverse as students are economically, socially, and culturally. Consequently, the approach to build trust and relationships should be a unilateral effort. Colleagues, mentors, and supervisors can assist in making this transition seamless (Howard, 2007).

Colleagues and peers can provide friendly competition to educational leaders. Peers can challenge ones thinking, provide additional perspectives. This reciprocal relationship enriches the pedagogical knowledge of both the colleague and the leader. Of course, this relationship must entail honest communication and mutual respect to maintain collegiality. Madsen (2008) suggests a colleague, peer, or superior can help one find his/her leadership voice. Grogan (2015) suggested mentoring is a paradox. The leader wants and needs guidance with a passion. Conversely, the leader does not want to be judged as having flaws or to be exploited. Nor, can the leader explain or convey the unequal gender or racial expectations that make the leadership experience diverse. This hidden educational agenda or yardstick compels the African American, specifically the female, to embark on a solidarity journey of faith (Grogan, 2015).
Research Questions

This research seeks to answer the questions: 1) How do African American females cope in educational leadership, and 2) does a phenomenon exist in African American females that influences their educational leadership and allow them to cope?

Limitations and Delimitations

There is limited literature connecting all three aspects of this inquiry. African American women in leadership roles who view spirituality as a lens to lead exposes a gap in the literature. In addition, the EFT is relatively new. EFT is an emerging framework. Thus, the literature is based on feminist thought from twenty years ago.

Another limitation to this study is that spirituality is an intensely personal topic. Rarely is spirituality discussed in the workplace or educational arenas. Those people who do voice their opinions may be very particular in the way that spirituality is discussed for fear of social, political, and/or career ramifications. In addition, the truth may be downplayed or omitted for these same reasons.

Like spirituality, the experiences one has in educational leadership can be deeply personal.Sharing a humiliating experience or one in which the leader is portrayed in a negative light is not any easy task. The leader may feel victimized all over again by speaking about it in a public or private setting. Even with the promise of anonymity, the leader may be reluctant to be vulnerable. Therefore, the full extent of the oppression or injustice cannot be conveyed. Similarly, the leader may not be able to articulate the feelings of injustice, moments of betrayal, and/or feelings of shame, inadequacy, or rage caused by events or people.
The researcher may capture some of the sentiments expressed from the research without fully understanding the implications of the event. This can lead the reader to have doubts of the phenomenon, question the validity of the research and/or feel a certain distance from the research. These limitations not only affect the research but the audience as well.

One delimitation of the study is that African American females in leadership are a concise group of people. This boundary makes it difficult to make generalizations and draw conclusions to the population as a whole.

Definition of Terms

In order to provide clarity for the reader, the following terminology will be used throughout the research.

Definitions to View Educational Leadership through the Lens of Spirituality

African American

Rastogi, Johnson, Hoeffel, and Drewery (2010) argue the United States Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is the authority that classifies federal data regarding race and ethnicity. African American and Black, used interchangeably, signify any Black descendants of Africa. “The Black racial category includes people who marked the ‘Black, African American or Negro’ checkbox” on the census. This group includes, but may not be limited to, people of Jamaican, Kenya, Nigeria, Haitian, and Afro-Caribbean descent (Rastogi, Johnson, Hoeffel, & Drewery, 2010, p. 2).

EFT

Okpalaoka and Dillard (2012) theorized the EFT as one that interweaves race, class, gender, and nationality with culture and feminism. EFT abandons traditional
ethnic and political stereotypes regarding the African American woman while expanding on the principals of feminism, spirituality, and race. EFT pinpoints the African American woman and enunciates her epistemological position through her expression (Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2012).

*Spirituality*

Spirituality is an awareness of a force, a consciousness outside one’s self and/or the belief in a power that alters reality (Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2012).

*Social Justice*

The practice of social justice includes, but is not limited to, empathizing with a marginalized group, searching for answers, and becoming an advocate for those that are being ostracized to empower the aforementioned people and restore their dignity. In addition, social justice seeks to create an atmosphere by which those disregarded will become their own activists (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

*Social Justice Leadership*

Social justice leadership focuses on the shared experiences of leaders that stimulate change in perceptions and bias, leading to cultural misconceptions and hatred. Social justice leadership is the vehicle that turns discussions into practice and application (Bogotch & Shields, 2014).

*Summary*

For the purpose of this study, the researcher will define social justice, examine social justice through an educational leadership lens, and relate social justice to the theoretical framework of the EFT and how it affects African American females in educational leadership. The study will be guided by the overarching theme of the
research: viewing educational leadership through the lens of spirituality, specifically how African American females cope. Included in this inquiry are complementary themes such as the role of spirituality in the professional lives of African American female leaders, the resilience of African American female leaders, how does male dominance versus traditional role of women fit into EFT, how “Whiteness” viewed in relation to “Blackness”, and how does the lack of voice of the African American female relate to the endarkened feminist theory. In addition to the aforementioned questions, the researcher hypothesizes that using spirituality as a method of leading may be a phenomenon amongst African American females as a coping method.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In order to research this line of inquiry, I used the education database with ProQuest and EBSCOhost being my primary research engine. With these databases, I researched full text journals regarding African Americans females, educational leadership and spirituality. African American females and leadership produced 21,755 results in ProQuest. The results dwindled to 2,021 results when spirituality was added to the search. 3,506 articles appeared when I researched spirituality and African American females. Of these citations, there were very few that connected the three concepts with any depth to the researcher’s satisfaction. Similarly, EBSCO host produced 12 citations for African American females and educational leadership. When the additional topic of spirituality was included, no results were found.

We usually think of privilege as being a favored state, whether earned or conferred by birth or luck. Yet some of the conditions I have described work systematically to overpower certain groups. Such privilege simply confers dominance because of one’s race or sex (McIntosh, 1989).

Human beings exhibit a blatant sexuality that can mesmerize the opposite sex creating power and subservient behavior. Foucault (1990) suggests that this power, stemming from sexual beings, create a negative correlation and power struggle. The appearance of a strong presence, usually in the masculine gender, conjures an image of control and authority. When an authority is present, the tendency is to obey. Obedience in society dictates supremacy,
compliance, and suppression of rights and needs. The politics of sex dictates how the world is seen and through what lens, theoretically and culturally, people identify (Foucault, 1990).

Foucault (1990) hypothesized the role of the woman was an extension of the role of man regarding intrinsic properties. Accordingly, the systemization of women suggests that men are superior beings, defining sexuality and the status quo. Similarly, the Freudian psychoanalytic theory suggests that in order for males to be “men,” they must reject feminine attributes and the teachings of their mother, in order to exist and conform to the male role in society. Consequently, a young male’s identity is formed by suppressing any tendency to emulate his mother, whether in ritual or symbolic. How then does this mindset define women? If a man must form his opinion of himself through the vilification of women, then the natural response is that man is superior and right when compared to the woman.

The power of sexuality and the dominant sex efficiently ignited the areas of sexism, racism and classism. Taylor, Whittier, and Rupp (2007) postulated the system of gender affects individuals and society as a whole in their book Feminine Frontiers. McIntosh (1989) argued

I see a pattern running through the matrix of white privilege, a pattern of assumptions that were passed on to me as a white person. There was one main piece of cultural turf; it was my own turf, and I was among those who could control the turf. My skin color was an asset for any move I was educated to want to make. I could think of myself as belonging in major ways and of making social systems work for me. I could freely disparage, fear, neglect, or be oblivious to anything outside of the dominant cultural forms. How then does the aforementioned statement define the Whiteness mindset? If the White race must form an opinion of themselves through the denigration of Blacks, then the natural phenomenon is that
Whites are indeed validated as the superior being. Nieto (2012) argues that it is dangerous to declare White as monolithic. Is this a contrast to the Whiteness mindset? How are African Americans, specifically African American females perceived in Nieto’s inquiries? Does her argument mean that African American females are not opposed?

Reddy (1972) wrote the song I am Woman to celebrate and empower women. She reflected

I couldn't find any songs that said what I thought being a woman was about. I thought about all these strong women in my family who had gotten through the Depression and world wars and drunken, abusive husbands. But there was nothing in music that reflected that (p. 24).

Looking for a voice but hearing none, Helen Reddy wrote the liberating song that became a national anthem for feminist. James Brown (1968) belted, “Say it loud, I am Black and I’m proud!” to address the prejudice against Blacks. Written during the Civil Rights Era, Brown simply wanted children to know it was okay to be Black. Each singer sparked national curiosity and awareness for their issue. They became the unofficial political voice for women and African Americans (Brown & Ellis, 1968).

Similarly, Dillard (2007) acknowledged a need for the growing cultural and spiritual diversity not addressed in traditional feminist and/or Black empowerment tradition. Dillard and Okpalaoka (2011) developed an Endarkened Feminist Theory/epistemology that “embodied a distinguishably different cultural standpoint, located in the intersection/overlap of the culturally constructed socializations of race, gender, and other identities and historical and contemporary contexts of oppression and resistance for African American women” (p.13). (Although Okpalaoka was cited in this article, the researcher did not find any other
research on the Endarkened Feminist Theory by her). Cynthia Dillard is the creator of the Endarkened Feminist Theory; therefore, her name will be cited throughout the research. How does the Endarkened Feminist Theory (EFT) apply to the current state of the African American woman in leadership? Why is EFT the best framework for this study?

This chapter explains the questions, themes, and concepts of African American females in educational leadership, as well as, spirituality as it relates to the EFT. Berry (2010) espouses that the life experiences of women of color provides a challenge to the status–quo, White middle/upper class, male heritage. Knowledge is acquired when those non-White voices are heard and felt and there is acknowledgment that cultural and national history is more than a single point of view (Berry, 2010).

Endarkened Feminist Epistemology

In order to establish an understanding of the Endarkened Feminist Theory, a history of feminist theories is included in the literature. While each of these theories can articulate the need to study some aspects of African American educational leadership, only the EFT conveys the leader’s voice, purpose of the research, and spirituality.

Okpalaoka and Dillard (2012) examined the dominant discourse of African Americans, who in traditional narratives are viewed as inferior underachievers in research and education. Linked to race and class, the African American student is generally portrayed as less successful than their White counterparts. The implications of racial identities theories, the process by which individuals develop attitudes and beliefs about racial group members, suggest that Black females are “matriarchs (overly aggressive and unwomanly), mammies (obedient servants) and welfare recipients (lazy, poor, and dependent on welfare state entitlement)” (Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2012, p. 124). Consequently, these labels justify and
solidify the oppression of African American women. These sentiments also create a racial disconnect across political, social and cultural lines (Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2012). Taylor (2001) states, “A feminine body does not always possess a feminist consciousness” (p.21). For these reasons, the researcher examined feminist, Black feminist, critical race, endarkened feminist, and gender equity theories. bell hooks (1994) demanded acknowledgement of a culture, pedagogy, and practice that celebrated the diversity of mind, thought, and being that encompasses the feminine and African-American essence. (The lower case of rendition of bell hooks denotes self-acknowledgment of racism and injustice). The triangulation of race, ethnicity and gender serves as a basis for current studies involving the plight of women (Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Feminist

Pursuant to the Freudian perspective, historically women were merely shadows of a man, devoid of rational thought and born to breed and fulfill sexual needs. Friedan (1983) postulated that Sigmund Freud created an essence of feminist mystique that inarguably enunciated the role of women in society. In her research, Friedan found that Freud’s misconception regarding the frustration of women in the household, insecurity of the male with his role as the head of the household, and the emotional repression of women in society fueled the notion women are the weaker sex. Consequently, she argued that Freud was brilliant in other areas, but totally missed the mark on women’s issues. Freud’s idea “freedom from repressive morality to achieve sexual fulfillment, chained women to an old image, prohibited choice and growth, and denied them individual identity” (Friedan, 1983, p.104). Women were depicted as salacious, wanton creatures good for nothing but sex, procreation, and entertainment (Friedan, 1983).
The Freudian misnomer caused a revolution called Feminist. What does it mean to be a feminist in today’s society?

Being feminist has been defined (a) by a woman’s willingness to endorse the label “I am feminist” for herself (self-labeling), (b) by the beliefs an individual espouses and (c) by a combination of the adoption of the label and endorsement of the beliefs (Yoder, Tobias, & Snell, 2010, p. 9). Yoder, Tobias and Snell (2010) present many feminist perspectives that surmise an attitude of being a feminist. Similarly, Henley et al (1998) suggests that the Feminist Perspective Scale (FPS) is sociopolitical, involving conservativism, liberalism, radicalism, socialism, culturalism and womanism (Henley, Meng, O'Brien, McCarthy, & Sockloskie, 1998, p. 348). In addition, women who are synonymous with feminism believe in self-efficacy, hold high self-esteem, value scholarship, reject the typical image of beauty, and express themselves with sexual boldness and/or openness. Traditionally, feminists were thought to be homosexual, but this stereotype is not endorsed by research. Arguably feminists celebrate the precepts of equal treatment, equal pay, and valuing women’s unpaid labor (Yoder, Tobias, & Snell, 2010, p.10). Taylor (2001) argued that the feminist movement only examined the world through the lens of middle-class Caucasian women, omitting the initiatives by women of color for freedom, justice, and equality. With the aforementioned beliefs of feminists, one cannot accurately look at feminist in terms of color only.

Dillard and Okpalaoka (2011) suggest that White feminists quickly dismissed the contributions of Blacks prior to the Civil Rights Movement. Walker (2007) hypothesizes “a womanist is a female who practices self-love, celebrates the wonders of being a woman, and commits herself to the expansion of feminist views”. Giles (2010) cited the accusation of Womanist Katie Cannon that White religions organizations ignored the human rights and
personalization of African American through religion. This argument supported the
definition of womanism.

Conversely, the Western ideology of womanism differs from the definition rendered
by Giles. Combined with the traditional African philosophical world view, Chilisa and
Ntseane (2010) hypothesize that Africana women exist in a world free of oppression. Still,
the Africana woman is too entrenched in the societal framework to embrace her own reality,
womanism. For example, whatever a woman sees when she self reflects is ignored. Her self-
worth is measured by the way in which others see her. “A person ‘is’ through others
(p.619).”

American feminist Judith Butler had similar thoughts on the views of women. Butler
(2011) expanded the notion of a person “is” through others regarding their gender (B. Think,
personal communication, June 06, 2011). Butler (1990) questioned the distinction between
feminism and sex/gender. In addition, she argued the language of the categories of sex. Does
the penis singularly represent masculinity? Is “feminine” the only sex represented within a
language that conflates the female and the sexual? Butler’s response (1990) was the
controversial Your Gender is Performative dialogue. Butler suggests that gender should not
be based on distinguishable characteristics, but how one acts in day-to-day interactions.
Butler reformed Freud’s notion of how a person’s identity is modeled in terms of the normal.
She postulated that “gender is performative, as opposed to the idea that gender is an
expression of some sort of innate or natural gender.” (Butler, 1990, p.xi). Butler questioned
what is natural or normal in regards to feminine and masculine roles. Butler suggests that
people merely play roles to be acceptable in society. Likewise, our sexual preference is
indicative of choice.
Butler (1990) theorized that debates over gender would lead to a crisis within the female community terminating feminism. Using the research of Beauvoir and Sartre, Butler argued that women, viewing themselves through masculine roles, rebelled to establish themselves as authorities of power. This phenomenon led to anxiety as women questioned or mocked their male counterparts by using the very weapons that gave them power. A simplistic glance, once utilized to flirt, became a weapon, a look of disdain, mockery, or outright defiance. Similarly, women used their bodies to communicate and or emulate the male to make men uncomfortable in their heterosexual skin. In a sense, women, taking on a masculine persona challenged the status quo by performing as males. By displaying male tendencies, do the aforementioned women cease being female? Moreover, can the single title woman embrace all that is female? Butler challenges the notion that woman is a comprehensive term that surpasses or incorporates gender, tradition, sexual and regional discourse. In fact, the word woman cannot differentiate gender in a cultural or political manner. Gender evolves much like society (Butler, 1990).

Leitch (2010) acknowledged Gayle Rubin as a pioneer in the field of academic feminism and queer theory. In 1980, Rubin suggested a division in the field of feminism regarding issues such as “sexuality, especially pornography, sadomasochism, butch/femme roles, and sex work” resulting in a move from activism to academic feminism (Leitch, 2010, pg. 2373). Women wanted a change in society starting with institutions of higher learning. Feminist views seemed to be the title for any issue pertaining to women, including but not limited to, poverty, disease, politics, homosexuality, abortion, contraception, pre-marital sex and sexuality. Rubin supported the notion of sexual essentialism, sex/gender systems, and post-structuralism. Heavily influenced by Michel Foucault’s History of Sexuality (1976;
trans.1978), “Thinking Sex” rejects the notion that lesbianism is based on a sliding scale. In this regard, Rubin aligns herself with feminists and lesbians who have promoted a progressive sexual politics, including bell hooks, Cherrie Moraga, Joan Nestle, and Esther Newton (Leitch, 2010).

bell hooks (1994) articulated her views on new feminism in Outlaw Culture. The bold statement of her chapters “Power to the Pussy We Don’t Wannabe Dicks in Drag,” and “Talking Sex Beyond the Patriarchal Phallic Imagery” effectively, if not eloquently, defined the modern feminist view (p. 9). hooks (1994) examined the notion that Europeans were able to move beyond race and racism to worship the Black Madonna, and questioned why the United States could not do so. In addition, she suggested that women wanted to see a serious, radical, mature woman like Madonna, “embody a subversive feminist spirit and fight the power to end sexism and sexual oppression” (p. 11). bell hooks argued that “within today’s cannibalistic market economy the willingness to consume homoerotic and/or homosexual images does not respond to a cultural willingness to stand against homophobia or challenge heterosexism (p. 14).” What is the modern feminist willing to support? Visual images of sex and the woman as a highly sexual being defy the very tenets of feminism. bell hooks articulated that White people could not visualize Madonna as being Black because of racist and sexist views. Madonna represents purity and innocence conflicting with the stereotypical image of the Black woman. Likewise, the blond, blue-eyed woman is the only representative that truly radiates femininity and holiness. The aforementioned sentiments seem to ignore feminist principles. The idea of the new feminist embracing and/or accepting this hypocrisy as the status quo is ludicrous.
In addition, Leitch (2010) postulated that bell hooks captured the essence of the Black woman’s query with her shared experienced in the book Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics. In it, hooks alleged that the discourse of postmodernism theory is dominated by White male intellectuals and is ignorant of the needs or concerns of Black people. Postmodernism, led by theorists Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard, opposes modernism in that it emphasized and celebrated variety in environment and culture (Leitch, 2010). hooks contends that the differences and uniqueness of experiences articulates Postmodern Blackness. The omission of Black female voices in postmodern theory suggests that black experiences are of no consequence to society possessing a lack of intellect and cultural awareness. Thus, the need for the EFT and current research articulating the shared experiences of African-American women are confirmed.

A critical aspect of feminism that the researcher cannot overlook is sex segregation. Traditionally, the United States has a system of sex-typing, meaning that jobs have been stereotypically male or female. Taylor, Whittier and Rupp (2007) posit that sex segregation was created by society to keep women at home and out of the work force. Men were seen as the provider. Consequently, women were seen as helpmates and/or menial laborers. Themes of sex segregation still exist in society today. Therefore, women especially African American women, are still overlooked in the professional arena.

The modern, marginalized plight of women has developed a need for more exploration into feminism. The feminist mindset has been upgraded due to societal changes. Included in the research for women are endarkened, decolonizing, and indigenous feminist qualitative research. Evidence and postulations in these areas can be found in the Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies (HCIM). Critical to HCIM, written in 2008, is the
“embrace of indigenous and critical research epistemologies that foreground spirituality, including feminist, native, indigenous, endarkened and Black feminist, spiritual, hybrid, Chicana, and border mestizaje among others” (Dillard & Okpalaoka, 2011, p. 148). For the purpose of enlightenment, the researcher wanted to acknowledge the other avenues of research in this arena. However, a discussion of aforementioned topics may lead to interest away from the phenomenon of this study.

Black Feminist

The theme of the Black Feminist movement was women of color differ from their White counterparts in every arena, including, but not limited to, race, class, sex and politics (Leitch, 2010). Research and scholarship omits the emergence of essentialism. Leitch (2010) alleged that essentialism was the notion that certain individuals share an unwavering belief that they are bound together by that specific belief. Barbara Smith, author of Toward a Black Feminist Criticism, was most noted for the idea of essentialism in her defense of the African American woman and lesbian society. Smith argued that “regardless of the issue of essentialism, she share[s] an objective political status with other Black females in this country, a political status not substantially altered by economic or educational variables” (Leitch, 2010, p. 2222). Whether or not this statement is accurate and/or supports the notion of feminism, Smith challenged the absence of the Black female voice in the feminist arena.

Okpalaoka and Dillard (2011) reiterate that Black feminism is about more than the title. The purpose of Black feminism is to comprehend and advocate for human rights across racial, tribal, ethnic and national differences. Since the Black feminism standpoint incorporates the total woman from more than a dichotomous and exclusive perspective, its tentacles embrace race, class, gender, and spirituality. Anna Julia Cooper, whose work was
one of the precursors of Black feminism, suggested that Black women must choose to be black or feminist, wealthy or minority, and/or downtrodden or victorious. One, by virtue of birth, cannot be successful, Black, and a woman by Cooper’s standard. Conversely, Dillard (2011) postulated that instead of minimizing race or gender or class, society should connect these arenas to find common ground and elimination causes of oppression (Dillard & Okpalaoka, 2011). Although Black feminism incorporates spirituality, it does not utilize it as a coping mechanism for African American females. Furthermore, it does not focus on the African American leader’s voice. Therefore, the Endarkened Feminist Theory best captures the sentiments of the researcher and the voice she seeks.

Spirituality as It Relates to the Endarkened Feminist Theory

Giles (2010) emphasized the Black community had a reverence and respect for religion and spirituality and social cohesion. Cozart (2010) incorporated the notion espoused by Cynthia Dillard that the Black church community was the place where spirituality was developed and displayed via every aspect of living. Essentially, the backbone of the African American family was the church (Giles, 2010). Respecting the history of spirituality in the African American culture, EFT incorporates faith as a means to lead, serve, and work. This concept is sacred in the African American community. Okpalaoka and Dillard (2012) emphasized the difference between sacred and spirituality implying that spirituality is “to have a consciousness of the realm of the spirit in one’s work and to recognize that consciousness as a transformative force in research and teaching” (p.134). Okpalaoka & Dillard (2012) went on to describe sacred as reverence of the traditions.

For the purposes of this research, self-definition would involve the perception of the African American woman as a leader, African American woman, and community leader. The
research would include, but not be limited to, her intellectual, spiritual, professional, and personal pursuits. The research will include examining the collective and individual experiences for the purpose of articulating this phenomenon.

Howard-Hamilton (2003) asserted that research attempting to understand the African American woman should be based on her racial and gender oppression as well as the spiritual, personal and social contexts. He further noted theories should overlook the stereotypes and inequities that create barriers to educational and economic parity and focus strictly on the realities of African American women and/or women of color. Although the core of Black and endarkened feminism recognizes that women, through their shared, lived experiences were empowered, the Endarkened Feminist Theory best suits this research in terms of the African American woman.

Dantley (2003) argued that one must be able to empathize with the marginalized group that is being researched in order to bring clarity and purpose to the study. Dantley utilized the purposive leadership research from Cornell West to support his analysis. Aggressive pessimism describes a coping mechanism used to redirect negativity into a positive mindset. African Americans have overcome insurmountable hate, demeaning acts, and overwhelming acts of violence by finding a glimmer of love and hope in despair and gloom. Similarly, school leaders find hope and encouragement in poverty, apathy, and disenfranchisement. Redirection of thought and uniformity of purpose, combined to incorporate purposive leadership (Dantley, 2003). The aforementioned sentiments support Thompson’s (2004) assertions that leadership of this magnitude involves faith, humility, situational reality, and spirituality.
Fairholm (2011) was the first person to correlate leadership and spirituality. He suggested that spiritual leadership embodies self-development through the awareness of spiritual, emotional, and academic pursuits. Leaders employing spirituality take a moral approach to lead and be led. Spiritual leaders use purpose, integrity, and responsibility as the theoretical framework to guide his/her decision-making. Spiritual or purposive leadership may reveal a coping mechanism for African American women who happen to be educational leaders. Fairholm (2011) argued that a person is guided by his/her actions. What one believes is the most influential factor in his/her life. Therefore, one’s spirituality should not be suppressed in the workplace. In fact, he postulates that spirituality generates behavior that controls how one sees policy and procedures, overriding managerial or peer pressure.

This analysis suggests there is limited literature connecting all three aspects of this inquiry. African American women in leadership roles who view spirituality as a lens to lead exposes a gap in the literature. In addition, the Endarkened Feminist Theory is relatively new. EFT is an emerging framework. Thus, the literature is based on feminist thought from twenty years ago.

Spirituality as a Lens to Lead: Is it a Phenomenon?

Creswell (2014) reasons “phenomenological research uses the analysis of significant statements, the generation of meaning units, and the development of what Moustakas (1994) called an essence description” (p.196). Qualitative research tells the story of its participants. Using multiple sources of data in the participant’s environment, qualitative research paints a picture of events, patterns, practices and phenomenon that explains how something happens or why something happens (Creswell, 2014). For the purpose of this research, the researcher first observed the domain of educational leaders who are African American women that
incorporate spirituality in their leadership style. Secondly, the researcher found common themes and patterns within these leaders that distinguish them from other races and organizations. Lastly, the researcher immersed herself within the study as a part of the phenomenon and articulated why this research is of value to herself, the community, academia, and society as a whole.

The goal of the transformative methodology is to reinforce community goals, polish and enhance the image of the ostracized group, and turn their struggle into a learning and empowering opportunity. Emphasizing social justice, the transformative paradigmatic view seeks socio-cultural metamorphosis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In addition, it offers an examination of cultural awareness, the infrastructure of power and equity of races. The transformative paradigm speaks to marginalization and injustice, arenas not yet explored but potentially viable (Mertens, 2007). Specifically, this research and methodology is designed to transform the perceptions of the African American female leader, create social action by empowering leaders to lead in a more efficient way unique to their culture, and to minimize a gap in the literature. Viewing spirituality as a lens to lead triangulates African American females, educational leadership and spirituality thereby forging a new path in educational research. If, indeed, a phenomenon exists, other educational leaders can utilize a spiritual view of educational leadership to empower a faculty, school or district.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Is there a phenomenon that exists within African American females that allows them to cope with the demands of educational leadership? This study seeks to answer this inquiry through the use of a qualitative phenomenological method. The research behind this dissertation grew from personal interest in the status of African American women in the role of academic leadership, the perspective of African American female effectiveness in that role, and the coping strategies that African American females employ when dealing with the pressures of leadership and the external perceptions of their ability to lead with effective capacity.

An examination of the coping and resiliency skills of women in leadership created an inquiry into the spiritual aspect of the women in leadership. Spiritual or purposive leadership may reveal a coping mechanism for African American women who happen to be educational leaders. Klenke (2003) conjectures encompassing spirituality into leadership roles to empower the leader. Can a leader successfully combine spirituality and educational leadership? Does the spirituality of the leader transform the leadership style making her more or less effective?

The purpose of this study is to assess if African American women utilize spirituality as a lens for educational leadership. The study will be guided by the overarching theme of the
research: viewing educational leadership through the lens of spirituality, resiliency, and Endarkened Feminist Theory, specifically how African American females cope in an environment. Included in this inquiry are complementary inquiries such as do African American females possess a spiritual aspect that provides them with the strength and conviction necessary to persist in educational leadership? Is there a phenomenon amongst African American females to cope in educational leadership?

In the previous chapters, I discussed the problem of the misconceptions and perceptions of the African American Leaders in Educational Leadership, the notion of social justice, and influences of the African American female in Educational Leadership. This chapter presents the design of the research study and the methodology. In the Research Design and Rationale section, I discuss research tradition used to explore the study and my choice of qualitative phenomenology as the methodical form of inquiry used to explore and analyze the gathered data of my study.

In the Participants, Setting, and Sample Study section I discuss a sample cluster of African American females in leadership roles. The participants in this study are African American females in leadership roles. For the purpose of this study, leaders are defined as any African American female in the educational arena that holds an administrative, team leader, department or grade level chair role. In addition to being African American females in educational leadership, the participants averaged twenty years in education with age ranging from thirty-five to sixty-five. The participants in this study were chosen based on convenience and availability as well as demographics. All participants live and work within a 50 mile radius of the researcher. Participation was voluntary, as participants were contacted outside of work. To eliminate potential bias, potential participants were not privy to the pilot
study. Similarly, the potential participants were only asked to provide responses to research. The researcher did not divulge the nature of the study. In order to keep each participant’s confidentiality, she will only be addressed by a pseudonym. Only the researcher will review all data.

For the purpose of this research, purposeful sampling was utilized. Maxwell (2005) argues that purposeful sampling or purposeful selection is deliberately utilizing a specific setting, persons, and/or activities to provide data unique to the research. In order to ascertain data about African American females in Educational Leadership, convenience sampling is the astute choice since this category is difficult to gain access to and/or previously rare in educational studies (Maxwell, 2005). The convenience sampling consisted of five African American females and educational leaders who hold or have held positions of leadership. After the initial pilot study and focus group, three individuals were randomly selected to participate in the face-to-face interviews for the purpose of articulating the phenomenon. These sample voices represented to the population as a whole (Creswell, 2014).

In the Data Collection and Instrumentation section I discuss the need for and rationale behind conducting a pilot study, data collection, and instrumentation. The researcher conducted a pilot study involving African American female administrators. The purpose of the pilot study was to help define and/or reshape the research questions to adequately and accurately address matter to be researched. The researcher contacted the appropriate school system to acquire approval to conduct research as well as sought and received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. From this study, data were disaggregated to determine if research questions were valid and related to the topic of the research. Based on the responses
received from the pilot study, the researcher posits that the questions were valid and related to the topic of the research. Data from the pilot study substantiated the need for the study.

Data Collection

The researcher obtained permission through the IRB to conduct a pilot study. The purpose of this pilot study was to help define and/or reshape the research questions pertaining to Viewing Educational Leadership through the Lens of Spirituality: How African American females cope. The pilot study was sent via email listserv to thirty African American female leaders in three surrounding counties. Participants volunteered to complete the survey. This survey, using Survey Monkey as the questionnaire, consisted of eleven questions. The feedback from the pilot study also informed the researcher that this line of inquiry was a viable avenue to pursue.

Research Study

For the purpose of the research study IRB approval was requested and granted. Eleven participants from the researcher’s home district were chosen to complete the same questions as the pilot study. These ladies were not a part of the pilot study. In fact, no information was given to these participants prior to the survey. Upon receiving the email of survey via Survey Monkey, the researcher received feedback from several participants who were hesitant to proceed due to the sensitive subject of spirituality. Participant seven printed out the survey and brought it to my school. During a face-to-face meeting, she expressed concerns in sharing her feelings. I cannot take this survey. You are asking me questions about my spirituality. I do not discuss my spirituality, my faith with my colleagues. It is not something I discuss or address in the workplace. At this point, the researcher explained that the data utilized from the survey would only be seen by her. In addition, participant seven
was shown the Survey Monkey screen that the researcher saw when she received the results. The participant could clearly see that the data received from Survey Monkey only showed comments, not names. In addition, the participant seven was told that any names used would be given pseudonyms. Armed with this knowledge, the participant decided to take the survey and participate in the study.

Another participant was also reluctant to take part in the survey. Participant eleven did not want her results to be anonymous. She had definite views regarding spirituality in the workplace as well as the stigma of being an African American female in educational leadership. She stated, I feel it is about time someone asked how I felt being in a position where I am constantly abused and disrespected. If people only knew the hell I catch for being ME. I have to stay prayed up just to make it through a day. I cannot wait to have my say. The researcher politely explained that the purpose of this research was so that she could tell her story. In this instance, the researcher was capturing her voice and sharing it. After the dialogue, this participant also decided to participate in the study.

Focus Group

From the eleven women who participated in the survey, five women were chosen for a focus group. The focus group consisted of the first five females to respond to the survey. The focus group was designed to discuss the shared experiences of the group in a non-threatening, supportive environment. Initially, the group was reluctant to speak, to share in front of each other. The researcher broke the ice by introducing herself to the group and sharing the commonalities amongst the group. This strategy opened the dialogue regarding the shared leadership experiences, perceptions, misconceptions, coping strategies and spirituality.
From the focus group, three participants were chosen to participate in face-to-face structured and unstructured interviews. Purposeful sampling was used to choose the three participants. Three is an adequate sample size because more voices would add so many perspectives that the focus is lost. During the face-to-face interviews, participants were very relaxed, talking freely. The fact that participants were relaxed allowed them to share more details because they felt their ideas were accepted and valued.

Data Collection Overview

For the purpose of this phenomenological study, data were collected via structured and unstructured interviews, audio recordings and observations. Simon and Goes (2011) argue that phenomenological studies attempt to comprehend human behavior by self-reported data (Simon & Goes, 2011). Similarly, Creswell (2014) suggests that phenomenological studies are the lived experiences of individuals that share a situation or cause presented from the point of view of the people studied (Creswell, 2014). The researcher conducted the pilot study via Survey Monkey. Survey Monkey provides a quick, meaningful feedback while providing the participant with anonymity. The pilot study was sent via email to the administrators in the participating counties through Listserv. Creswell (2014) proposes, this testing is important to establish the content validity of scores on an instrument and to improve questions (Creswell, 2014). Similarly, Mertens (2015) proposes, “pilot studies are often necessary in qualitative studies to help provide a framework and research questions” (p. 469).

The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher. For the purposes of taping and transcribing, the researcher used TapeACall, Hyper:TRANSCRIBE and Hyper:RESEARCH. TapeACall is a cellular phone application that records interviews.
Hyper:TRANSCRIBE lets you listen to the recording as it types. Hyper:Research helps you code the transcribed data in a manner that makes sense. Creswell (2014) suggests a preliminary code for researchers testing a theory or phenomenon. After the researcher discovers commonalities, participants sharing the “phenomenon” will be selected for face-to-face interviews and recordings. The researcher interviewed three people for the final phenomenological study. The research data determined the adequate number of voices represented (Creswell, 2014).

Mertens (2015) stated that “[t]he opportunity to see things from your own cultural bias is recognized as a potential problem in qualitative research,” and maintained that research should be clear of cultural bias (p. 445). The researcher ensured credibility by being as transparent as possible during the entire study. The names of the participants were changed to protect their identity. Recording the interviews certified that the participant’s voice is presented with integrity and fidelity (Mertens, 2015).

Bourke (2014) states the nature of qualitative research sets the researcher as the data collection instrument. It is reasonable to expect that the researcher’s beliefs, political stance, cultural background (gender, race, class, socioeconomic status, educational background) are important variables that may affect the research process. Just as the participants’ experiences are framed in social-cultural contexts, so too are those of the researcher (p. 2).

The aforementioned sentiments speak to the positionality of the researcher. The researcher’s positionality in this study consisted of African American, woman, educational and spiritual
leader. Using spirituality as a lens to lead is a personal preference that appears to be a part of an occurrence amongst African American women in educational leadership.

In the Data Analysis section, I discuss utilizing the EFT to articulate the shared experiences of African American females in academic leadership roles. Incorporating EFT, the participants articulated her impressions, feelings, and perspectives on the phenomenon of African American women using spirituality in academic leadership. In addition, the African American female introduced her lived experiences via storytelling. The data were triangulated by the pilot study survey data, observations, field notes, interviews, and recordings. Survey Monkey, TapeACall, Hyper:TRANSCRIBE, and Hyper:RESEARCH were the tools to record, transcribe and code the data making triangulating the data possible.

After the pilot study and initial interviews, a follow-up inquiry was conducted to ferret out more information and to provide more clarity and validity to the research. The follow up questions are listed below:

1. How has your race or gender caused you to depend on your faith/spirituality?
2. Name at least two experiences where your race influenced unfair treatment of you.
3. Do you feel African American females in educational leadership are respected to the same degree as African American males, White males, or White females? Why or why not?
4. Has your faith/spirituality extended your tenure in educational leadership? If so, how?
5. Has your spirituality made you at peace with your position?
6. You were previously asked which factor is your biggest source of strength. What did you mean by faith?
The answers to these follow up questions were hand coded. From this hand-coded analysis, the researcher segmented the data. Boeije (2010) theorized that researchers group data into distinguishable categories relevant and meaningful to the researcher. This strategy includes organizing data into categories based on similarities and differences. In a sense, segmenting data means discovering trends and assimilating that data into pieces that allow research to be clear and concise (Boeije, 2010). The researcher was able to discover trends in the data hinting at a phenomenon. Trends included but were not limited to, a) the notion of spirituality, b) race and gender as a bearing on how one is treated in educational leadership, c) spirituality is the foundation for productivity, d) faith is the biggest source of strength, and e) educational leadership is the path chosen for them by God.

Summary

Qualitative research tells the story of its participants. Using multiple sources of data in the participant’s environment, qualitative research paints a picture of events, patterns, practices and phenomenon that explains how something happens or why something happens (Creswell, 2014). For the purpose of this research, the researcher observed the domain of educational leaders who are African American women that incorporate faith and spirituality in her leadership style. Secondly, the researcher found common themes and patterns within these leaders that distinguish them from other races and organizations. Lastly, the researcher immersed herself within the study as a part of the phenomenon to articulate why this research is of value to herself, the community, academia, and society as a whole.

As mentioned in chapter one, the goal of the transformative methodology is to reinforce community goals, polish and enhance the image of the ostracized group, and turn their struggle into a learning and empowering opportunity. Emphasizing social justice, the
transformative paradigmatic view seeks socio-cultural metamorphosis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In addition, it offers an examination of cultural awareness, the infrastructure of power and equity of races. The transformative paradigm speaks to marginalization and injustice, arenas not yet explored but potentially viable (Mertens, 2015). Specifically, this research and methodology is designed to transform the perceptions of the African American Female Leader, create social action by empowering leaders to lead in a more efficient way unique to their culture, and to minimize a gap in the literature. Viewing educational leadership through the lens of spirituality triangulates African American females, educational leadership and spirituality thereby forging a new path in educational research. In chapter 4, I present my findings related to viewing educational leadership through the lens of spirituality, explaining how African American females cope. Chapter 5 analyzes the phenomenon of spirituality as a coping mechanism for African American females and the impact it has on educational leadership and the academy.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The research behind this dissertation grew from personal interest in the status of African American women in the role of academic leadership, the perspective of African American female effectiveness in that role, and the coping strategies African American females employ when dealing with the pressures of leadership and the external perceptions of their ability to lead with effective capacity.

The purpose of this study was to assess how African American women utilize spirituality as a lens for educational leadership. The study was guided by the overarching theme of the research: viewing educational leadership through the lens of spirituality, specifically how African American females cope. Included in this inquiry were complementary themes such as do African American females possess a spiritual aspect that provides them with the strength and conviction necessary to persist in educational leadership? Is there a phenomenon amongst African American females to cope in educational leadership?

The research behind this historical perspective grew from personal interest in the status of African American women in the leadership role and understanding the influence of spirituality as a coping mechanism in their leadership role. Blount (1998) compared the number of women in the superintendent’s role from 1910 to 1990. His work substantiates that the overall representation of women in the 1930s has not been equaled (Shakeshaft, 1999).
Shakeshaft (1999) refined earlier work from Blount that had begun to document the historical trends of women in school administration. Blount compared the number of women in the superintendent’s role from 1910 to 1990. His work substantiates that the overall representation of women in the 1930s has not been equaled. In 1930, women in the superintendent’s role were 11% compared to 4.9% in 1990. (Shakeshaft, 1999).

The 1960s -1980s marked the period of the pursuit of equality in education. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 instigated several smaller movements to level the playing field in education. Unfortunately, the Women’s Rights Activity and the Women’s movement had little to no effect on education. In 1972, Title IX of the Higher Education Act, provided gender equity in colleges and universities. In addition, Title IX sought to escalate the number of female administrators in schools. Based on New York Department of Education (1997), it is evident that women remain under-represented in school leadership. In 1996-1997, 88% of Elementary Teachers were women, but only 16% of those were Minorities. Similarly, 46% of Elementary Principals were women. However, 16.5% of those were Minorities. Secondary Teachers were 56% women with 12.4% being Minorities. On a leadership level for Secondary School, the numbers were 23 and 7.9% respectively. These figures demonstrate the underrepresentation of Minorities in New York State. In the same way, Shakeshaft (1999) compared Public School Teachers and Principals by Race/Ethnicity. 84.8% of Teachers were White compared to 7.9% Black. In the same way, 82.4% Principals were White and 10.6% Black respectively.
This historical perspective emphasizes the growth of the female leader in educational leadership. Yet, the African American female is still struggling for parallel growth consistent with her Caucasian counterparts. How are African American females in educational leadership perceived? Are they effective? How do African American females in educational leadership cope with the pressures they face? In this chapter, I will summarize the process leading up to my findings. In addition, I will articulate the findings for the purpose of answering my research questions and demonstrate if a phenomenon exists amongst African American females in educational leadership. As shared in the prologue, my spirituality and reliance on God was essential to my growth, tenure, and coping as an educational leader, African American female and individual. Was this dependence unique to me as an African American female? Did spirituality help me cope uniquely or does it speak of a phenomenon as yet to be studied?

Intrigued by the possibility of exploiting a gap in the literature and exposing a possible phenomenon, I conducted a pilot study involving African American female administrators. In the pilot study, eleven African American females in educational leadership were asked ten questions regarding their beliefs. The researcher conducted the pilot study via Survey Monkey. Survey Monkey provides a quick, meaningful feedback while providing the participant with anonymity. The pilot study was sent via email to the administrators in the participating counties through Listserv. The purpose of the pilot study was to help define and/or reshape the research questions to adequately and accurately address matter to be researched. The researcher contacted the appropriate school system to acquire approval to conduct research as well as sought and received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. From this study, data were disaggregated to
determine if the research questions were valid and related to the topic of the research. Based on the responses received from the pilot study, the researcher posits that the questions were valid and related to the topic of the research. Data from the pilot study substantiated the need for the study.

After the pilot study, five additional African American females in educational leadership participated in a focus group. These five females, who live and work within a 50 mile radius of me, were given a survey of eleven questions to ascertain their beliefs regarding African American females in educational leadership. Although the participants were known to me, the nature of the study nor the participants’ personal beliefs were discussed and/or identified prior to the survey. In addition to being African American females in educational leadership, the participants averaged twenty years in education with age ranges from thirty-five to sixty-five. The ages of the participants and the years in education arena were not a part of the initial survey. These data were obtained in a follow-up inquiry, as discussed in chapter 3, to provide more clarity and validity to the research. The focus group, which was a convenience sampling, participated in structured and unstructured interviews, audio recordings, and observations. After the initial pilot study and focus group, three individuals were randomly selected to participate in the face-to-face interviews for the purpose of articulating the phenomenon. From this hand-coded analysis, the researcher segmented the data.

There were five major themes that emerged from this study: (a) the notion of spirituality, (b) race and gender as a bearing on how one is treated in educational leadership, (c) spirituality as the foundation for productivity, (d) faith as the biggest source of strength, and (e) educational leadership being what God wants for them. These
finding support the phenomenon of viewing educational leadership through the lens of spirituality; how African American females cope.

The researcher utilized semi-structured interviews to elicit data in a manner that supported the participants and guided the discussion. Each participant was asked the same follow-up questions. In the event that an answer was unclear to the researcher, the question was asked again in another manner.

Each woman gave a diverse perspective of spirituality. Although each participant utilized the word “God” in her description, a unified definition of spirituality could not be disseminated from the data. Patton and McClure (2009) suggest that spirituality stems from one’s own experiences and coping mechanisms (Patton & McClure, 2009). This assertion would explain the personalization of the definitions. As stated in chapter one of this dissertation, spirituality is an awareness of a force, a consciousness outside one’s self and/or belief in a power that alters reality (Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2012). The research findings fail to support a need for changing this definition.

All participants in the survey acknowledged a feeling that race and gender had a bearing on how they were treated in educational leadership. Since this line of inquiry was a multiple-choice item, I postulated this quandary needed further development. As such, it became a reflective piece of the semi-structured interview that was recorded and transcribed below. These sentiments will not be discussed at this point to maintain authenticity of the participant’s voice.

As a complementary inquiry in this study, the notion of African American females compartmentalizing aspects of leadership emerged. In the survey, the participants were asked to compartmentalize four areas of their lives and rank them in order from
least to greatest. This open-ended question allowed the researcher to test the hypothesis that God and/or spirituality would be a primary method of sorting responsibilities or priorities. Based on the research survey data, my hypothesis was proven correct.

Faith was listed as the biggest source of strength for the participants. In hindsight, the phrasing of this question seemed to lead the participants to an answer. Faith was implied as the same thing as spirituality. In an effort to eliminate potential researcher bias, the question inquiry was presented to the participants in the interview in a more appropriate manner. The interview participants were asked, “According to the viewing educational leadership through the lens of spirituality: How African American females cope survey, you were previously asked which factor was your biggest source of strength. The choices were family, faith, colleagues, confidence in your abilities, or other. What did you mean by faith? As all respondents answered faith, this question presented in this manner increased the validity of the question and maintained the integrity of the phenomenological study.

Ironically, the pilot study did not reveal this potential bias to the research of this inquiry. The purpose of the pilot study was to shape the questions for the dissertation. It was only through the research process that the researcher could see the potential bias or confusion the participant had. I had no preconceived intention to deceive or confuse my participants. Misconceptions and preconceptions by people can inadvertently shift a response. Thus, proving why this arena of research is invaluable.

The last theme of the research was in that in addition to loving what they do as educational leaders, this particular path was believed to be what God wanted from them.
As the participants’ responses are shared later in the findings, this theme will be articulated.

Three participants were chosen to participate in a semi-structured, follow up interview. For the purpose of this research, three was an adequate sample size.

At the time of the initial survey and consent process, each participant was told that there was a possibility of a follow up interview. My process was to randomly select the first, second, and last respondent prior to receiving any data. Each participant was asked the same initial questions in the follow-up interviews. Based on their responses, additional questions were asked. The stories of these African American females in Educational Leadership are presented below in their unique voices. Each pseudonym was chosen by the researcher prior to data collection as well. The pseudonyms were based on the imagery of the character in the Bible.

Elisabeth

Elisabeth is the youngest of the three African American females in educational leadership who participated in the face-to-face interviews to articulate the phenomenon. She currently serves as Principal in Eden County at the age of 35. Elisabeth comes from a long line of degreed educators. Young, single, and gifted, Elisabeth spends most of her time in the hallowed halls of her school. Childless, she considered each child in her school her “baby.”
Naomi

Naomi is in the twilight of her career having been an educator for 32 years. She also works in Eden County as an Assistant Principal. A mature woman of 52 years of age, Naomi’s students are treated with the same respect as her biological children. Obtaining her doctorate was the last item to accomplish on her teaching “bucket list.” Although more than qualified, Dr. Naomi has no desire to move further up the educational chain by becoming a principal. Of the three African American educational leaders, Naomi has faced the hugest hurdle to become an educational leader, coming from a background in Health and PE.

Lois

Dr. Lois is the most seasoned member of the participants. Having been an educator for 38 years, she has recently retired to serve God in other areas of her life. Dr. Lois is a widow who ruled firmly, with a smile. Her motto is “love the hell” out of those you employ. Her tenure as Principal provided her many mentoring opportunities.

The Notion of Spirituality

Each woman gave a diverse perspective of spirituality. Although each participant utilized the word “God” in her description, a unified definition of spirituality could not be disseminated from the data. Spirituality is an intensely personal relationship. Although themes such as self-awareness, interconnectedness, and relation to a higher power were mentioned in the survey, these themes meant different things to each participant. The concept of spirituality or faith was contingent on each woman’s upbringing, beliefs, and experiences. For example, spirituality, as examined in the prologue through the bridge metaphor, was my escape. Spirituality was my strength and support, the core of my
being. As I escaped to the “bridge”, I experienced a feeling of emancipation. To each participant in the study, this bridge may represent a similar experience, but not exactly the same.

The lack of a consistent definition of spirituality could be viewed as a limitation to the study. Yet, I posit that this lack of consensus reiterates the unique voice of females, specifically African-American females. It would seem like spirituality is “coded in the DNA of the African-American female” generationally-speaking. Spirituality was the foundation of survival in past generations. In fact, the belief and/or reliance on a higher power seemed to be passed down from generation to generation. Going to church or some type of worship service was the norm rather than the exception.

Although a uniform consensus of spirituality could not be established, all participants, even in the pilot study, argued that they could not do their job and maintain their career without their faith in a higher being. Dr. Naomi hypothesized, in our culture; we tend to utilize the term faith and spirituality interchangeably. However, there is a difference between the two as far as I am concerned in what I have been taught. Having faith is trusting and believing in something that is greater than you. It is bigger than you. It is bigger than man period. It is based on the principles that I have been taught of the Bible, of knowing and understanding that we are spiritual beings. Our behavior is mimicked based on that spirituality which leads us to have faith in something greater than we are.

Elisabeth posits any strength that I have is drawn with the personal relationship I have with the Lord. A by-product of that is that he graces me to do the job that I do. In my own power, I would not be in the position that I am in, nor would I do it well. I count
on him for the grace to do the job that he gave me. I am at peace with my job because I know it is unto him that the peace comes.

My spirituality has definitely extended my tenure in educational leadership. I would not have this administrator position nor had the opportunities I have had if it had not been for the Lord blessing me. There have been several situations that I encountered that I have seen other people encounter and they either did not do well in the situation or got removed from the position. That could have easily been me, but by the grace of God it was not me in that situation. Similarly, Lois stated without my spirituality, I would have become an angry and bitter leader. Instead, I knew I had to show the love of Jesus Christ.

Based on the aforementioned interviews, surveys, and observation, I can conclude that spirituality in this case refers to a belief in a higher power. In the case of these three African American females, that higher being is God or Jesus Christ. Each participant referenced God and/or Jesus many times throughout her interview. Through informal conversation, I concluded that God and Jesus Christ are one in the same to these participants. “He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Matthew 16:15-16 KJV.” For clarity, based on biblical principles, Jesus is God in the flesh.

For each participant, spirituality involved prayer. Prayers and thanks to God were observed during the informal observation. This did not seem to be a conscious thought or action. The need for prayer was mostly observed during a moment of crisis or impeding anger. When questioned about prayer or silent conversations with God, the participants did not hesitate to respond that prayer was used to calm the nerves, alleviate fears, prepare the right words, deescalate anger, and/or swallow angry thoughts or words.
Elisabeth advises prayer on a daily basis. She posits in her interview that educational leaders, regardless of their race or gender, should pray every day. I pray over my decisions. I pray on the decision made on behalf of the students and staff. I pray over everything. I dispatch angels over the building. Every morning, I plead the blood of Jesus over my school, over the day. I would encourage any leader to pray, pray, pray, pray. When you are faced with questions, people demanding/expecting an answer on the spot, you should pray. You do not have to give an immediate answer. You can think and pray. Prayer gives you peace in every situation. The biggest advice I would give to a new leader is pray (Elisabeth, 2016).

Lois agreed with these sentiments. Has my faith and spirituality extended my tenure in educational leadership? By all means, it has. I could not have made it without the Lord, a lot of prayer, and exercising that spirituality at work. You have to pray.

Race and Gender Has a Bearing on Your Treatment in Educational Leadership

The need for social justice is evident in gender equity and educational leadership. Gupton (2009) noted that women make up 57% of the educational workplace and hold more advanced degrees than their male counterparts, yet women are dominated by males in educational leadership roles. Similarly, women who manage to break the glass ceiling of administrative roles are paid less than males in comparable positions. The stereotypical beliefs that men are natural born leaders and women are weak-minded, emotional creatures keep the disparity of female educational leaders current. Capodilupo, Nadal, Hamit, Lyons and Weinberg (2010) argue gender micro-aggression supports the theory that women’s influences are not as respected as men. Robnett, Anderson and Hunter (2012) suggest that non-traditional women, career women as opposed to housewives,
threaten men’s status in the workplace and gender inequalities in the workplace are justified. In addition, women desiring male-dominated positions are often seen as intimidating, overbearing and aggressive (Gupton, 2009). The aforementioned statements affirm the need to examine social justice, gender equity, and treatment of all women, African American women in particular. Thomas, Hacker and Hoxha (2011) posit women experience sexism for being female while African American women experience the “double jeopardy” of sexism and racism. Furthermore, they face discrimination at the hands of service providers, at work or school. Sternberg (2005) hypothesized that students justify their feelings of discrimination by describing the victim as irritating. He argued that groups in a social context can spill over and affect others.

Based on the research, Elisabeth, Lois, and Naomi concur with these sentiments. 

*Elisabeth hypothesizes that African American females in educational leadership are respected more than African American males. Usually African American males are stereotyped to do only discipline; at least a lot of Black males I have seen get pigeon-holed to do just discipline. And in order to be an effective administrator now, you have to do both instructional and discipline. So, they do not have the same opportunities as Black females have. Such as, African American males are relegated to high school positions because of the athletic opportunities, but not necessarily prospects of becoming an instructional leader.*

*African American females and males have less respect than their White counterparts. Often, the people in a position to hire educational leaders are usually White. These White leaders generally hire people they know, who look like them, and/or they are comfortable around. They may not necessarily feel comfortable around African*
American females or males. As an African American Educational Leader, I have had to deal with the injustices of this hiring practice my whole tenure. In order to combat these slights, I relied on my mentors and their spirituality to pull me through.

I do not see my race as a hindrance to me in educational leadership. I cannot fathom my race causing unfair treatment of me. Never one to be treated differently because of my race, I handle circumstances at face value. When I am reprimanded at work, it is because of something I really did not do. I do not see situations in that light.

Lois provided a different perspective but supported the same theme. I was the first African American and female in the school. I felt staff members and parents would second guess me in my decision making. The culture was not conducive to neither female nor African American educational leadership. If I had been a male or non-African American, I do not believe I would have been challenged to the degree or frequency that I was. In this and the aforementioned incident, I feel that I have to prove and defend myself. Would I have had to go through these experiences and take extreme measures if I was of another gender or persuasion? I think not. I believe an investigation would have taken place without assumptions being made.

Initially, African American females in educational leadership are not respected to the same degree as African American males, White males, or White females. You have to work harder. You have to be a lot better in many situations than your counterparts. However, once you have proven that you are fair, consistent, and knowledgeable, then that respect is given. Furthermore, you are truly shown the respect you desire and deserve.
Naomi expounded

African American females in educational leadership are not respected to the same degree as African American males, White males, or White females. In my experience, people want to put you in a box of what they think you should be like or what they think you are. Oftentimes, being placed in that box, they want to hold you and limit you to a place where you can only do what they perceive you to do. It is not until you either speak up, and you must recognize the box to speak up, and address it before you can move away from the box. I came from a background of a physical education teacher. In seeking leadership positions, I found myself frequently being in the top two or three candidates. When I did not acquire the position, the reason I was given was that I lacked curriculum experience. They said that I was not strong in the curriculum and instruction arena. My question to them would be, “How would you know that if you do not offer me the opportunity to get in there and show you what I know?” Where I am now, in an assistant principal position, the aforementioned statement is exactly what it seemed like. It was not until a third administrator came and realized that I had more to offer than just discipline and testing, the menial things, that I was able to showcase what I am fully capable of. I am stronger in curriculum and instruction than previously thought. The only reason I was given the leadership position at this school was because I was Black. As a Black person, I could handle our Black families. This statement by the principal was highly offensive as there is more depth to me than just being Black. I was the first Black administrator in the school’s history. Knowing that I grew up in the community, that I may know several families already, my job was not to discipline, empower teachers, or impact instruction, but to handle the Black families. Although I am African
American/Black, I am not familiar with all the Black families in our school district or county. I am not equipped to deal with all the crisis that occur within the Black community. Nor, am I a spokesperson for people of color by accident of my birth. Just because I am Black does not mean I can identify with other Black people and what they go through. Placing me in this position, for this reason was very unfair. This decision was a prejudicial judgment call. After listening to Naomi’s remarks, the focus group agreed that decisions like the one mentioned above, made them depend on their spirituality. From a social justice perspective, these shared experiences and coping mechanisms turned discussions into practice and application. In this case, the practice and application of spirituality to cope. Furthermore, Naomi surmised that every time she was turned down for a position, she was encouraged. Her spirituality gave her hope and courage that she would soon acquire those things that had been denied to her.

Naomi’s response emphasized an undercurrent that spirituality plays a major role in her educational leadership. Even when asked about gender and race, she mentioned spirituality. Thus, there is a correlation between race, gender, educational leadership and spirituality.

Spirituality is the Foundation for Productivity

In order to survive in the educational leadership arena, painted so eloquently by Aldridge’s reiteration of W. E. B. DuBois, leaders, with the emphasis here on African American females, must acquire skills to remain effective, focused, and balanced. Polka and Litchka (2008) suggested that prosperous leaders practice self-control, remain enthusiastic, establish confidantes, maintain his/her principles, and develop reflection
time. When leaders find strength in family, friendships, mentors, and/or faith, student achievement is affected.

So, how does spirituality play a role in the productivity of the African American female educational leaders? Elisabeth remembered, *whenever I would talk about difficult days or situations, they (my parents and mentors) would always intertwine faith into the advice they gave. Something as simple as, “Just pray about it” or “You cannot seek revenge or say something back to them because vengeance is mine said the Lord,” helped calmed my fears and eased my tension. They constantly brought biblical principles into the conversation. Periodically, they peppered their speech with spirituality. They did not preach a sermon, but the effect of the things they said to me had that affect.*

*There was never a time that my spirituality and educational leadership became at odds with each other. My conscience and what the Bible says always dictates my actions. My leadership reflects my faith. If I had to pinpoint an occasion where I might seem a little at odds between my spirituality and my educational leadership, it would be how I phrase things. I phrase things in a manner that promotes a climate of accessibility and acceptance. In a professional setting, this may not be appropriate to all stakeholders. So, when I am telling a teacher I do not want to renew their contract, I generally say, “It is not the right fit.” I would not say, “You are fired because you are horrible.” It is all in how you say things. In this scenario, my spirituality/faith is not in direct opposition to my educational leadership principles. It simply means I have to say things another way. Thank God, I have not had to choose between my integrity and my job, faith versus career.*
Lois had these revelations on spirituality and productivity. *My advice to any new female entering the education field to truly ask God for wisdom, read the word of God, and just asks God for insight. If you cannot read the Bible, you should read some sort of inspiration daily. Of course, you want to make sure that you have all of your ducks in a row. You must be knowledgeable in your field. Also, you must be smart and wise, both of which are different from being knowledgeable. You can be smart, but you have to know how to that smartness. You have to know how to relate to people. Building relationships is essential. Everything you do is about relationships; relationships with parents, relationships with students, relationships with staff. Get to know your staff. If you do that for your staff and students, they will know you care. When students and staff know that you care, they will go the extra mile for you.*

When questioned about spirituality aiding her productivity, Naomi adds *I do not fly off of the handle like I used to. I will pray. I will stop and think. If something is going on with a student, I am not running to it unless a student is injured. If it is a general behavior thing, I am getting there, but I am not running there. I realize that I need time to say, “Lord, help me make the right decision. Help me to have the right words to say.” And because I have that personal relationship with God, it helps me not to panic. Do I make mistakes? Of course I do. Yet, it is not the costly mistakes that could possibly cost me my job.*

*My spirituality never conflicts with my educational leadership that I have recognized. They have to co-exist, because I could not do what I do without the Lord, without having faith in someone greater than me. It keeps me in balance of what I need to do, how to do it, how to handle situations.*
My spirituality has helped me become a better human resource manager. I have been in education for three decades. In the middle part of my career, I was challenged to manage people with my heart. This challenge has stayed with me to this very day. I try to remember the basic principles I was taught as a child, the basic principles from the Bible, treat people like you want to be treated. Sometimes you cannot simply treat them how you want to be treated, you have to show them. You have to model what you want.

Viewing educational leadership through the lens of spirituality not only has an impact on the people in my building, it has an impact on my community. Based on some of the feedback I have received, what I have been able to accomplish as an African American female in educational leadership encourages them to want to do more. If my leadership encourages just one person, I know my living is not in vain. These leadership tidbits underscore spirituality and how it leads to a more productive leader.

Faith is the Biggest Source of Strength

Reed and Johnson (2010) cited 69.9% of African Americans are spiritual and religious beings, producing leaders that possess spiritual attributes in their leadership style. This religious leadership style is systemic of a marginalized society overcoming prejudice and creating change by any means necessary. Faith in the midst of overwhelming odds is a clear indicator that God or a higher power directs one’s path. This unyielding faith allows the Black leader to focus on the task at hand, not on the disrespect or perceived dissatisfaction of his/her leadership. Reed and Johnson (2010) suggest education and spirituality were inalienable rights for African American students, including the adult learner.
Mattis (2002) argued there is a psychological link between religion and spirituality, coping, and understanding the lived experiences of the Black woman. Based on the religion of Christianity, the Black woman has traditionally used the church and the Bible as a transgressive and transformative force to overcome the ills of a chauvinistic and racist society. The Bible as a spiritual weapon possesses literary guidelines, symbolic of a blueprint to treat people with dignity and respect. The mantra “love thy neighbor as thyself” has resonated within the community and reveals itself via the instructional leader. The Bible allows the African American woman to emulate the passages of scripture within her own wilderness experience of isolation, ostracism, and pain (Mattis, 2002).

Female educational leaders are constantly balancing the needs of home, work, and school. The pivot in the balance for many is spirituality. Spirituality is the lens through which sociopolitical struggles are seen (Mattis, 2002). Dillard and Okpalaoka (2011) postulate spirituality is the necessary pendulum of race, class, sex, and gender worldwide. Spirituality negates the negative impact that the aforementioned issues have on a person. A single force of balance, insight, and consciousness, spirituality brings a reverence and focus to the lives of those who chose to embrace the philosophy of love, life, eternal rewards, and a supreme being. Through spirituality, the African American woman can cope with the injustices of society while remaining driven, compassionate, and competent. For many women of color, spirituality travels throughout the heart, mind, and soul of the person, being its lifeblood (Dillard & Okpalaoka, 2011).

As a complementary inquiry in this study, the notion of African American females compartmentalizing aspects of leadership emerged. In the survey, the participants
were asked to compartmentalize four areas of their lives and rank them in order from least to greatest. This open-ended question allowed the researcher to test the hypothesis that God and/or spirituality would be a primary method of sorting responsibilities or priorities. Based on the research survey data, my hypothesis was proven correct.

Faith was listed as the biggest source of strength for the participants. In hindsight, the phrasing of this question seemed to lead the participants to an answer. Faith was implied as the same thing as spirituality. In an effort to eliminate potential researcher bias, the inquiry was presented to the participants in the interview in a more appropriate manner. In the face to face interviews the interview participants were asked, “According to the viewing educational leadership through the lens of spirituality: How African American females cope survey, you were previously asked which factor was your biggest source of strength. The choices were family, faith, colleagues, confidence in your abilities, or other. What did you mean by faith? As all respondents answered faith, this question presented in this manner increased the validity of the question and maintained the integrity of the phenomenological study.

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During the face-to-face interviews, each participant was asked to define faith. Lois surmised *that faith is just knowing that you are going to do the right thing with the*
wisdom God gives you. When he gives you wisdom, you do one thing at a time, you got
the knowledge, you got the wisdom and you put it all together. Sometimes none of that is
enough. However, your faith supplies the missing piece. You keep going even though you
get tired and weary, frustrated and defeated. You feel like you are knocked down, like a
lot of hurtles are in your way. Those hurtles seem insurmountable. Yet, faith turns those
hurtles into stepping stones. That faith helps you to always be positive and know that it is
going to work out.

Naomi stressed that faith is her biggest source of strength. Faith is an exercise of
spirituality. My faith is how I do what I do and how I do it. I trust in God for what I do,
for all my needs. Unless I am deathly ill, my rise and my fall each day is with him. I
cannot get through a day without acknowledging that I need him. Everything that I do
from my personal to professional life, I have to rely on that faith that I have of knowing
that he will be with me. He (God) has always said in his word that he would neither leave
us nor forsake us. I trust that. So, every day, I have to read and study his word. Of
course, I do my devotion at home. However, the staff knows that I read and prepare my
office at school to lead and make the right decisions over this building. I do not trust in
my might, not all the time. We can operate in the flesh. I am not going to lie about that. I
have to trust that I can do what God says I can do.

After transcribing Elisabeth’s story, it was the researcher’s overwhelming thought
to change this participant’s story and/or interview someone else. It would seem that the
lack of depth of Elisabeth’s answers could not possibly add validity or introspect to the
dissertation. The participant mainly discussed her spirituality in the workplace. The
epiphany occurred that this quandary was exactly why this study is needed. The African
American female has had to suppress her thoughts, bury the pain of isolation, bury the pain of rejection, and/or bury the pain of carrying an intangible weight of oppression. The only arena in which she can fully articulate her struggles is in the spiritual ream. On a daily basis, the spirituality shines through in her educational leadership. The pain and anguish of her experiences are so deeply buried, so smoothly ingrained that she cannot bear to let it go, even in such an anonymous and intimate atmosphere. She can articulate her need for spirituality but not the force that makes her so depend on her spirituality to cope. Elisabeth’s story was a great data point regarding spirituality and leadership.

Educational Leaders are Called by God

Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee: and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. Jeremiah 1: 4-5 KJV Much like the call of Jeremiah to preach the gospel, Elisabeth, Naomi and Lois felt a call to education and educational leadership. Naomi’s thoughts articulate this point the best. *She argued often times in my educational journey and because of the field [health\pe] I was in in undergraduate school, using that as an example, I was often the only female or I was the only Black or African American in those classes. I have had to lean and depend on my faith as I search to find the place God wants for me to be in regards to my career. When I was put in a position of, let’s say, interviewing for a leadership position, the people were either looking for a male or they were looking for another persuasion. If I leaned on that as being the reason why I did not get the job, then I held myself back. But, in searching I did find that I was not what they were looking for either because I was a female or because I was Black. Let’s put it like that.*
It kind of made me question myself, whether I sought a position in error, whether leadership was the direction that God wanted me to go. At the same time, it gave me more of a determination to keep pushing and going after what I wanted. It kind of made me feel like both sides of a coin here. But, it gave me the drive I needed. It seemed like the more I heard, “No!” I was so much closer to a yes. I knew a yes was coming.

God has called me to do what I do. Non-African American females or non-spiritual people may not understand the role spirituality plays in my life. I love what I do. It is my belief that when you love what you do, when you have a passion for the career that you have chosen, you never work a day in your life. You do it with such ease. It is not a burdensome task to be able to rise in the morning and come to a place that you love. I say it is a calling because I did not go to school for this. My undergraduate degree was not in education. As a matter of fact, I tell the story often that my younger brother and I changed careers. We were not called to do what we went to school for. We were called to do what we do currently. We literally switched careers because we were not walking in what God had for us. Now, he is doing what I went to school for and vice versa.

For all African American females who seek to become educational leaders, my advice to you is that you can do it! If this is what God called you to do, go after it. I really did not know that what I am doing today God wanted me to do. I was not listening. However, I remember that on this journey, he (God) assigned people, at the right time, to say things to me. For example, when I was still a teacher, I was asked, “So, at what school are you a principal?” I recalled laughing and saying, “I am not a principal. I do not want to do that. Then another statement made a year or so later, “So, I heard that you were a principal. How is that going?” Again, I laughed and gave a negative
response. I am happy where I am. “Why do you not go back to school and get your leadership degree?” “I do not want that!”

God was using those individuals to plant that seed. It was already there. God was watering it so that it would blossom within me as I sought that which he had called me to do. Was I already a leader? Absolutely! I was already a leader. However, I was in a box. I had placed myself there. It was not until after I started listening to him, after growing spiritually, that I acted upon what he had already needed for me to do. Was getting here without obstacles? Setbacks? No, there were plenty of both. During this time he was pruning me, seeing if I was going to trust him to get me where I needed to be. He was preparing me to be in the position I am now.

Most people would think that being one of the last two candidates for a job and not getting it would be a setback. The excuse of not being strong as an instructional/curriculum leader was a setback. It took me from the time I was finishing my leadership degree until now to realize that everything happens in God’s time. You see, to me, in the flesh, it should have happened as quickly as I could snap my finger. Just like that, I should be in a leadership role. I was trying to make it happen myself. It was not by my might but by his (God) that I am here. It took me five years of interviewing, hearing all those no’s, until I sat in an interview and made a profound statement. That statement was, “I have heard enough no’s to know that a yes is coming.” I received a phone call two days later that I was their choice. It was not until then, when I took my hands and mouth off of it, trying to make it happen on my own, that God allowed it. Only God could make it happen, make it possible.
Endarkened Feminist Epistemology

The endarkened feminist epistemology hypothesizes that it is the responsibility of the population, African American females in educational leadership, to articulate their shared experiences incorporating race, gender, class, cultural identity and spirituality. EFT utilizes the voice of the marginalized group to proclaim them as voices needing to be heard. Elisabeth, Naomi, and Lois voice the challenge of the African American female in educational leadership.

Elisabeth posits being a young African American female educational leader creates a unique challenge. She was confronted with the perception that she did not know how to do her job effectively because she was young, African American, and female. In her case, her maturity and wisdom were questioned regularly. Her voice in this research was needed to articulate that race nor age is a viable reason to discount someone’s educational leadership. She argued *I would have to pray over every decision I made so I would not second guess myself. In addition, the fact that I did not have children made staff and parents question my decision-making process. I had to think about what was best for children while justifying that I knew what best practices for children were. The pedagogy of educational leadership is not about race, gender, class, or cultural identity. It is about an interconnectedness of race, gender, class, cultural identity and prior knowledge as a basis to assimilate knowledge and present it in a way that students, parents, faculty, and other stakeholders can identity, grow, and apply.*

Similarly, Dr. Naomi faced the challenge of being an African American educational leader with a non-tradition leadership background. As a former coach, Dr. Naomi’s knowledge of the curriculum and instruction pedagogy was examined. *If a*
teacher disagreed with my approach to a problem, instead of the solution being questioned, the inquiry regarded my ability to relate to or ascertain the problem in question. In addition to my cultural identity, the issue of my gender came into place. As an African American female educational leader, coaching and/or being a Physical Education Teacher was seen as a negative factor on my resume. However, 80% of the male educational leaders in our district were coaches and/or had PE backgrounds. Was the fact that I coached basketball an issue? If I would have coached tennis, would I be perceived as a more effective and knowledgeable leader? Or does the fact that my female status, particularly African American female, result in perceived ignorance or lack of knowledge regarding educational leadership? Coaches develop and motivate players of different backgrounds, ability levels, and experiences into one team. Educational leaders develop and motivate teachers and staff members of different educational backgrounds, ability levels, and experiences into one team. Should not this experience empower me forward as opposed to providing a barrier for communication and non-acceptance? Being rejected for leadership positions because of my race and gender made me rely on God for strength and courage. In order for me to pursue my dream, I needed my spirituality to keep me grounded, balanced, and focused.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to assess how African American women utilize spirituality as a lens for educational leadership. The study was guided by the overarching theme of the research: viewing educational leadership through the lens of spirituality, specifically how African American females cope. Included in this inquiry were complementary themes such as do African American females possess a spiritual aspect
that provides them with the strength and conviction necessary to persist in educational leadership? Is there a phenomenon amongst African American females to cope in educational leadership?

Based on the data from the pilot study, semi-structured and structured interviews, observations, face-to-face interviews, and follow up inquiries, the researcher has enough concrete evidence to adequately and accurately answer the research questions. Based on the answers from sixteen women, including eleven in the pilot study and five in the research study, this sample population can articulate the voices of African American females in educational leadership.

How does the African American female cope with the misconceptions and/or perceptions of their leadership style? The African American female relies on inner strength, confidence in God, mentors, and family to cope with the misconceptions and perceptions of their leadership style. Confidence and belief in their spirituality, faith, and higher being gives them a tangible force to persevere amidst conflict, doubt, attacks, and fears. An example of this was Lois dealing with a hostile parent.

Early in my administrative career, I was faced with a hostile parent who was a community leader. Her child committed an infraction and she had to face the consequences. Of course, the parent did not want any consequences for her baby. After praying about the situation, I set up a meeting with the parent one on one. We discussed the issue and I thought it was addressed adequately and accepted fully. Unfortunately, this was not the case. To my surprise, the parent waited until a PTO meeting and publically addressed the discipline issue. She used the forum to publically attack me. In addition, she tried to get me to engage in a dialogue regarding the issue. She asked
several unrelated questions in which I answered competently. Unbeknownst to me, a member of the media was in the audience. Both the parent and the journalist took bits and pieces of the conversation and made an erroneous article in the paper.

I was furious that a parent would use a public forum to not only attack my leadership ability but the district leadership for hiring me. In addition, this same parent went to the district leadership with an invalid accounting of the meeting. She was given a private meeting with the Superintendent to address her concerns. While I feel every parent has a right to his/her opinion and the ability to express said opinion, I was not given the same autonomy. Not only was I denied a defense in the matter, I was reprimanded without inquiry. My character, integrity, and professionalism were being challenged and I was not allowed a voice.

At this point, my spirituality had to take over. Emotionally, I wanted to use the most profanity I knew to tell this woman how I felt. I wanted to lash out at the situation because it was unwarranted, unfair and untrue. Moreover, the allegations from this mother had a negative impact on the student. The student and I had a great relationship. She would share information regarding her dance class and the trophies she won. She shared her excitement of getting a new horse and making an A on her math test. Her mother assured her that I no longer liked her which caused both of us extreme sadness. Without my spirituality, I would have become an angry and bitter leader. Instead, I knew I had to show the love of Jesus Christ. So, I made a vow to love the hell out of her.

Even as I fought the reprimand of attacking a parent in a public forum, I smiled and gave this parent every courtesy. I spoke cheerfully to her as she tried to avoid me in the hallway. I encouraged her daughter and hugged her during the Student of the Month...
celebration. I attended parent conferences in which the parents were present and
applauded their volunteer efforts.

After several staff and PTO members refuted this woman’s claims, I was finally
allowed to talk to the Superintendent and recount what happened in this hostile situation.
In fact, I had already spoken to a lawyer about defamation of character charges. As a
new principal, this incident could have cost me my job. But by the grace of God, people
came forth on my behalf. Coincidently, the husband of the parent spoke on my behalf. He
acknowledged that past incidents revealed a friendly, supportive relationship. There were
no ugly words exchanged, no lack of professionalism on my part. He felt, as I did, that
the incident was blown out of proportion. In fact, he embarrassingly admitted that race
might have been a factor.

In the midst of a hostile environment where race and gender may certainly play a
role, Lois knew her spirituality was her best resource. She was able to center herself,
focus on the problem at hand, and remain professional. She realized that although
parents visualize certain roles for their children and expect administrators to act
accordingly, one must remain true to themselves, stand their ground, and remain
professional. In this environment, the parent had to see the error of her ways. Only
remaining professional, standing on truth, and allowing wisdom and justice to prevail
would all stakeholders to see beyond race and gender. Through the process, Lois relied
on her spirituality and successfully changed the misconception regarding her leadership.

What ramifications do spirituality as a means to lead have on educational
leadership? Spirituality as a means to lead has certain ramifications on the leader and
ultimately the faculty and staff. From the leader’s perspective, spirituality can provide
guidance, peace in the midst of a storm, and an inner conviction that all things are possible through Christ that strengthens them. For example, Naomi did not think her non-traditional background would reward her with an Assistant Principal/Curriculum Leader position. Yet, God ordained her leadership. Through faith, many failures produced the desired outcome. In her thirteenth year in administration, she continues to rely on God, his promises and plan for her life. From the employee standpoint, faculty members benefit from a leader who is confident in her abilities, firm, fair, and positive. Elisabeth acknowledged she prays on the decisions made on behalf of the students and staff. *I pray over everything. I dispatch angels over the building. Every morning, I plead the blood of Jesus over my school, over the day. I would encourage any leader to pray, pray, pray, pray.* When you are faced with questions, people demanding/expecting an answer on the spot, you should pray. You do not have to give an immediate answer. You can think and pray. Prayer gives you peace in every situation. Suppose a faculty member is dealing with a death in the family, problems within his or her marriage, or a sick child. For some, it is comforting having an educational leader who empathizes, offers words of encouragement and support, or just listens. Pauchant (2007) proposed that spirituality in the workplace is based upon quadrants of development and input. The more one utilizes spirituality, the more worker output. Increased worker output is a huge ramification of an educational leader who uses spirituality as a lens to lead.

Do African American females possess a spiritual aspect that provides them strength and conviction necessary to persist in educational leadership? All three respondents in the face-to-face interviews stated spirituality extended their tenure in educational leadership. Without the spiritual aspect to provide balance, they would have
lacked the strength, conviction, and belief to remain in an oppressive environment. Giles (2010) emphasized the Black community had a reverence and respect for religion and spirituality and social cohesion. Cozart (2010) incorporated the notion espoused by Cynthia Dillard that the Black church community was the place where spirituality was developed and displayed via every aspect of living (Cozart, 2010). Essentially, the backbone of the African American family was the church (Giles, 2010). Respecting the history of spirituality in the African American culture, EFT incorporates faith as a means to lead, serve, and work.

Klenke (2003) noted that in 1998, Fairholm, who was the first person to correlate leadership and spirituality, suggested spiritual leadership embodies self-development through the awareness of spiritual, emotional, and academic pursuits. Leaders employing spirituality take a moral approach to lead and be led. Spiritual leaders use purpose, integrity, and responsibility as the theoretical framework to guide his/her decision-making. Spiritual or purposive leadership may reveal a coping mechanism for African American women who happen to be educational leaders (Klenke, 2003). Fairholm (2011) argued that a person is guided by his/her actions. What one believes is the most influential factor in his/her life. Therefore, one’s spirituality should not be suppressed in the workplace. In fact, he postulates that spirituality generates behavior that controls how one sees policy and procedures, overriding managerial or peer pressure (Fairholm, 2011).

Viewing educational leadership through the lens of spirituality: how African Americans cope means how we cope with things on a daily basis states Naomi. Often times, it is not like our counterparts. We do not seem to get frantic all the time. We do not appear to fly off of the handle. I am not saying it does not happen, but we are more
verbal about our faith. We are more verbal about what we believe in. We are not afraid to show we believe in God. In my experience, when we as African American females in educational leadership open the doors to our beliefs, those counterparts can open their hearts to us and treat us as equals. When we acknowledge our spirituality and show that is who we are, we finally get to walk in the hallowed halls of academia as the leaders we are. Without opening that door, we will never know what we can be. They will never know what we can be.

Is there a phenomenon amongst African American females to cope in educational leadership? Creswell (2014) reasons, “phenomenological research uses the analysis of significant statements, the generation of meaning units, and the development of what Moustakas (1994) called an essence description” (p.196). Qualitative research tells the story of its participants. Using multiple sources of data in the participant’s environment, qualitative research paints a picture of events, patterns, practices and phenomenon that explains how something happens or why something happens (Creswell, 2014). Amongst the sixteen African American females in educational leadership interviewed, surveyed, or observed, faith and spirituality are the most valuable coping mechanism they possess. Based on the data presented in and throughout this dissertation, there is a phenomenon amongst African American females to cope in educational leadership: spirituality.

Throughout the surveys, focus groups, and the interviews, the spirituality of African American females in educational leadership is evident as a viable coping mechanism. In fact, the existence of spirituality seems to be a way of life as opposed to just being a means of surviving. Furthermore, one cannot deny the belief that not only
does spirituality make one a better leader, it is necessary to the survival of the African American female leader.

In chapter five, the researcher will summarize the data and analysis presented in previous chapters, describe its impact in future areas of research, and demonstrate the implications of the research on society.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to assess how African American females utilize spirituality as a lens for educational leadership. The study was guided by the overarching theme of the research: viewing educational leadership through the lens of spirituality, specifically how African American females cope. Included in this inquiry were complementary themes such as do African American females possess a spiritual aspect that provides them with the strength and conviction necessary to persist in educational leadership? Is there a phenomenon amongst African American females to cope in educational leadership?

In the prologue, the bridge served as a unique metaphorical undercurrent for this research study. The bridge was the analysis of my most intimate thoughts combined with my spiritual dependence on God, the Master of life and death. I could not help but be captivated by the need for the bridge in my life. I could not quench my desire for more knowledge into the plight of African American females in educational leadership. Thus, there was a need for this study. The bridge analogy was used to help readers visualize the way in which spirituality strengthened me. The need for spirituality in my life led to an examination of other women who might utilize the bridge (spirituality) in their leadership. Was the bridge a coincidence or a viable and valuable piece of the legacy of African American females in educational leadership?
The selection of a dissertation is an intensely personal decision. When asked to think about the things that matter to me the most, I knew immediately that spirituality would be involved. My faith has empowered me to journey from a paraprofessional through the ranks to becoming an AP. As stated in the prologue, my tenure in education leading to leadership was filled with many highs and lows. In fact, when I started writing my story, I was amazed at all of the things that happened to me. As impossible as some of those situations seemed, I persevered in spite of all the odds. Nevertheless, the correlation of spirituality and African American females in educational leadership seemed to be a quite easy topic in theory. To most people, it was an interesting idea. As interesting as this research topic sounded, the question still was asked - why is it important? What relevance does African American females who believe in God, higher beings, or spiritual forces have on educational leadership?

Donaldson (2006) hypothesizes that strong educational leaders develop relationships with the staff that withstands stresses and seizes opportunities. If the African American female leader has beliefs and/or procedures that assist them in maintaining their composure, handling crises, and seizing educational momentum, the researcher believes that other leaders of different races and genders can utilize it to bring those same components to their workplace and leadership. Furthermore, viewing educational leadership through the lens of spirituality can lead to a new and productive trend in educational leadership.

In order to study the effects of spirituality on educational leadership and African American females in leadership, a theoretical framework was needed. Finding a theoretical framework that captures the sentiments of the African American female leader
who views spirituality as a lens to lead was the first challenges of this study. Because of the complexity of the intersection of race, gender, spirituality, and educational leadership, the theoretical framework had to try to capture all of these entities. Furthermore, for the purpose of a phenomenological study, the framework had to best articulate the voices of the women.

Chapter two explained the need for a voice in the African American community and how this voice is articulated to incorporate a new generation of leaders. A review of the literature discussed the history of the EFT including feminist, Black feminist and critical race philosophy. The researcher’s purpose in this study was to triangulate African American females, educational leadership, and spirituality. Although Black feminism incorporates spirituality, it does not utilize it as a coping mechanism for African American females. Furthermore, it does not focus on the African American leader’s voice. Therefore, the researcher surmises that EFT best captures the sentiments of the researcher and the voice needed to articulate the phenomenon.

Do African American females possess a spiritual aspect that provides them with the strength and conviction necessary to persist in educational leadership? Is there a phenomenon amongst African American females to cope in educational leadership?

Conclusions

African American Females Cope in Educational Leadership

In order to cope with the demands of educational leadership, African American females utilize family support, mentors, and spirituality. Without the spiritual aspect to provide balance, the educational leader would have lacked the strength, conviction, and belief to remain in an oppressive environment. Giles (2010) emphasized the Black
community had a reverence and respect for religion, spirituality and social cohesion. Cozart (2010) incorporated the notion espoused by Cynthia Dillard that the Black church community was the place where spirituality was developed and displayed via every aspect of living (Cozart, 2010). Essentially, the backbone of the African American family was the church (Giles, 2010). Respecting the history of spirituality in the African American culture, EFT incorporates faith as a means to lead, serve, and work.

A Phenomenon Exists Amongst African American Females

There is a phenomenon amongst African American females to cope in educational leadership. Creswell (2014) reasons “phenomenological research uses the analysis if significant statements, the generation of meaning units, and the development of what Moustakas (1994) called an essence description” (p.196). Qualitative research tells the story of its participants. Using multiple sources of data (i.e. focus groups, interviews, and surveys) in the participant’s environment, qualitative research paints a picture of events, patterns, and phenomenon that explains how something happens or why something happens (Creswell, 2014). Amongst the 15 African American females in educational leadership interviewed, surveyed, or observed, faith and spirituality were the most valuable coping mechanism they possessed. Based on the data presented in and throughout this dissertation, there was a phenomenon amongst African American females to cope in educational leadership: spirituality.

Throughout the surveys, focus groups, and the interviews, the spirituality of African American females in educational leadership was evident as a viable coping mechanism. In fact, the existence of spirituality seemed to be a way of life as opposed to just being a means of surviving. Furthermore, one cannot deny the belief by the African
American females in this study that spirituality makes one a better leader. It was necessary to the survival of the African American female leader.

The researcher posits that this study was not biased with the selection of women in the educational leadership arena who appear to be spiritual. One cannot examine or ascertain the degree of a person’s spirituality by simply having one or two conversations with them. A conversation with a colleague is very different from a conversation with a peer or even a spiritual advisor. Similarly, one cannot comprehend a person’s spirituality without empathy and/or experiencing what obstacles, triumphs, joys or sorrows one endured to make them who they are. As the participants suggest, spirituality is a deeply personal issue, not to be shared with a casual or professional acquaintance.

Gap in the Literature

In preparation of this research study, the researcher conducted an annotated bibliography and historical perspective. The topics of African Americans females in Educational Leadership, African American females in Secondary Leadership, African Americans in Spirituality, and Spirituality as a leadership style were utilized for my initial inquiry. There was a plethora of studies on African American females in educational leadership. There were a few studies on leadership and spirituality. There were no studies regarding African American females in leadership involving spirituality.

Klenke (2003) hypothesized leaders employing spirituality take a moral approach to lead and be led. Spiritual leaders use purpose, integrity, and responsibility as the theoretical framework to guide his/her decision-making. Spiritual or purposive leadership may reveal a coping mechanism for African American women who happen to be educational leaders (Klenke, 2003). Fairholm (2011) argued that a person is guided by
his/her actions. What one believes is the most influential factor in his/her life. Therefore, one’s spirituality should not be suppressed in the workplace. In fact, he postulates that spirituality generates behavior that controls how one sees policy and procedures, overriding managerial or peer pressure (Fairholm, 2011).

Limitations and Delimitations

There was limited literature connecting all three aspects of this inquiry. African American women in leadership roles who view spirituality as a lens to lead exposed a gap in the literature. In addition, EFT was an emerging framework. Thus, the literature is based on feminist thought from twenty years ago.

Another limitation to this study was spirituality is an intensely personal topic. Rarely is spirituality discussed in the workplace or educational arenas. Those people who do voice their opinions may be very particular in the way that spirituality is discussed for fear of social, political, and/or career ramifications. In addition, the truth may be downplayed or omitted for these same reasons.

Like spirituality, the experiences one has in educational leadership can be deeply personal. Sharing a humiliating experience or one in which the leader is portrayed in a negative light is not any easy task. The leader may feel victimized all over again by speaking about it in a public or private setting. Even with the promise of anonymity, the leader may be reluctant to be vulnerable. Therefore, the full extent of the oppression or injustice cannot be conveyed. Similarly, the leader may not be able to articulate the feelings of injustice, moments of betrayal, and/or feelings of shame, inadequacy, or rage caused by events or people.
The researcher may capture some of the sentiments expressed from the research without fully understanding the implications of the event. This can lead the reader to have doubts of the phenomenon, question the validity of the research and/or feel a certain distance from the research. These limitations not only affect the research but the audience as well.

One of the most important limitations to the research regarded the separation of church and state. Spirituality is not discussed in mainstream education. The research talks about finding the voice of the African American female leader. Yet, the main resource, the main coping mechanism, spirituality, is something that these leaders are not supposed to talk about in the very environment where it is needed. Schools are not a place where spirituality can be freely discussed.

Future Implications of the Research

As suspected, African American females in educational leadership utilize spirituality as a means to cope, extent their tenure, and deal with the perceptions and misconceptions of their leadership style. Based on my research, African American females in educational leadership using spirituality as a lens to lead is a phenomenon. Although it is evident that African American educational leaders need family, peers, colleagues, and mentors to enhance his/her leadership, one of the most intriguing aspects of coping for them occurs through spirituality or faith. Garner and Laskin (2011) posit the church was the only institution in the Black community with authority and credibility. The church was the first audience for Black youths. Therefore, spirituality is as much a part of the African American community as struggles, marginalization, and injustice.
(Garner & Laskin, 2011). Using spirituality as a lens to lead is a new phenomenon in leadership, education, practice and research.

Dantley (2003) argues leaders who practice the tenets of faith-based leadership understand the multi-faceted demands of leadership, and yet still find the intestinal fortitude to aggressively deal with the issues in an uplifting and supportive way. Fostering community unity and renewal, the spiritual leader sees oneself as a part of a major plan, a divine plan from a higher being. Spirituality integrates the science of consciousness with personal critical awareness (Dantley, 2003). The intersection of spirituality and leadership by the African American female creates a new awareness that compartmentalizing areas of an individual is not necessary to be an effective leader. All experiences in a leader’s background can be applied to maximize effectiveness, eliminate misconceptions, and maintain a professional balance that empowers the leader to lead in a more productive manner.

African American females in educational leadership utilizing spirituality as a lens to lead is a phenomenon. This phenomenon has not been studied by African American males, Christian White women, African American Christian males, or African American educators who are not in a leadership role. To date, this gap in the literature poses additional inquires as to the uniqueness of this marginalized group and/or how these coping strategies can benefit other races or gender.

Another inquiry to ponder when viewing educational leadership through the lens of spirituality is the notion of racial stereotyping as it relates to phenotypic features. Are African American females in educational leadership stereotype based on their physical features? Does having European features make one more successful in educational
leadership? Does within race variables affect the African American female in educational leadership? If a female is multi-racial is she treated the same in educational leadership? Do Multi-Racial females view spirituality like African American females in educational leadership? A single inquiry can enhance the thinking process as it relates to African American females. In addition to the aforementioned questions, additional questions to examine may be how do African American women cope with the misconceptions and/or perceptions of their leadership style? What ramifications does spirituality as a means to lead have on educational leadership? How might African American females resist and contest the deficit-based perceptions without giving into frustration and battle –mode instincts thereby reducing the angry Black woman stigma in order to lead effectively? When researched, the answers to the questions might expand the knowledge regarding African American females in educational leadership.

Could we compare the endarkened feminist theory to womanist theology? How might this research be different if taken from a northern prospective? How is the endarkened feminist theory different from intersectionality? Would an ethnography study be a more effective way to articulate this phenomenon? How will this study empower future African American educational leaders? These are just a few questions that the researcher could have studied to impact future teaching and learning.

There was limited literature connecting all three aspects of this inquiry. African American women in leadership roles who view spirituality as a lens to lead exposes a gap in the literature. Why is this important? First, this research gives a voice, in their own words, to a marginalized group whose voice would otherwise not be heard. Second, it exposes a gap in the literature that requires further study. Lastly, this inquiry provides a
credible, proven strategy to cope with the concerns, misconceptions, and perceptions of educational leadership. Specifically, this research and methodology was designed to transform the perceptions of the African American Female Leader, create social action by empowering leaders to lead in a more efficient way unique to their culture, and to minimize a gap in the literature. Viewing spirituality as a lens to lead triangulates African American females, educational leadership and spirituality thereby forging a new path in educational research.

How does viewing educational leadership through the lens of spirituality, specifically how African American female cope, impact future research? This research creates an interest in the viability and transferability of using spirituality as a means to lead. Specifically, this research and methodology is designed to transform the perceptions of the African American Female Leader, create social action by empowering leaders to lead in a more efficient way unique to their culture, and to minimize a gap in the literature. Viewing spirituality as a lens to lead triangulates African American females, educational leadership and spirituality thereby forging a new path in educational research. In addition, a curious researcher could delve deeper into the nature of spirituality and examine what spiritual component makes spirituality as a lens most effective. Moreover, researchers could investigate if African Americans use spirituality as a coping method based on the tenants of slavery.

Throughout this study, the idea of intersectionality was often approached but not fully realized in this paper. The concept of intersectionality is a term that was coined by lawyer and activist Kimberle’ Crenshaw in her essay, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist
Theory and Antiracist Politics” (1989). In her essay, Crenshaw (1989) describes intersectionality as the phenomenon of black women experiencing multiple forms of discrimination or oppression. An example can be found in Chapter One where the author describes being very sick and instead of being approached with empathy, she was characterized as the “angry black woman” and asked “what’s wrong with you?” While the focus of this research centered around spirituality, future research could further explore the phenomenon of intersectionality with both race and gender as the focus in the professional trajectory of African American females and how spirituality helps to cope.

African American females in educational leadership utilize spirituality to cope and extend their tenure. There is limited literature connecting all three aspects of this inquiry. African American women in leadership roles who use spirituality as a lens to lead exposes a gap in the literature. With the addition of this research, awareness of spirituality as a means to lead can prove to be a viable option for more educational leaders. Moreover, the oppression of African American women in leadership is recognized and their voice heard. As a curriculum and instructional leader, this study feeds my desire to teach others how to handle African American females in educational leadership. In order to take of others academically, I must first feed my mind good food. After research of this caliber, I can change the way curriculum and instruction materials are delivered, utilized, and maximized to assist a generation of new learners. Viewing educational leadership through the lens of spirituality not only tells the story of how African American females cope, but how they thrive and overcome.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

INITIAL STUDY

Viewing spirituality as a Lens to Lead: How African American Females Cope in Educational Leadership
Survey Questionnaire

1. How do you define “spirituality”?

2. What do you perceive is your educational leadership style?

3. Which factor(s) do you think most influence other people’s initial opinion of you?
   Circle all that apply.
   a. Race
   b. Gender
   c. Educational background
   d. Title/position in the school
   e. Demeanor

4. Do you feel your race or gender have any bearing on how you are treated in educational leadership?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. It has never crossed my mind.
   d. I believe I am judged as an individual, not as a part of a group.
   e. Educational leadership has nothing to do with race or gender.

5. If you had to compartmentalize your life into four areas, what would be the four areas in order from least to greatest?
6. How often do you think about changing your career, school, or position?
   a. Hourly
   b. Daily
   c. Quarterly
   d. Yearly
   e. I am content with my career, school, and position.

7. Which factor is your biggest source of strength?
   a. Family
   b. Faith
   c. Colleagues
   d. Confidence in my abilities
   e. Other: Please explain.

8. Do you feel you that people would respect you more as an educational leader if you were a different gender or a different race?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. It has never crossed my mind.
   d. Respect has never been an issue for me as a person or leader.
   e. Other: Please explain.

9. Which of the spirituality practices listed below do you believe you must do on a daily basis? Circle all that apply.
   a. Pray for myself.
   b. Pray for others including faculty, students, or parents.
   c. Meditate.
   d. Read the Bible.
   e. Treat others with kindness, dignity, and respect.

10. Other: Please explain. Have you ever thought about leaving education as a profession? If so, why do you stay?
    a. I am the source of income for me and my family.
    b. I love what I do.
    c. I believe this is what God wants me to do.
    d. I have no other options right now.
    e. I am currently seeking options other than education.
    f. Other: Please explain.
11. What is the one misconception about you as an educational leader that you want to address?
APPENDIX B

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Viewing spirituality as a Lens to Lead: How African American Females Cope in Educational Leadership

Survey Questionnaire

1. How do you define “spirituality”? 

2. What do you perceive is your educational leadership style? 

3. Which factor(s) do you think most influence other people’s initial opinion of you?
   Circle all that apply.
   a. Race
   b. Gender
   c. Educational background
   d. Title/position in the school
   e. Demeanor

4. Do you feel your race or gender have any bearing on how you are treated in educational leadership?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. It has never crossed my mind.
   d. believe I am judged as an individual, not as a part of a group.
   e. Educational leadership has nothing to do with race or gender.

5. If you had to compartmentalize the four areas of your life, what would they be from least to greatest?
6. How often do you think about changing your career, school, or position?
   a. Hourly
   b. Daily
   c. Quarterly
   d. Yearly
   e. I am content with my career, school, and position.

7. Which factor is your biggest source of strength?
   a. Family
   b. Faith
   c. Colleagues
   d. Confidence in my abilities
   e. Other: Please explain

8. Do you feel you that people would respect you more as an educational leader if you were a different gender or a different race?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. It has never crossed my mind.
   d. Respect has never been an issue for me as a person or leader.
   e. Other: Please explain.

9. Which of the spirituality practices listed below do you believe you must do on a daily basis? Circle all that apply.
   a. Pray for myself.
   b. Pray for others including faculty, students, or parents.
   c. Meditate.
   d. Read the Bible.
   e. Treat others with kindness, dignity, and respect.
   f. Other: Please explain.
10. Have you ever thought about leaving education as a profession? If so, why do you stay?
   a. I am the source of income for me and my family.
   b. I love what I do.
   c. I believe this is what God wants me to do.
   d. I have no other options right now.
   e. I am currently seeking options other than education.
   f. Other: Please explain.

11. What is the one misconception about you as an educational leader that you want to address?
APPENDIX C

FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
APPENDIX C

FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How has your race or gender caused you to depend on your faith/spirituality?

2. Name at least two experiences where your race influenced unfair treatment of you.

3. Do you feel African American females in educational leadership are respected to the same degree as African American males, White males, or White females? Why or why not?

4. Has your faith/spirituality extended your tenure in educational leadership? If so, how?

5. Has your spirituality made you at peace with your position?

6. You were previously asked which factor is your biggest source of strength. What did you mean by faith?
16-Nov-2015

Ms. Alison Dawn Jackson
Mercer University
Tift College of Education
1400 Coleman Avenue
Macon, GA 31207

RE: Pilot Study: Using Spirituality as a Lens to Lead (H1511318)

Dear Ms. Jackson:

Your application entitled: Pilot Study: Using Spirituality as a Lens to Lead (H1511318) was reviewed by this Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research in accordance with Federal Regulations 21 CFR 56.110(b) and 45 CFR 46.110(b) (for expedited review) and was approved under Category 6, 7 per 63 FR 60364.

Your application was approved for one year of study on 16-Nov-2015. The protocol expires 15-Nov-2016. If the study continues beyond one year, it must be re-evaluated by the IRB Committee.

Item(s) Approved:
New Application for pilot study consisting of an online survey and follow-up interview

Please complete the survey for the IRB and the Office of Research
Compliance. To access the survey, click on the following link:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/K7CTT8R

Respectfully,

Ava Chambliss-Richardson, M.ED., CIP, CIM

Member

Intuitional Review Board

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